The Memoirs of Keris Mas

SPANNING 30 YEARS OF LITERARY DEVELOPMENT

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Translated by
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Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
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PREFACE

This book is a collection of fragmentary reminiscences of a number of my personal experiences which to my mind are related to events that took place in Malay literature over a period of approximately thirty years – 1945 to 1977. In some cases, the events were experiences in which I was personally involved as a writer or an activist, while in others, they were experiences in which I was involved as an editor who observed, followed and assessed the developments that took place from the outside.

Throughout this book, I took great pains to ensure that I did not write more than I actually knew or had experienced, and because it is basically a memoir, it should not be mistaken for a piece of research or an academic work.

Many things have happened these last thirty years, many changes and events that influenced the lives, thoughts, and views of our people, particularly those in the literary circle. Only a

small part of these happenings is probably depicted in this book. It is most unlikely that I had been fully objective in the telling, in fact, much of what is written will come across as too subjective since to some extent I was describing my involvement, my observations and my point of view. However, it was not my intention to merely reminisce, bask in past glories or lament my personal failures. I had the best intentions, that is to look at past events retrospectively hoping that it will in some way help offer new perspectives to the way people think, believe and go about practising their culture in this day and age – an age that has seen many changes and much turbulence, an age inherited and underpinned by our younger generation, a generation endowed with much wider knowledge and greater exposure to the complex and perplexing fluctuations in everyday life and way of thinking.

Today, I can feel, discern and sense that Malay literature is perceived and appreciated totally from the literary perspective, whereas in the past, much of the time literature was viewed from the angle of the environment that shaped it. The extent to which knowledge, other than social and economic conditions, as well as politics, had influenced the developments in literature can be seen in the literary activities today, the study of literature and the works currently produced. I have always held the view that literature should be the embodiment of works of art that is of equal value in form and content; however, in the past, creative achievements were given little thought and attention. Literary developments these past thirty years have breathed new life into and given new status to Malay literature.

Several names, particularly literary luminaries and activists, are mentioned in this book. To them I would like to offer my apologies should there be errors in my accounts of their experiences. The same goes to organizations and associations. However, I did not touch on matters that were not related to literary events or the background to them. To these people and to those who will follow in their footsteps, I present my memoirs.

I am indebted to the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka for the

opportunity, encouragement as well as the necessary facilities they had made available to me. I wrote this book during my tenure as Resident Writer at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. Mohd. Arif Ahmad (MAS), Singapore, Usman Awang, Wijaya Mala, Baha Zain and Ayob Yamin for their kind assistance. And I would also like to mention the role played by my wife, Hajah Rosewita Haji Ali, who helped me recall experiences I had undergone that now make up the content of this book.

Keris Mas
Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
Kuala Lumpur
August 1978

A group photograph of the participants of the Third Malay Language and Literature Congress taken on September 1956 at Istana Besar, Johor Bahru.

The participants of the Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM) Congress at Kampung Gelam Palace, Singapore, 1947.

INTRODUCTION

In this introduction, allow me to first of all relate a fraction of my early experiences before I became directly or indirectly involved in literature. These early experiences were indeed very personal, affecting a number of matters which in the end drew me to involve myself in the literary world. I believe that these early experiences were not only a great influence, in ways both positive and negative, on my attitude and thinking as far as literature is concerned, but also on my whole life. If ever I have made contributions in the form of ideas, writings, or activities to the field of literature, then the positive and negative elements in these activities or their resultant effects are the fruits of my early experiences. As I acquired new knowledge and experience, I was able to continuously improve myself. I believe that most people go through this process in life, and that no matter how meticulously they plan their lives, they cannot totally

avoid making mistakes. We are only human, capable of planning and executing our plans, but the absolute power that determines everything is God Almighty. Man Proposes, God Disposes. As a result, we frequently do things through trial and error, and will always continue to do so.

I do realise that by writing about myself, I most definitely run the risk of boring the readers. However, since there have been many things written about me in connection with the developments in Malay literature, I feel that I must present the true picture so that the credits and discredits that have been accorded me do not give rise to confusion. I have had the experience of being given credit I did not deserve, and it is as frustrating and confusing as being wrongly discredited. While personal disappointments do not deserve public attention, confused public opinion however, can wrongly alter the true course of history.

Singapore – The First Time Around

I went to Singapore in early 1941, approximately a year after returning from West Sumatra with an Islamic College diploma. At my hometown, Ketari, a Malay kampong situated at the junction of Kuala Lumpur and Temerloh, and just a mile away from Bentong, Pahang, the diploma was not of much use at all. Although there was a religious school in Ketari at that time, and I was expected to teach there, the kampong folks were not too happy with the way I lived my life which was quite far removed from the way the "revered clerics" of that time did. Perhaps they had considered me too "modern" to be an *ustaz* ("religious teacher"). I enjoyed hanging out with the other young men, playing badminton, wearing short pants, and going to the movies. They felt let down as at first they had looked forward to having their very own kampong boy help them bring improvement to the school. I too was disappointed with myself for not living up to their expectations. However, to me, the one who was most disappointed was my father as it was obvious that his hopes of my settling down in Ketari and one day taking

his place as head of the family, was not to be realized. I was his only son. He had given me the opportunity of getting a proper education, religious education that is, so that I would one day become an upstanding member of the village community. He had dashed my family's hopes, especially that of my mother who had wanted to see me become a man of position, by taking me out of the Special Malay Class (the English stream), a course of study which he believed would have led me in that very direction. In addition, he had also provided me with a very modest means of livelihood à la kampong. All this became inconsequential when I was deemed unsuitable for the post of teacher at the religious school. However, his greatest disappointment lay in the attitude of the villagers whom he regarded as narrow-minded. Perhaps it was this that had mollified him and made him agree to my leaving the kampong in search of knowledge.

In point of fact, my qualifications were sufficient to secure me a job as a religious teacher in a primary school (*ibtida'i*) or lower secondary school (*thanawi*), but I had other ambitions. I wanted to continue my studies. The kampong people's rejection of my candidacy was actually a blessing in disguise and provided me with a golden opportunity to leave the kampong and pursue my ambition to seek greater knowledge.

How did I become a young man with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge? I believe it had something to do with the atmosphere and mood that I had gotten used to at the Islamic College in West Sumatra where I studied. In terms of curriculum, the public religious schools in Sumatra at that time taught all the basic general subjects offered at the government schools (Dutch schools) and non-religious public schools. In addition, religious subjects were compulsory. The objective of education and learning was to create true Muslims who were able to live in any environment or community anywhere in this modern world. Extra-curricular activities at these schools included sports, games and those of the Scout Association as well as subject-related school societies, and in addition, missionary work. Given this learning environment, it was

inevitable that I should return to my kampong a religious school graduate with a personality so different from that of the holier-than-thou clerics who studied religion to the exclusion of everything else in the *pondok*[1] system.

I have yet to answer the question: how did I become a young man with such a thirst for knowledge? In truth, education and learning that aims at producing Muslims who are able to live in any environment or community anywhere in this modern world brings forth a kind of orientation that prepares students to face life's challenges, both physical and spiritual, in this world and the hereafter. Only knowledge can help one face these challenges. Such is my conclusion. The belief that one could only attain stability in life through social position et cetera, as was often demonstrated in our country at that time, was non-existent at the college where I studied in Sumatra. Only a handful of the students had planned to become clerks, executives, teachers and so forth after graduating from college. For most of them, foremost in their minds were thoughts of gaining higher education and acquiring the highest level of knowledge. Even the Indonesian students, who, because of their family's circumstances, could not afford to continue their studies, did not dream of getting a job after graduation. They only thought of leading a better and more progressive life as Muslims – working as farmers, traders or the like.

It was due to this learning orientation and environment that I became eager to pursue higher education. A number of my Indonesian friends, those who had the means, had left for Batavia (Jakarta) to further their studies at the AMS (Algemeene Middelbare School), while some others had left for Egypt to study at the Al-Azhar University. I myself was unable to do so, firstly because I had not completed the Dutch language course to enable me to study in Batavia; and secondly, my parents did

1 *Pondoks* are Islamic religious schools that are privately run by respected clerics. At the time the author studied in Sumatra, students at these schools were only taught subjects that are related to Islam, for example *tauhid*, fiqh, the Holy Quran, *Hadith* and Islamic history.

not have the means to pay for my studies in Egypt. My only recourse was to go either to Kuala Lumpur or Singapore. I had tried my luck in Kuala Lumpur for several months but to no avail. Thus, with full resolution I decided to give Singapore a try. I was determined to be independent in my quest for knowledge as I was doing it of my own volition. It was not my father's idea, although he was not against it. I knew that he had wanted me to go to the Al-Azhar although he never once mentioned it. Perhaps it was because he was aware of how much it would cost him. I too had wanted to go to the Al-Azhar, but knew it was out of the question.

In Singapore, I had a day job as a sales assistant at an antique shop on Orchard Road. At night, I studied under the tutelage of the late Haji Idris L.L.B., a lecturer at Pitman's College, who conducted night classes for college dropouts or Indonesian students who wished to continue their studies in the English medium, someone like me that is. According to Haji Idris, through Pitman's, I could register myself for the London University matriculation examination without needing to sit for the Cambridge examination. I took five subjects including English language and literature. It was these subjects that I found particularly hard. The reason was, although English was taught in Sumatra, the level of English taught was not advanced enough. Another subject I found tortuous was mathematics. From Bentong Malay School through secondary school and later on college in Sumatra, arithmetic and mathematics were not my favourite subjects. Algebra and geometry were my worst nightmares. Other than that, I was actually going over what I had already learnt at college in Sumatra. I was very happy and felt that apart from earning a good income, I was making progress in my studies.

I led a simple life, earning between twenty and twenty-five dollars a month in commission which was based on my monthly sales at the antique shop. I was provided free food and lodging. The antique shop was a suitable place for me to polish my English as it was only patronized by the British or tourists of other nationalities who spoke no other language but English.

In those days, twenty-five dollars was a lot of money. My college fee was only ten dollars, and I had not yet learnt to smoke, or to have a good time. Going to the movies only cost twenty-five cents. A train ride from Tank Road to Haji Idris' house in Geylang cost a mere two cents. Whenever I wanted to go to the seaside, my friends and I would just walk along the five foot way and the city streets through Bras Basah Road, Kampong Jawa, Kalang, down Mountbatten Road under the shade of the magnificent trees that lined this new road, then onward to Katong Park, or straight on to Marine Parade. There I did not have to spend a single cent; I would just sit under the casuarina trees and gaze at the blue waters of Tanjung Katong as I read. Applying for the position of sales assistant at the antique shop was my second attempt at getting a job. My first attempt, however, was a most unforgettable experience. I had gone to Utusan Melayu on Queen Street where I was taken to see Abdul Rahim Kajai, the Chief Editor of the newspaper. I did not recognize the man who showed me to Kajai's room; perhaps it was Zaiton (ZABHA), on the other hand, it could have been Abdullah Thani (Ahmad Boestamam). I knew none of the journalists then, although they later became my good friends and soul mates. However, it certainly was not Ishak Haji Muhammad as I would have recognized this important man. When I was still a schoolboy, he had once come to Bentong with my cousin who, like him, studied at Clifford School in Kuala Lipis. It would be impossible that I did not recognize him.

Abdul Rahim Kajai invited me to sit on the chair in front of his desk. He was middle-aged, on the tall side, rather thin, and wore a singlet and a black *songkok*.[2] I felt as though I was standing in front of an awesome mountain as I had for a long time heard that Abdul Rahim Kajai was Malaya's greatest and most prominent writer. My heart began to pound in my ears

2 A brimless hat worn by Malay men, flat-topped, oblong in shape and usually made of felt.

and I went hot and cold all over. That was the first time in my life I sat facing someone who would determine whether or not I would get a particular job. Abdul Rahim Kajai was not only to decide whether or not the job was mine but also whether I was journalist material at all. In my heart of hearts I knew that I had what it took to become a writer and a journalist. Fortunately, the sainted Kajai was not quite a saint after all. He only sported a singlet, whereas I had expected to meet an arrogant man, wearing a *songkok*, tie and a double-breasted jacket. Contrary to my expectation, he smiled a lot, talked a lot and teased a lot – a formidable mountain, both fascinating and refreshing. After enquiring about me, my educational background, my writing experience, how long I had been in Singapore, he fired his last question, "Have you been to Desker Road?"

I was taken aback, shocked, dumfounded and could hardly believe my ears. It had seemed to me that this august mountain was about to crumble and crash down upon me. I did not answer. What could have I said in reply? I had just been back a year from Sumatra, graduated from an Islamic college, never missed my prayers, never got involved in affairs of the heart, much less go to Desker Road which was well-known as the hotbed of prostitution in Singapore. May God protect me from this, I prayed silently. And with that, my plan of becoming a newspaperman had to be abandoned, that is, the intention I originally had when I left my hometown, of eking out a living while studying. I did not give myself time to ponder whether the question was asked in earnest or in jest, but I certainly felt that it was a direct jibe at my dignity and self-respect. Had I been matured and understood the jokes of newspapermen, perhaps I would have been taken in as a junior writer at Utusan Melayu then. However, the incident was in itself a salutary experience as I too used the same shock tactic on friends who came to the office to enquire about getting a job as a journalist, and later became well-known writers.

As a matter of fact, I never imagined I would become anything else but a journalist or a writer because it was what I

really wanted to be, and I considered myself having the necessary skills and aptitude for that line of work. Likewise, it had never occurred to me that I would work as a sales assistant at an antique shop or any such establishment. However, many things can happen when one is desperate. I was young, barely nineteen and had this burning desire to pursue my studies. My training was such that I believed knowledge was the one factor that determined whether or not one leads a meaningful life.

My teachers at the college where I had studied in Sumatra, other than the Islamic scholars from Al-Azhar University, Egypt, were young radical nationalists who believed that in the fight against colonialism, only knowledge could fill the void in the hearts of the Indonesian people and rectify the problem of their intellectual debility. The general subject teachers in particular most of whom came from the Jakarta Law College (Rechtsche Hogeschool), earned their living as teachers while preparing themselves for their finals before graduating in law and used that golden opportunity to sow seeds of nationalism among the students. Practically all of them were political activists, young men who had inherited the spirit of *Indonesia Muda* (Young Indonesia), a confederation of societies which were at one time district-based, such as Jong Java and Jong Sumatra. In fact, some actually became members of the Youth Wing of the *Partai Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian National Party) and were in tandem with the political leanings of the graduate teachers of the Al-Azhar who were mostly members of the Indonesian Muslim Society, an Islamic-based political party opposed to colonialism, with its headquarters in West Sumatra. Owing to this, the orientation of their teaching was geared solely towards the attainment of knowledge and the fight for independence. The idea of struggling solely for a stable material life was something alien to them.

As a result of their training, I became an idealist with aspirations of gaining as much knowledge as possible. That I should chance a job as a sales assistant at an antique shop was something I never questioned. It was God's will that I should meet the proprietor of the shop at Orchard Road. He was a

Minangkabau who was very sympathetic towards young men who were thirsty for knowledge and filled with the desire to see their country independent. (Later on I found out that he himself was one of those who had fought for the independence of Indonesia).

I was readily accepted by the Indonesians in Singapore because I spoke their language fluently and understood their ways. They treated me as if I was one of their young men who could be found in great numbers in Singapore at that time, holding all kinds of jobs as they studied. In the end, I became very much like an Indonesian – I had my secondary education in Indonesia, had many Indonesian friends, read many Indonesian books, and was patriotic like the Indonesian young men. The Indonesians respected me because I was more educated than most of them, and because they later found out that while I was studying in their country, I had done a spot of writing. They knew that I at one time had contributed articles to well-known student magazines like *Raya*, published by the Islamic College Students' Association and *Setia*, published by Islamic College Training Students' Association. They got this information from several students who knew me when I was in Sumatra. These students had gone to Singapore either to gain knowledge or to be involved in some kind of business. In fact, they also learnt that a short story I had written had appeared in *Panji Islam*, Medan. For the Sumatra Indonesians then, someone who had had his work published in *Panji Islam* or *Pedoman Masyarakat*, Medan or by well-known magazines in Java was someone who deserved much respect. Thinking of it now, I feel embarrassed with myself for having proudly accepted the deference they had shown me which was really misplaced. My short story which was published in *Panji Islam* was just the romantic day-dreams of a teenager.

However, it is true that it was while studying in Sumatra, at the tender age of sixteen, seventeen and eighteen, that I felt the first stirrings of love for literature. The first novel that fascinated me was not *Putera Gunung Tahan* but *Layar Terkembang*. Upon my return to Malaya in the early 1940s, I became one of the

more fastidious followers of the Pujangga Baru movement. The topic of discussion mooted by *Pujangga Baru* magazine on the philosophies of western civilization (*Westersche Beschaving*) and Indonesian-Javanese cultural thinking (*pesantren*), each of which had been explored earlier on by Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana and Ki Hadjar Dewantoro, became the topic of conversation and group discussions of the Islamic College Students' Association of which I was an active member.

In fact, when I returned from Sumatra, I had wanted to continue writing and did on several occasions contribute articles to the newspapers, *Majlis* (Kuala Lumpur) and *Utusan Zaman* (Singapore), at that time a magazine. However, as I was working and studying at the same time, I had to forget about writing. I was intent on and busy acquiring knowledge.

In addition, because I moved in the Indonesian circle, read a lot of Indonesian books and magazines, as well as English books and newspapers, I unwittingly became cocky, imagining myself to be smarter than others and ahead of the times. I considered the language and much of the content of Malay newspapers, magazines and books at that time the product of fusty writers; rambling, senseless, paltry and crude. Even the dime novels of Medan were, to my mind, better than the books published in Malaya, more so if we were to compare the latter with the books brought out by Balai Pustaka or Pujangga Baru which I held in esteem. Such was the situation, while my studies progressed smoothly, I gradually drifted further and further away from the developments that were taking place in the thinking of my own people.

Nevertheless, one day, I got wind of the takeover of *Warta Malaya* by Ibrahim bin Haji Yaacob (IBHY). Without really knowing why, I wasted no time in paying him a visit at *Warta Malaya* on Cecil Street. He was rather surprised to learn that I was in Singapore, working and studying at the same time. IBHY was my teacher when I was a student at the Bentong Malay School. I knew that he was active in politics and was one of the better known writers of the day. Among the Malay authors and writers at that time whose work I enjoyed reading were

IBHY and Ishak Haji Muhammad. Sitting opposite him then, I felt rather awestruck. He was single-minded and chose his words very carefully – a far cry from Abdul Rahim Kajai who had purposely tried to shock me. He in no way indicated that *Warta Malaya* was looking out for someone like me. Nevertheless, deep in my heart, I still wanted to work at a newspaper office, still wanted to write.

During the 45-minute meeting with IBHY, I could sense that a movement to free Malaya from the British was well underway. According to IBHY, young men such as I should be at the centre of things, and together with the people prepare to face the turbulent changes that would rock our lives. The meeting had left me restless for a while. It evoked memories of those times in Sumatra during which I had joined the Indonesian students in stoking up revolutionary ardour for an independent Indonesia. However, the desire to pursue further studies in the end quelled all stirrings of nationalistic feelings that IBHY had kindled in me. Nevertheless, what he had said had quite an influence on me. Perhaps his comments had aroused the pride and ego of the idealistic and romantic young man that I was. He had said too that although one should seek higher education, it was not the time for it. We should instead fight to achieve independence as Indonesia, India, Burma and other colonized countries were doing. Furthermore, he pointed out, young men like me were very important in the struggle for independence as the education and experience I had acquired in Indonesia were far more relevant compared to that acquired by the young men who had studied at the English schools in Malaya.

His inspiring words made me feel elated, appreciated, and in some way superior as I had something that others did not. I became self-satisfied and quite removed from reality. However, this uneasy heady feeling in the end evaporated as my urgent desire to continue my studies got the better of me. Every now and again I would get word from him and information about the struggle for Malaya's independence.

Not long after that, on the night of 8 December 1941,

Singapore was rocked by bombs dropped from Japanese fighter planes. When that happened, I was at first consumed with an overpowering feeling of nationalism. I was certain that the struggle for independence that IBHY had talked about had reached its most dramatic climax. Images of British colonial rule in Malaya and Indonesia collapsing like a house of cards flashed through my mind. And I imagined that victory and glory for the Malays and the Indonesians were close at hand. But the reality of it was far from what I had imagined. Everyone was in a state of panic. Simple everyday routine began to change drastically. Everyone in Singapore, especially the young, was initiated into wartime employment. And I was called up to serve in the Malayan Auxiliary Service. Everyday we had military drill, march practice, fire drill and the like. However, that did not last long. Towards the end of December, I went back to my kampong after receiving a telegram from my father and brother-in-law. I had expected to find Ketari in total chaos. I presumed that the Japanese army that had landed in Kota Bharu, Kelantan on 8 December must then be marching towards Terengganu and Pahang. Perhaps, moving through Temerloh and Bentong, they would soon capture Kuala Lumpur. Kampong Ketari would most certainly become a battlefield.

There was much confusion when I left Singapore by train that night. It was my first taste of wartime chaos. The train was packed. Civilians and military personnel crammed its coaches. I hanged on to the railings of its steps from Tanjung Pagar to Kuala Lumpur. Some people had installed themselves on the train's rooftop. Many had done that in fact. The train crawled slowly piercing the dark blanket of night. Inside the coaches, it was pit black too. The blackout order had been enforced throughout Malaya since the night after Singapore was bombed and the day the Japanese army landed in Kelantan.

My plans for further education were in ruins. As I clung all night to the railings of the train steps, I kept on turning it over and over in my mind until I could think no more. I wanted to cry when I thought that had it not been for the war, in a month or two I would be sitting for the London University

matriculation examination. My dream of becoming a sailor, sailing to foreign land in search of means to pursue my studies with only a London matriculation examination certificate to my name, too were shattered.

After only a few days in the kampong, I became totally disoriented. The junction in Ketari was crawling with British and Indian soldiers who were busy setting up bunkers equipped with guns and machine-gun nests. The mosque in front of our house had been turned into some kind of a camp for Muslim Indian soldiers. Even within the compound of our house, where the road shoulder sloped quite steeply, a machine-gun nest encircled by a barricade of sand bags was installed. We were all nervous and frightened. In the end, the soldiers advised us to leave Ketari. We would not be safe there, they said. The war will escalate. The Japanese army were violent and ruthless. We would all be harmed, robbed and tortured. It would be best for us to go far away from Ketari, particularly the women and children.

Father had ordered me to take charge of moving the family to our house in Kampong Lebu, a village behind a hill called Bukit Raka which loomed over Kampong Ketari. All of a sudden, I was head of our rather large family, responsible for moving its members out of the village. We had to force father to move with us as he was already old. He certainly would not have been safe living in a house that would not survive the ravages of war. Although father and I did not quite believe that the Japanese army were as cruel as the British soldiers had made them out to be (on the contrary, I was confident that the Japanese army was a liberation army and hence were unlikely to be brutal, pillaging our land and tyrannizing us), father nevertheless, had managed to convince me that war is a catastrophe which is by nature violent, thus prompting us to move. Practically everyone in Kampong Ketari had taken the decision to do so.

The move from Kampong Ketari to Kampong Lebu was quite eventful, in fact, very eventful. However, I need not give a full account of it here. Stories surrounding it are not unlike

those that have been told over and over again all over Malaya by people who had undergone similar or worse experiences. Nevertheless, one or two incidents deserve mention as the effect they had on me were to later influence my attitude towards life as well as my way of thinking.

On the third night after having completely moved out of Kampong Ketari, with all its trials and tribulations, we heard deafening explosions similar to those I had heard in Singapore earlier on. We thought that the Japanese Army had arrived and that war had broken out. Consequently, we decided that the young men among us as well as our young relatives from Lebu, should go to Ketari to look after our houses and property in case they could still be protected from being destroyed. I myself was happy with the decision although my family clearly indicated that they were worried for my safety. What I felt then was an overwhelming surge of desire for my country's independence. I was eager to meet and get to know what I thought was the Japanese liberation army.

Bentong was in a state of utter chaos when we arrived. People were scrambling to get the rice stored at the PWD (Public Works Department) depot. It appeared that war had not broken out. The Japanese army had not arrived, only the British army had left. The Bentong Bridge was in smithereens as a result of being bombed by the British, which accounted for the loud explosion we had heard the night before. Kampong Ketari was silent and eerie. The sandbags and the remains of the barricades put up by the British troop evoked an uneasy calm.

On the following day, there arrived a Malay-speaking Japanese man bearing a Malay name. He came by bicycle accompanied by three Malay men from Kelantan. They were armed. They were members of the Fujiwara command acting as scouts and sent ahead of the combat troops. They went to the house of our neighbour whom I called Pak M, a government officer and a well-known activist in Pahang who was also one of the leaders of the *Persatuan Melayu Pahang* (Pahang Malay Association). It turned out that Pak M was also a member of

the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (Malay Youth Association) or KMM led by Ibrahim Yaacob. Together with Pak M, they trooped to the District Office to hoist the Japanese flag and then held a public meeting to inform the people about the impending arrival of the Japanese army. The people were told to welcome the army and to give their cooperation. They were also warned to avoid committing offences and not to go against the army's orders.

At that moment, the meeting with IBHY in Singapore several months earlier flashed through my mind. And I felt a sudden need to work together with Pak M, the KMM member. I respected him not only because he was a reputable man who deserved respect, but because he generously gave me his opinion when practically the whole kampong was disenchanted with my attitude and lifestyle, which they blamed for dashing their hopes of working together with me to bring improvement to the religious school. This man, Pak M, had understood my aspirations. And I felt appreciated when he seemed pleased to learn of my involvement in the student movement in Sumatra. He was pleased as he listened to my stories about how I too had joined the demonstrations against the Dutch government's repressive policies towards public schools, notably their infamous law *ordinansi sekolah liar* (literally translated as "unruly school ordinance"). He too was pleased when he heard how the people of Sumatra had held frequent rallies chastising the Dutch. But most of all, I was pleased that he was supportive of my ambition to further my studies. It dawned on me then that the struggle for independence that the Indonesian people had initiated, which I was once involved in, was being secretly carried out by the KMM, of which Pak M was a member. From that moment on, I became obsessed with politics. I wanted to fight for my country's independence. However, it was purely academic. I did nothing of that sort at all. I was merely day-dreaming and fantasizing.

There is no need for me to relate what took place in Bentong after that. In the context of the "Introduction" to this book, it is not, as a matter of fact, important. Suffice to say that once

the bridge had been repaired by the Japanese with the help of forced Chinese labour, and after hundreds of bicycles were confiscated from Chinese shops and houses for the use of Japanese soldiers whose bicycles could no longer be used, Kampong Ketari, like all other kampongs in Malaya, began to face a period of hardship; food was scarce, clothes were scarce, everything was scarce.

Singapore – The Second Time Around

I suddenly felt that my presence in the kampong no longer served its purpose. Thus, several months later, after Singapore had fallen into Japanese hands, I took leave of my family to resume my studies there. I was then twenty and still thirsty for knowledge. This time I was orientated towards Tokyo. In order to play my role in the fight for independence, I was convinced I had to be well-educated.

I returned to the antique shop in Singapore and was welcomed back like one of the family. And later, I met a Japanese called Kurosawa who frequented the shop. Mr. Kurosawa, it turned out, was a colonel in the Japanese Territorial Army. In Singapore, he worked as the Director of the Dai Nippon Insatsu, a printing company formerly known as the Malaya Publishing House (MPH). He spoke Indonesian fluently and was sympathetic to the Indonesian people's fight for independence as well as the Malayan people's struggle for the same. We became close and eventually he employed me as a clerk at MPH. For that purpose, he asked me to learn Japanese. In addition, he frequently encouraged me to talk about the general opinion of the Malays as regards the various actions of the Japanese Occupational Army, be they political, social, or economic in nature. I suspected that he had a political function aside his job as Director of MPH as he told me that information about the Malay people's general opinion was important in preparing the Malays for their new-found independence later on. However, I really had no idea how the information he obtained during our discussions was collected or used for that purpose. It was

just a suspicion I had. Perhaps he did nothing of the kind. In any case, I did not question his motives at all. Instead, I felt useful in being able to contribute to the independence movement.

I enjoyed all kinds of privileges; I was given a special pass along with a special badge that I could show to the authorities whenever necessary. These, on many occasions, had helped me escape the dragnet of the *kempeitai* which was always tripping up people so they could send them to work on the railroad at the Siam-Burma border as forced labour. I had sufficient supply of rice, had cigarettes, and could go freely to the cinema and amusement parks without having to pay at all. I lived comfortably whereas practically everyone around me led a life of terrible hardship. The antique shop which was also where I lived had become an "antique"; it was not doing good business. But we had enough food on our table.

My Japanese lessons were going on smoothly. Once, I told Mr. Kurosawa about the progress I was making and asked whether there was any possibility of my being sent to Tokyo for further studies. He smiled and regretfully told me that at that moment such opportunities had yet to arise, however in the future, they may.

In the end I became bored. My hopes of going to Tokyo to study were very dim. Working as a clerk was most uninteresting, in fact, it was not what I wanted at all. I began to question if it was true that Mr. Kurosawa's political task was to help the Malays gain independence for their country. The consequences of the Japanese Occupation then began to dawn on me. I saw and was able to feel the suffering of the people, and on many occasions, witnessed their harsh treatment by the Japanese army. There no longer seemed to be any suitable topic that I could discuss with Mr. Kurosawa as the Malays were clearly dissatisfied with everything that had happened and was happening. At that time too, Pak M who had come to Singapore to see Ibrahim Yaakob, paid me a visit. The word was that Ibrahim Yaakob had just got back from Tokyo. Pak M told me in confidence that we should no longer cooperate with the

Japanese. We were to secretly work against them. The Japanese were not to be trusted. They were themselves colonialists. At least that was how I understood Pak M's words to mean. And I had no way of knowing whether it was a decision that had come from Ibrahim Yaakob or it was just Pak M's opinion.

At around about the same time, my father (may his soul rest in peace) who lived in the kampong, passed away. I was totally devastated and crestfallen. He had departed this life before I could prove to him that I was a good son, that I would fight the causes and achieve the things he had wanted to but did not have the time. He had not lived long enough to see the fruits of my years of study, much less the causes I fought for. I was greatly distressed as much of the drive that had propelled me to study and to partake in the movement for independence had stemmed from the need to make him proud. He was an ordinary kampong man with great aspirations, but they were unfortunately unattainable. I nursed the ambition to achieve his ambitions because I knew that I had better opportunities than he had had when he was a young man. The village folks had considered him one of the young bloods. I understood fully his religious, political and social principles. I too read the issues of *Seruan Azhar* which he had in his keeping. *Seruan Azhar* was a magazine published in Cairo by a group of Malay and Indonesian students who preached Islamic reformation as propagated by Muhammad Abduh and Jamaluddin Afghanistan, as well as independence for the Egyptian people. In addition to that, my father was also a good friend of Pak M.

I stopped learning Japanese; stopped discussing with Mr. Kurosawa about the general opinion of the Malays and their aspirations for independence. Perhaps he understood the change in my attitude; however, he never once showed any reaction.

I began to read *Semangat Asia* a lot. The articles published in it made interesting reading. The language used, the essays, poems and short stories it published were no longer "antiquated". The same could be said of *Fajar Asia*, which in my opinion was meatier, as well as bold as it used a spelling system which combined Malay consonant sounds with

Indonesian vowel sounds, a system that met with my approval at that time. I desperately wanted to be associated with the editors and writers of the magazine, especially those who hang around *Berita Malai*. However, they were extraordinary people, impossible to get close to. So I started writing. I wrote poems, short stories and articles, but not a single piece of my writing found its way into the pages of *Semangat Asia*. I too sent my work to *Fajar Asia* which was under the leadership of Zainal Abidin Ahmad who was at one time responsible for *Panji Islam* in Medan. He could not quite recall that *Panji Islam* had once published my short story. However, he made it clear that the poems and short stories I had sent to be published in *Fajar Asia* were not up to the mark. And he earnestly explained how difficult it was to get suitable material for the magazine. Finally, I understood that as a writer, I was too romantic. My approach towards any particular subject was coloured by dreams, dreams of independence, dreams of improving the lot of the people of Malaya and Indonesia, dreams of reforming the Malay concept of Islam, et cetera. Whereas at that time, people were not supposed to have dreams, or rather, were not supposed to have aspirations other than the establishment of *Asia Timur Raya* (literally translated as the Greater East Asia). People could only speak confidently of the *Asia Timur Raya* war as a holy war which would save Malaya, Indonesia and the rest of the world. This was the theme of all works, be they articles, short stories or poems.

Life was most boring then. Perhaps this is the state of mind and emotion that people today call *frustration*. The boredom got worse when we were subject to a blitzkrieg of propaganda asking people to go back to the land, to plant tapioca and rice. I heard that Pak Sako had migrated to Bintan To so that Singapore Malays would have more opportunities to own land. I wondered if it were possible that planting tapioca and rice could strengthen the position of the Malays in the fight for independence.

Then I received a letter from Pak M asking me to go back to the kampong to help with the political activities there. I

became troubled, confused. I could not understand how we were to carry out our political struggle for independence. My trust in the Japanese had been shattered; in addition, I had little faith in my own ability. There was no one I could discuss politics with. I dared not go to see Ibrahim Yaakob as I had been advised by Pak M when he came to Singapore some time before that, not to do so too often. For the sake of our cause, he had said. Those at *Berita Malai* who were familiar with the political scene, were all celebrated writers, thus difficult to get close to. Quite often I would see Pak Sako, Samad Ismail, Abdullah Kamil, Zubir Salam and a host of other writers and editors who were well-known and popular in the country; however, I could not get into their circle. Everything seemed to be shrouded in secrecy. Their world was so remote from mine.

I began to be angry with society. I accused society of arrogance, of being indifferent towards people like me. I felt I deserved to be involved in the struggle for independence. I felt I was a talented writer. In a nutshell, I regarded those people arrogant and haughty. It was only later, when experience had taught me to think more clearly, I realized that it was I who was arrogant; not just plain arrogant, but stupidly arrogant – I did not cut my coat according to my cloth. I did not understand that politics was more than marching for a cause, giving speeches and writing controversial articles.

When the Japanese surrendered and the British returned to Malaya, life became even worse and harder for me. The antique shop could no longer provide me employment, although I was still allowed to lodge there. Thus I tried my hand at various jobs, one of which was a broker looking for buyers of goods brought in from Sumatra. I began to meet all sorts of traders from Indonesia. They ferried in rubber in their large boats. They traded vegetables, rattan, catechu and all kinds of products from the rainforest. I failed to gain enough of their trust to act as their broker as I was unable to fulfil one of their conditions. In fact, I did not know how to. Their condition was that I was to also look for people who would sell them

arms. Later, I found out that most of these traders were members of Indonesian freedom-fighter groups who resisted the return of the Dutch. They bought up as many weapons as could be collected by certain people in Singapore, weapons left behind by the Japanese or hoarded by Singaporean traders who knew there would be a ready market for them. Apparently these traders were better at politics than I or people like me. During the sale and purchase of these weapons, every little detail was treated with extreme care and absolute secrecy. I was bewildered; activities of such intricacy and level of confidentiality were just beyond me. I had thought, at one time, that fighting for independence was about street demonstrations, fiery speeches and sizzling articles that subsequently land one in jail for a period of time. As a result, I spent more and more time daydreaming. Dreaming of fighting for my country's independence. I started writing again; I wrote novels. Everything related to this as well as the background to it shall be discussed in one of the episodes of this book.

A TRAGIC BEGINNING

My first serious attempt at creative writing after returning from pursuing further studies in West Sumatra was the writing of *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* (Hero of the Malayan jungle). In my career as a writer, *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* was truly a blessing from God, one that I will always be grateful for. I pray that God will confer such blessings upon me again and again throughout my life. Although the writing of the novel was a blessing, its publication was a tragedy; a tragedy which cuts me deeply such that till this very day, thirty years after the event, I still pray to God Almighty that a similar tragedy would not befall me ever again.

Allow me to relate how the writing of the novel, which I consider a blessing, started, and how it ended in its tragic publication.

Trapped in a most boring existence, in an atmosphere of

political turbulence, physical hardship, mental confusion and cultural poverty, I was, to say the least, bedazzled by news of Indonesia's independence, disappointed with the failure of Malay freedom fighters to achieve Malaya's independence at the same time as Indonesia, and excited by news of the existence of a Malay guerrilla group known as *Wataniah* in Pahang, whose role in fighting the Japanese I had just then discovered. And it was in this state of bedazzlement, disappointment and excitement that I tried to escape from the bitter realities of life, and let my imagination soar to its greatest heights. I wrote *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* at the time the Japanese surrendered in 1945, a time when I had no means of livelihood, no clear direction as regards my intention to join the independence movement, just as I had stated in the last part of the "Introduction" to this book.

I quit being a broker of goods brought in by traders, or to be more precise, freedom fighters from Indonesia, and gave the couple of dollars I had earned from the unsuccessful venture to the owner of the antique shop where I lodged. With that small sum of money I had hoped to get temporary shelter, board and lodging at the shop. The owner had just started to rebuild the business which had gone under during the Japanese Occupation. I was once again offered a job as a salesman but declined the offer as I had already made up my mind to one day return to my kampong and involve myself in the political struggle. I had worked as a salesman in order to pursue my studies. I no longer felt the need to do so.

For about three months, I sat in front of an ailing typewriter at the shop and used up almost a whole ream of old typing paper which I had had in my keeping since before the Japanese arrived. Writing made me very happy. My imagination began to stretch and expand beyond its normal bounds, building around the theme of Malay guerrilla resistance against Japanese occupation. I cannot explain what had caused my imagination to swell to such proportions or from where I had derived such unbounded energy to be able to write as I did. Finally, after some of the paper had ended up in the bin, 250 pages survived

as the manuscript of *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya*. In it was manifest the mind-blowing result of my imagination which bordered on the fantastic, a tapestry in which the struggle of Malay guerrillas against the Japanese was interwoven with the heroic aspirations of a young Malay, his hopes for his country's independence, his endurance of a hard, gruelling life, his enlightened spiritual life intertwined with romance and humanistic ideals.

It was the first time I had written with such gusto, labouring almost non-stop for approximately three months. Throughout, I felt a mixture of satisfaction and disquieting high hopes for the bundle from heaven which had been treated with so much love and care. However, when the time came, *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* was born grossly mutilated and imperfect. A novel which should have been 150 pages long had only 59 pages in it. It was not published as a well planned novel or story but a synopsis devoid of plot development and characterization. This was what I meant by the tragedy that had cut me to the quick. And this tragedy became complete when the original manuscript was said to be misplaced and could not be found, and needless to say, could not be replaced.

Upon completing the manuscript which had caused me to miss many a meal and to go to bed late at night or not until the wee hours of the morning, I realized that the world around me had changed. The antique shop was almost back on its feet. People were once again milling about in the streets dressed in smarter clothing, and newspaper services had improved with delivery becoming more regular. It was almost the end of January 1946. Strangely enough, I felt a great yearning for literary materials. I wanted to read some good short stories or novels. However, such materials were not to be found. Unlike *Semangat Asia* and *Fajar Asia*, the newspapers of the day did not publish short stories or articles on language and literature. *Utusan Melayu* had just hit the streets, a four-paged tabloid filled with information on the British military administration, labour activities and essays that smacked of politics. Everyday I walked along Bras Basah Road looking for second-hand books

that were plentiful there. But I seldom came across novels except those that I had already read. New books had not made their appearance yet. I also frequented the Kampong Jawa district – Arab Street and North Bridge Road – looking for Malay books or magazines with a new approach, particularly literary books and magazines. This search too was most disappointing. Generally speaking, in the early part of the British military administration, people cared little for literature and culture. People were busy picking up the pieces and rebuilding their lives. I suppose young people like me who were romantic and idealistic could be found all over Malaya at that time, looking for reading materials or putting down to paper their fantasies, aspirations and romantic ideals.

However, newspapers had become a hot item. Public interest was focused on the existent political developments and labour activities. The main topic of conversation was the arrival of a British representative who had slipped into the country unobtrusively with a mission to lure the Malay rulers into accepting a new form of civilian government known as the Malayan Union. The Malays appeared to be very suspicious of the new system of government proposed by the British. But I myself paid little attention to this extremely important development. I was still intoxicated with Indonesia's independence and its people's fight against the return of the Dutch. Later, the formation of a party called *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* (Malayan Malay National Party) or PKMM which was basically an extension of the struggle, together with Indonesia, to demand for the independence promised by the Japanese, aroused my interest. In reality, I had not yet grasped the fact that the British had come back to rule Malaya. I was still under the delusion that the struggle to reject the British as Indonesia were rejecting the Dutch, was still going on. I, in actual fact, did not understand that Indonesia had *de facto* achieved independence through the declaration it made on 6 August 1945, whereas Malaya had legitimately returned to its status quo and was once again under the British. The return of the Dutch to Indonesia was a violation of the sovereignty of an

independent nation while the return of the British to Malaya was the return of a victorious power to reclaim the territory once under its sway. I was not a politician in the real sense of the word, but dabbled in politics because I wanted to see my country independent. As such, the movement opposing the Malayan Union, which involved the majority of Malays and was later led by UMNO, was to me a step backward; it was a rejection of direct colonial rule but an acceptance of British protection which actually boiled down to colonization. I was more comfortable with the policies of PKMM which continued to whole-heartedly fight against colonization.

Those responsible for sowing the seeds of political awareness, be it in favour of total independence or cooperation with the British, were mostly the well-known writers and editors of the day. During the political maelstrom as did exist in those days, these writers were involved in, or rather were in the front line of political activities. Those who were writers wrote only political articles. The literary world was completely barren. I reckon even the young people who had literary talent were too preoccupied with politics.

During this period of literary vacuum and political frenzy, I toyed with the idea of writing a short story and spent hours poring over the manuscript of *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* while waiting for the maturation of an inspiration to write another novel, this time about the working class and their struggle.

Today I would describe the state of my mind at that time as the mental state of a writer who was cut off from the rest of the world.

The Publication of *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya*

During this period of inner turmoil and straitened circumstances which resulted from my being jobless, I continued to look for ways and means to publish *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya*. My attempt at writing the novel about the working class and their struggle did not go on smoothly and when a friend arrived in Singapore from Kota Bharu, I decided to give it up. I

followed him back to Kota Bharu on a big boat or perhaps more aptly, a small ship laden with all kinds of cargo. This friend reckoned that there would be absolutely no problem getting a book like *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* published there. I had already given up hope of doing that in Singapore, not merely because there was no willing Malay publisher, but because even the printers were not willing to bear the cost of printing. There were two reasons for this. First, the Malay publishers were still trying to get back on their feet and restart their business. Second, printing materials and equipment like ink, paper, spare parts for ailing machines and the like were not available. Even during the Japanese Occupation, these were in short supply. I should know as at that time I worked at a big printing press which was under the control of the Japanese. Thus, if what my good friend from Kelantan had said was true, then the situation in Kota Bharu must be much better; there was paper, there was ink, and machines plus parts that were still in good condition.

I was very confident that *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* would be published in Kota Bharu. And in fact it was published there – but at what price. The price paid was high; the novel had been compressed into a synopsis made up of only the abstract or gist of the story – which was why to me it was such a tragedy. (Readers shall learn the reasons for this in the later part of this book). However, at that time, I did not know that this had happened. In fact, I felt very fortunate that *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* had finally been brought out. Thus, I did not feel then what I felt several years later, that in agreeing to remove large chunks of the text I had compromised my principles as a writer.

It may sound strange if one were told today that writers should also be publishers and are to live on the charity of friends. But thirty years ago, this was quite normal; in fact it was common practice. In Kota Bharu, I depended on friends for food and lodging. And as was the case in Singapore, apart from the Kelantanese, these friends also included some Indonesian traders. Like me, they were full of revolutionary fervour, eager to continue the fight for independence together with Indonesia,

or at the very least, to oppose the return of the British. The closest friends amongst them and the ones who helped me the most were Mohd. Asri Haji Muda and Khaidir Khatib. Later, the two of them continued their struggle as members of an Islamic political party. Khaidir Khatib was the one who had brought me to Kota Bharu from Singapore and together with Mohd. Asri had helped me find a printer willing to print *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya*. They were editors of the magazine, *Penyedar*, a publication of a political party known as *Persetiaan Melayu Kelantan*. As editors, they had a lot of contacts with printers in Kota Bharu.

The political climate in Kota Bharu at that time was charged with tension be it amongst those who willingly cooperated with the British, those who demanded absolute independence, or those who wanted to continue the fight for independence with Indonesia. I myself had not become a member of any political party. However, anyone could have easily guessed my political leanings. In the end, many of my friends wanted me to remain in Kota Bharu and set up a publishing house there. However, the big poser was money. No one had the vaguest idea where the capital required was to come from.

Nonetheless, the idea of setting up a publishing house had appealed to me and I gave the publisher of *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* the name "Permai". To my mind, and several of my friends agreed with me, "Permai" was short for "Persaudaraan Malaya-Indonesia" (Malaya-Indonesia Brotherhood). Everyone liked the name. The acronym sounded pleasing and romantic, while the full form of it consisted of a philosophy embracing humanity and politics. I thus became obsessed with the idea. The leaders of PKMM must surely have had their own interpretation of my political objectives, but in all honesty, I was really driven more by sentiment than by knowledge or careful consideration.

Political sentiment was the source of the destruction of *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya*. Apparently, when the book was being typeset, my intention to name the publishing house "Permai" as well as the sentiment (nationalistic fervour and an aspiration

to see Malaya and Indonesia independent) behind the name had come to the knowledge of the authorities responsible for security. A "friend" whom I was to find out later was also a "friend" of the authorities, had "advised" me to delete certain parts of the novel. As I was to remember later, he had suggested that I should use my literary talent to whittle down the sections on political struggle which might incite anti-colonial feelings. His advice appeared to be well-meant and perfectly logical too as he reminded me about the probable danger not heeding the advice might pose to the book and I as its author and publisher. He also cautioned me to be circumspect so that my first publication would not become my last. What bewildered me later was that the printer suddenly complained of not having enough paper, whereas before that, since the early days of the negotiation, he had never once mentioned this problem. I was in fact taken to the place where the paper was stored and told that there was enough paper to print sixty pages of each copy. The printer had then requested that I should trim off the content here and there so that only two-thirds or at the very most, half of the novel was left. He refused to continue with the typesetting unless the original content was reduced because, and again his reasoning was quite logical, there was no point in typesetting the whole novel if there was not enough paper to print it.

I began to panic. I asked my friends for their opinion and was advised to be patient and to follow the printer's suggestion. They were not wrong in offering such advice as there was no other alternative if the truth was there was not enough paper. However, I did not tell them about the "advice" the earlier "friend" had offered. Strangely, I had hoped my friends would give me advice that would make it possible for *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* to be published. Had my inner being protested, resulting in the fruit of my labour not being brought at all – what then? I cringe at the thought.

Thus, I went against my own principles as a writer, destroyed and betrayed my own work and hence have had to live with this personal tragedy. Nevertheless, at the time all this was happening, I did not as yet feel the pain that I felt in

the ensuing years. In fact, at that time, I felt most fortunate that *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* got published at all. I loved it like a mother loves her newborn, even if the baby were deformed.

Pahlawan Rimba Malaya is of no significance in the development of Malay literature, even if it had been fated to be published in its original form. It would never be on par with *Putera Gunung Tahan* or some such work. And this is said not as an apology but as a fact. It was a piece of work wrought from unskilled hands and born of a mind that was still immature and lacking in knowledge and experience.

I relate the birth of *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* without any intention of suggesting that the novel was significant in the development of Malay literature, but rather to record it as an external event on the periphery of this development. In addition, I had intended to show how the political turbulence, changes in the way of thinking, the living conditions and other pressures had influenced the young writers who had to live through the literary vacuum during the early days of the British Administration, towards the end of 1945 and the beginning of 1946.

Stories and Speeches

At the time *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* was published, I was busy arranging its sale through agents and bookstores. Within a month, all 2000 copies of the novel had been sent out. I lived on the proceeds of the sale which I easily collected from the book stores all over Kelantan. A large part of the money was used to pay the printers. As for the money I owed friends for food and lodging during the time I was busy arranging its printing, it is forever to remain a generous handout from them. I owe my friends in Kota Bharu a debt of gratitude for their generosity, something I will never be able to forget or want repeated. It is not because there was ever any shortage of kind and charitable people; it is just that I never ever want to be indebted again. From that one experience and perhaps due to

my cultural and educational background too, I learned that indebtedness creates a kind of complex in one, something that is difficult to obliterate.

Although life became more difficult, I could no longer bear to accept further donations from friends, which I felt with every day had degenerated into handouts that stem from pity. "Permai" had become defunct. And my contribution to *Penyedar* was so negligible that it could be said to be completely meaningless. I decided to return to my kampong. I took a train from Kota Bharu and journeyed through southern Thailand – Sungai Golok, Haadyai, and then onwards to Padang Besar. From Padang Besar I took a bus and stopped at several places to collect the proceeds from the sale of my book. It actually sold well, and there were only a few copies left in the market. A month later, I reached Ketari, the village I dearly missed.

During the journey from Perlis to Kuala Lumpur, I stopped at a number of small towns in Seberang Perai, Penang, Perak, and Selangor and met several people who called themselves freedom fighters. They greeted me with "*Merdeka*!" ("independence"), spoke with great passion, and were members of the PKMM. I felt at ease with these "freedom fighters". In several places, I was even called on to give speeches. They were the ones responsible for the brisk sale of *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya*. Overnight, I became "famous" and was called Bung Keris.

Such was my debut in the world of literature and politics. For me then and for these freedom fighters who called me Bung ("brother"), a literary work was a story or poem imbued with the spirit of the struggle for independence, written in elegant language. A literary person was someone young who apart from being good at giving fiery speeches and writing fiery articles was capable of whipping up patriotic sentiment through the beautifully crafted romantic stories they pen. And I was called Bung because of my oratory skill. An orator was someone who could give powerful speeches with an Indonesian accent.

When I reached my kampong, I immediately contacted the leaders of PKMM Pahang and decided to join them

straightaway. I became a member and lived in Temerloh, working as a teacher teaching Islamic History at a small religious school known as the *madrasah* (the religious school in my kampong had closed down). Soon after, I was appointed a committee member of PKMM, Temerloh. Following this, we got busy organizing rallies at every branch of PKMM and I, as the Information Officer in Temerloh, began to contact Utusan Melayu in Singapore to fill them in on our activities for publication purposes. Thus, news of PKMM activities in Pahang and Temerloh frequently appeared in *Utusan Melayu*. Some of the news was published based on the information I sent.

When *Pelita Malaya* and *Suluh Malaya*, a newspaper and magazine respectively, published by PKMM in Kuala Lumpur made their first appearance, I started to write to them as well. I not only wrote about our party activities in Temerloh, but also sent in short stories I had written. Consequently, I received many letters from people I had met on my journey from Padang Besar to Pahang. They wanted me to write more short stories. Henceforth, my interest in writing short stories or literary work as they now call it began to deepen. I started to indulge in creative writing in addition to giving political speeches. To improve my knowledge of politics, I attended workshops organized by the party; to improve my knowledge of literature I read works of Indonesian and English writers. I did not read even one book on literary research or theory, or critiques by Indonesian or English literary pundits.

Writing short stories gave me two different kinds of satisfaction; one, the satisfaction of letting the imagination expand beyond normal bounds; two, the satisfaction of getting across the spirit of the independence struggle which I could feel was getting wide support among the readers.

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL THINKING

With every passing day, the flurry of political activities in Temerloh became more and more intense. I, meanwhile, continued to teach at the religious school in Temerloh – but only one day every week. I was especially busy going out to meet the kampong people along the Pahang River, to the north and south of Temerloh town. For at least fifteen days each month, my comrades-in-arms and I gave speeches and held dialogues with the villagers to explain to them the objectives of PKMM.

Just as it was not difficult to convince the kampong people how decadent the British colonial policies were then, it was equally not difficult to make them understand the importance of Malaya and Indonesia achieving independence together. They, the kampong people, were already living in desperate straits; most of them were descendants of the Pahang warriors

who had put up a strong resistance to British intervention in the administration of their state. They were patriots who had endured much suffering, ever ready to fight as patriots to restore the country's sovereignty and as the downtrodden, to free themselves from the economic system of the imperialists. And they were prepared to accept the idea of the unification of Malaya and Indonesia as at that time it was greatly believed that the Malays would be a power to reckon with if all the Malays in the Malay Archipelago were to stand united against their common enemy – the colonizers. The non-Malays, meanwhile, had never shown any sign of patriotism towards Malaya either in their speech or action.

However, developments within the party were sometimes totally bewildering. During the meetings and political training programmes that I attended, I could sense the undercurrents of the development of an ideology larger than what was initially the concept of Malay nationalism. This concept of nationalism which embraced the Malays of Malaya and Indonesia, to my mind, was important enough to fight for. However, the training programmes I attended unveiled new horizons, suggesting that the concept of the Great Malay nationalism was only the first stage in shoring up the spirit and strength of the people to fight for independence. The people's struggle, we were told, should develop beyond that, that is, in the direction of a political and social revolution to wipe out colonialism and imperialistic and capitalistic oppression that had subjugated not only Malaya and Indonesia but also the whole of Asia and Africa.

Based on my reading and my own rationalization, I felt that there was some truth in this new line of thinking, but I started to have doubts when certain quarters began to show indications of belittling party leaders whom they alleged had a very narrow notion of nationalism. As a young man, I hero-worshipped some of these leaders. Leaders like the late Dr. Burhanuddin and Ishak Haji Muhammad had a special place in my heart. However, my admiration for such leaders did not stem purely from sentiment. I admired them for the principles, conviction and ideology that I believed they upheld. They were

true nationalists. While Dr. Burhanuddin was inclined towards Islamic reformation, Ishak Haji Muhammad advocated the social democracy of the West, concepts both of which were important to the people of Malaya and Indonesia in order to be dynamic and democratic, and elements of thinking and ideas which in my opinion were crucial to building a race that is strong, just and dignified. To me, the combination of these elements as embodied in the two nationalists was central to the struggle for Malay nationalism because the Malays needed to have their own identity so that they do not abandon their traditional values or become immersed in superstitious beliefs which they associated with Islam but were in reality contradictory to its teachings. The Malays must not allow themselves to be emasculated by these beliefs, but rather adhere more strictly to the tenets of Islam. In addition, the Malays should be modern in their approach and emulate the westerners in the true sense of the word, and not become westernized copy-cats or slaves to feudalism such that they lose their identity and moral integrity. Thus when it was whispered that these leaders whom I knew to be champions of such exalted goals were unprogressive, old-fashioned and parochial in their views of nationalism, I became very unhappy.

Nonetheless, PKMM remained robust and strong, and continued to enjoy the support of the people. I, on my part, was made Information Head of the party for the state of Pahang. I did not pay much attention to the latest developments planned by the party leadership. If at all I came to know of the more liberal policies they had examined or adopted, it was purely by accident. I continued giving speeches and carrying out propaganda work in my own way. I was, as a matter of fact, part of the Pahang PKMM leaders' delegation which visited Terengganu and Kelantan.

Getting to Know the Kampong Folks

From my interaction with the people of Temerloh and the other districts of Pahang, it was very clear to me that the

kampong people were dying to free themselves from the shackles of poverty. Lack of education and social as well as economic infrastructure, a legacy of the colonial economic and social policies, were important factors which had contributed to their impoverishment. They were prepared to fight for independence in order to get out of their state of destitution. Things being what they were, it was not difficult to motivate them to fight. However, there was one factor which most of them had overlooked, that is, the apathy which was deeply ingrained in them and which had caused them to hold back all this time. This apathy was like a disease that had become endemic through the preservation of the feudal system and superstitions which were believed to be associated with Islam. The imperialists had allowed it to fester by playing on the politics of culture and religion. The people who were uneducated were not aware that they had been infected with this disease and therefore had felt no great need to purge themselves of it. It would take more than propaganda and fiery anti-colonial speeches to uproot this kind of apathy. It required some kind of a well-thought-out and long-term education program to do so. I had discerned this from the dialogue sessions I had with the people as well as from my interaction with them in their daily lives. The dialogues that were mostly about Islamic reformation and western democracy, little by little, had managed to rid them of the symptoms of the disease. However, the dialogues were not able to destroy or wipe out the symptoms altogether.

During my interaction with the people, I discovered that I was accepted by them not only because of my ability at giving speeches and holding dialogues with them, but also because of the short stories I had written which had come to their knowledge or which they had read. This had somewhat increased my popularity with them, especially with the younger generation.

In 1946, magazines began to once again allocate space for poetry and short stories. What I found interesting was that these genres were widely popular amongst the younger

generation. During our visits to the villages, many young men from the youth wing of the party would often come up to me to show that they had been reading and how much they liked short stories and poetry. Among them, there were those who were nicknamed after the heroes of particular short stories. And to have an edge over each other, they would discuss the personal lives of these writers. In fact, some would proudly claim that they know this or that writer. To these young men, knowing a writer was an important factor which would help enhance their status among the villagers.

These young men were often restless, high-spirited, and given to discussing and debating endlessly amongst themselves or with others at the coffee stalls. One of the hot topics was the theme of a particular story. They would look for examples in the community whom they felt typified certain characters in the short stories and then gave them the appropriate nicknames, good or bad. At that time, the characters in the short stories included dishonest clerics (*lebai*), repressive village headmen, untrustworthy youths and upstanding young men. They would also debate the outstanding genius of particular leaders or writers. They might praise one and censure the other. Needless to say, the ones they praised and adulated would be the leaders or writers from their own party. And the young men I met most certainly praised me and writers of the same leaning.

As a young man it pleased me to be idolized and admired. It also pleased me to see how passionately they worked to achieve the goals of their party. Some even tried to behave like Ahmad Boestamam, the leader of *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf* (Generation of Aware Youth) or API, the youth wing of PKMM. They asked me when Bung Boestamam would come to their village to teach them marching drills. My only answer was, "Be patient. Bung Boestamam was busy drawing up strategies." In actual fact, I had no idea when he would come to Pahang. I myself was most eager to meet him. Strangely enough, despite being a leader at the state level, I had not had the chance to meet most of the party bigwigs, including Boestamam, who was held in esteem by the young and exercised great influence over them.

One thing about these high-spirited young men that I found disturbing was their lack of good sense. They were not shining examples of sensible independence fighters who were able to fend for themselves, at least in their daily lives. It can be said that most of them could hardly be categorized as hard-working. Elders who had some official position or who were regarded to have some such position in the village like the headman, the *imam*,[1] the *kadi*[2] and so on, looked upon them as layabouts or troublemakers because of the attitude shown by some of them who frittered their time away discussing and debating at the coffee stalls. These elders, like the nobility and the leaders of the other parties became one of their topics of conversation and subjects used to enliven their discussions. The elders to them were turncoats who worked for the colonizers, supporters of feudalism, and bloodsuckers. From the perspective of the independence fighter, these accusations were not totally baseless, but the way in which they behaved towards the elders did not help at all, in fact only resulted in increasing the number of enemies of PKMM and made the independence struggle even more difficult.

For a while, my mind was preoccupied with the dilemma raised by these young people. When I wrote the short story, "Wasiat Orang Bangsawan" (A nobleman's last wishes) which was published in *Suluh Malaya*, I trumpeted the burning ardour of the young men who fought against those whom they considered feudalistic. However, when about a year later I wrote "Menjawab Pesan" (Responding to a request) published in the magazine *Kencana*, my objective was to instil amongst the youth who were fighting from within the party, the desire to form a cooperative that was in line with the social and economic programmes drawn up by the leadership. To my mind, the experience of running the organization for the community would teach them self-reliance and inject some good sense into

1 In this case, a religious leader who was appointed to lead prayers at the village mosque.

2 A judge who presides over matters relating to Islam (performs marriage ceremonies, decides in divorce cases and family disputes, etc).

them which would enable them to win the hearts of the people. I did not know whether I had managed to get my message across to these young men. And I never dared to openly talk about their negative qualities with them. I was not sure that they would understand my intentions and was worried about losing their support. The members of API were extremely radical and were only interested in fighting for their cause.

I was not as yet free of the romanticisms of the young or the idealistic attitude of the independence fighter. It was perhaps this idealistic and romantic view of life that eventually led me to feel more comfortable being a writer than a party leader. This is the way I look at it now; but at the time I was living the life of a two-bit party leader and a small-time writer, I was quite unaware of it.

A New Impetus

I continued to ponder the plight of the people, particularly of these young men till one day I received a letter from the editor of Utusan Melayu, A. Samad Ismail. The letter stated that plans were afoot to turn *Utusan Zaman* from a daily published in Romanised script into a weekly newspaper published in the Jawi script. (*Utusan Zaman* was published as a magazine during the pre-war days but had its publication discontinued during the Japanese Occupation. After the war, it was revived as a daily for readers in Malaya and Indonesia. However, when the political turmoil in Indonesia worsened, and less and less of her people remained in or travelled to Singapore, the sale of the paper dropped dramatically).

The new *Utusan Zaman* was to have a section devoted to articles on culture, short stories and poetry. I was invited to contribute short stories in support of this new venture.

This letter of offer was a real ego booster. I immediately felt that it was some form of recognition for me as a short-story writer. In fact, prior to this, I was on a similar ego trip when Hantu Raya, whose column "Selamat Pagi", appeared in the newspaper *Pelita Malaya*, wrote a favourable comment

about my work. Hantu Raya was none other than Ishak Haji Muhammad, a leader whom I greatly admired. When a favourable comment like that came from someone as influential as the columnist, I could not help but let it go to my head. It was as though I had been given an endorsement of the highest kind and it certainly had the effect of making me feel spurred on to work even harder.

Such developments were stimulating and impelled me to want to write more prolifically. At the same time, new developments in the party too were equally exciting. The dearth of reading materials began to concern me. There was no library in Temerloh and no book shop except for a stall that sold newspapers. I needed to read on politics and literature. With every day, I found this situation more and more agonizing. I toyed with the idea of moving to a big town like Kuala Lumpur or Singapore. But circumstances and my commitment to the cause did not enable me to do so. I started rereading the books and magazines I had brought back from Indonesia including the novels published by Balai Pustaka, the works of Hatta, Soekarno and Mohd. Natsir, as well as the magazines *Pujangga Baru*, *Pedoman Masyarakat* and *Panji Islam*.

I was once again attracted to, as I was in my college days, issues concerning the people's attitude towards and opinion about the challenges of the twentieth century. The developments in western civilization and Islamic reforms were extremely thought-provoking. The *Westersche Beschaving* principles advocated by leaders of the Pujangga Baru movement such as Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, and the revival of the *Pesantren* school of thought (Indonesian-Javanese in tradition) ascribed to Ki Hadjar Dewantoro and others, ignited my desire to cast about for something that was right and suitable for the Malays in their struggle to establish themselves as an independent race that was strong, respected and well-esteemed.

I did not agree with the Pujangga Baru movement that we should totally embrace the western culture, nor did I with the advocates of *Pesantren* that we should revert completely to the traditional ways. I was more confident that the answer lay in

balancing out Islamic reforms and concepts from the western civilization which, in fact, had originated from the Islamic world. At college, I studied the history of Islamic civilization from books written by Ibn Khaldun. His ideas had made an indelible mark on my mind. The ideas of Muhammad Abduh and his follower and pupil, Rashid Redha, too had influenced my thinking. And when I read Hatta and Soekarno's works, although I was fascinated by Soekarno's *Marheinism,* I was more inclined towards supporting Hatta who emphasised the importance of educating the people in economics and politics. It was this which eventually caused the split between Hatta and Soekarno and led the former to come up with the idea of Indonesian National Education Plan and to form the *Partai Nasional Indonesia*. I had great confidence in Hatta's far-sightedness.

My mind was full of culture and politics and it was this that had caused me to grope for something more concrete as regards the kind of programmes the party should come up with for the people beside the political activities aimed at achieving independence.

Perhaps I was still too young to be overly concerned about serious matters which involved the identity and value system of the Malay people. So I continued to be active in the party's propaganda campaigns and dialogues, but at the same time freed my mind of all cares and gave full rein to my imagination by writing short stories.

Each time I wrote a short story which smacked of the independence struggle or resistance to a social system that was undemocratic thus leaving the people feeling oppressed; my work would be heavily laced with the romantic ideals of youth. And each time I reread these stories, I wondered what the romantic and idealistic youth of my imagination would do to build an independent nation.

In their daily lives, the people's whole attention was focussed on the struggle for independence. The question that had been playing on my mind about a more stable new order for the people was never addressed. It was considered an issue

not practical to be realized as one of the party's activities. And to this day, I do not know whether the leadership had ever put it on the party agenda.

Singapore – The Third Time Around

The Congress of Political Parties was to be held in Singapore at the end of 1947 and it had been decided that I was to be part of the delegation from Pahang. I saw this as an opportunity to get out of the state and live in Singapore or Kuala Lumpur. It was not my intention to leave the party but to find a broader base where I could have easier access to the party leadership and to follow more closely their line of thinking. In addition, I would be able to increase my knowledge especially and establish links with the sources from where I could get the books I needed. So I went to Singapore for the third time.

I arrived early in Singapore and was able to meet several of the party's top brass. I told them about the gossip that had been circulating the past few months which aimed to belittle certain party leaders who allegedly subscribed to a narrow form of nationalism and were unprogressive in their thinking. I too tried to explore their opinion about the broader interpretation of nationalism and the more universal anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist ideologies. I could not form any definite conclusions but it was clear to me that there was a great deal of politicking in the top echelon of the party and among the more distinguished members.

I also told them about my desire to get out of Pahang and be at a more strategic operations centre such as Kuala Lumpur or Singapore. Ishak Haji Muhammad intimated that I may be offered a job at the party's weekly newspaper which was to be established in Ipoh, and which would be named *Pertama* (an acronym for *Persekutuan Tanah Melayu* or Federation of Malay States). I was delighted. Later, the party's secretary, Abdul Hamid Abdul (now deceased), who was working as a reporter with Utusan Melayu, introduced me to the editor, A. Samad Ismail. He thanked me for the short story "Penjual Ubat

Merdeka" (Independence medicine peddler) which I had sent two months earlier in response to his invitation to write for the new *Utusan Zaman*. He told me that the story would be published two weeks from then, that is, when the new *Utusan Zaman* which was already in circulation, increased its number of pages from four to six.

After the Congress, the delegates were scheduled to visit Utusan Melayu. I, however, did not go with them and instead went to the antique shop on Orchard Road where I had first become acquainted with Singapore. That afternoon, at the party's headquarters at No. 10 Bussorah Street, I once again ran into Hamid Abdul and Samad Ismail. They told me that Yusuf Ishak (now deceased), Editor-in-Chief and Managing Director of Utusan Melayu, sent his regards and that he had agreed to offer me a job at the publishing house. I was surprised and touched as I had not applied for a job at Utusan Melayu. I was, in fact, waiting for word from Ishak Haji Muhammad about the offer to join *Pertama* which was to be published in Ipoh. I had seen the advertisement in *Utusan Zaman*. When I told Hamid Abdul about this, he merely smiled and said that Ishak himself had agreed that I should work at Utusan Melayu.

Subsequently, I met Ishak and he confirmed that he had so agreed because, according to him, it was still uncertain whether *Pertama* would be published although the advertisement had been put out. A few things had not been resolved yet but he was disinclined to elaborate.

Becoming a Journalist

The next day I reported for duty at Utusan Melayu and was immediately asked to write a short story for *Mastika*. I managed to complete the story that very same day.

I did not have the time to savour the pleasure of getting something I had wanted for a long time, that is, a job at a newspaper, because the minute I arrived at the office I was straightaway asked to put pen to paper. Perhaps it was a test to gauge my ability. Luckily, it was just a short story. In the

afternoon, I was introduced to journalists whose names I knew but whom I had never met before. I was also introduced to Yusuf Ishak. Something I had wondered about at that time was why I should have felt as if I was meeting old friends I had not met for a long, long time. I did not feel like a newcomer at all. There were no interviews, no official statement about the position offered me, no mention of how much the salary would be, or terms of employment, or office regulations, or job specifications. And I immediately felt that Melan Abdullah, Dahari Ali, Mohd. Salleh Daud, Othman Wok, Haji Dahlan Mas'ud and the rest whom I had never met before, were my friends as well as my colleagues.

My first day at work was a Wednesday. The next day I arrived at the office at eight in the morning. Except for the printing section on the ground floor, the first floor where the office of the editor and the administration department were located, and the second floor where the typesetters and composers worked, the office was not yet open. The people who were busy cleaning the printing machines or distributing newspapers to the vendors, who rushed to get their allotment, were very friendly to me. They told me that reporters only came to work at nine o'clock, as do the clerks and the rest of the staff because the office does not open until then. I was taken to see the printing machines and briefed on how the pages that had been composed and typeset at the department on the second floor were passed through the machines and printed. I began to learn about printing and later on, about how a piece of news is obtained by a reporter, written down, edited, composed and so on. And from them too I learnt about who's who in Utusan Melayu. And I could tell that the most influential and respected journalists at Utusan Melayu at that time were Yusuf Ishak and A. Samad Ismail.

At nine o'clock I tried to take leave of these kind-hearted people who were my first teachers at the newspaper. However, they would not allow me to do so just yet and went on to explain a couple more things. They told me that the highest paid journalist was A. Samad Ismail and that his salary was

$150.00. The other reporters were paid between $100.00 and $130.00. Thursday of every week was pay day. Sometimes the employees' total pay was divided by four, sometimes by five, depending on the number of weeks there were in a particular month. It was already ten in the morning when I left the printing section and found that only one junior reporter had arrived at work. This junior reporter was so respectful towards me it was as though I was his superior officer. The officers from the accounts and administration departments were all busy working. The junior reporter then introduced me to the manager, Ungku Hassan. And Ungku Hassan then introduced me to Mr. Chan, the Accounts Officer. Ungku Hassan informed me that I would be paid a monthly salary of $100.00 and then handed me my letter of appointment as a reporter, which was signed by the Editor-in-Chief and Managing Director, Yusuf Ishak. The letter did not state the terms and conditions of my employment and the other matters that I needed to know. When I enquired, Ungku Hassan explained that there were neither written terms and conditions of service nor office regulations for reporters. Everything would be arranged at the discretion of the editor, A. Samad Ismail. And he also told me that the working hours for reporters were not fixed. Every reporter should be prepared to work 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Sundays and public holidays were off days, in line with government regulations. If a reporter had to work on those days, he would be paid ten dollars a day. I was also told that the paper hit the stands 365 days a year.

Assignments for reporters were written in a book compiled by the Chief Reporter. The junior reporter looked for his assignment in the book and asked me to do the same. I found that my first assignment was to accompany Syed Hamid al-Edrus to report on a rally sponsored by *Jam'iyah Da'watul Islamiyah* of Singapore during which well-known *ulama*[3] from Indonesia would be giving a speech.

I was introduced to Edrus when he arrived at the office.

3 A theologian, particularly in matters pertaining to Islam.

He was not around the day before when they introduced me to the other reporters. I followed him on this assignment and he taught me how to write speech news. I was asked to take down as many words uttered by the speaker as I could. All throughout the speech, I continuously took down notes, writing down almost everything the speaker said. Edrus collected the notes from me and upon arriving at the office, went through it very carefully. He asked me to write a news report by taking only the important points from the speech. It was for me to practice, he said. He himself diligently wrote the report. At three o'clock, the editor (A. Samad Ismail) asked to see me. I saw him poring over Edrus' work. Samad Ismail asked me if I remembered anything new or interesting in the cleric's speech. I immediately told him that the *ulama* had said that in this modern age, marriage vows could be taken via the telephone. He at once asked me to write this particular news story. In the report that I gave to Edrus, I had only touched on it briefly. Apparently, it had not been included in Edrus' report. So I sat down to write the news report. It was not until six p.m. that I finally managed to finish writing it. It was rather long. Approximately three pages. I prayed all night that my first attempt would prove that I had the makings of a reporter. In the morning, when I was having breakfast at a coffee shop on Arab Street, I saw an *Utusan Melayu* poster with the words "MARRIAGE VOWS VIA THE TELEPHONE – INDONESIAN CLERIC". I was stunned. Blood started to rush to my head. I bought a copy of the newspaper upon seeing that the report I had written the day before had made it to the front page of the paper. I scanned the paper but could not find Edrus' report. It appeared that it had been rejected by the editor who asked for it to be published as an article in *Mastika*.

When I arrived at the office, my colleagues, especially Melan Abdullah, made me buy them coffee for writing the scoop and for scooping the senior reporter from the religious section. Luckily, I had four or five dollar in my pocket. After that, I sat staring into space wondering how I was to survive before I received my first week's pay the following Thursday, which

was a week away. I dared not borrow money from anyone there although all the reporters at Utusan Melayu had seemed like old friends. Before lunch, I was summoned by Ungku Hassan. He asked me to sign a voucher for $30.00 as payment for the three short stories I had written before joining Utusan Melayu, including the one that I wrote for *Mastika* that Wednesday. I was surprised as the three short stories had not been published yet although I knew that Samad had given the green light for their publication. And I knew that it was not the normal practice for magazines or newspapers to pay short story writers. It seemed that Samad and Hamid Abdul understood the financial difficulties faced by political activists like me, and to avoid encouraging me making a habit of borrowing from others as well as to save me from losing face, they had persuaded Yusuf Ishak to pay me for the three short stories. Yusuf agreed on condition that it would not set a precedent for future short stories, articles or poems sent to Utusan Melayu. The Board of Directors at that time only allowed payment for selected writers who had been specially appointed, and not for the common writer.

Thus, my life as a reporter began. I wrote news stories covering all kinds of fields and topics including industrial relations, politics, crime, the courts, sports, and entertainment (films for example). My favourite was sports as I was a football and boxing fan.

I underwent orientation for several months. Was taken to all sorts of places in Singapore and learnt about its society and met people from all walks of life. The orientation took place on the job and through associations and contacts between the reporters of Utusan Melayu and people from all levels of society in Singapore, through political, professional, social and cultural ties, in the field of religion as well as entertainment. I began to know the city folks in the same way I had once known the kampong folks.

A New Horizon

My relationship with the other reporters at Utusan Melayu

became even closer. Although in some respects I did not quite approve of the attitude and social life of some of the senior journalists, there was something about this particular crowd that I found endearing. They valued and respected each other's point of view. Furthermore, they were all bound together by a common goal, which was to serve the people and the country. I felt I was among friends as most of them were supporters of PKMM.

The most avid readers among them were A. Samad Ismail, Mohd. Salleh Daud and Dahari Ali. I quickly joined this "club" of bookworms. At first, I did not have enough money to buy expensive books but this was not a problem at all as they were ever willing to lend me their books. There were books on politics, on theories of various ideologies, on economics, books on literary criticism, literary theories and culture. The only books I bought were novels.

The discussions I had with them were sometimes most gratifying. I at once felt that I had managed to broaden my knowledge and outlook on life through interacting with them. One thing, however, gave me an edge over them, and that was my knowledge of Islam. However, I did not reveal this to them as I did not want them to think that I was qualified to be given the responsibility of handling religious matters. I was not prepared to do so. The knowledge I had was barely enough for me. But I could sense that they respected my attitude towards life. Thus, I did not feel small or obliged to follow any lifestyle which I found disagreeable, although in reality I did learn a lot from them.

I gradually saw the spectre of a new and broader horizon, one that showed that the Malayan people's fight was not just a fight for independence but also a social, economic and cultural revolution. My experienced colleagues had realized this long ago. This was the reason why Utusan Melayu had planned to publish *Utusan Zaman* as a weekly and worked at improving the contents of the magazine *Mastika*. Instantly I could see that these newspapermen were intellectuals in the real sense of the word. Journalists like A. Samad Ismail, Mohd. Salleh Daud,

Dahari Ali and Yusuf Ishak had provided nourishment for my soul which was then too unfulfilled to carry on the search for knowledge and experience. Books and the people were very much a part of our lives, be it in our professional life as journalists and writers, or in our political struggle to achieve independence for Malaya.

Nevertheless, looking back now I realize that at the start of my career as a reporter, I was a young man who was both romantic and idealistic. I had not fully grasped the realities of politics or the struggle involved although I was well aware of its objectives and goals. I was still anxiously looking for something more concrete, especially as I gained greater insight into the lives and travails of the working class in Singapore. With every day more and more young Malays from the Peninsula began to flock to Singapore living in "pigeon-hole" dwellings called extra rooms which were built as extensions of Malay houses around Geylang Serai, Kampong Wak Tanjung, Paya Lebar, Lorong Ungku Aman, Kebun Ubi and so on. These young men and the families they boarded with faced innumerable problems. I had stopped taking part in activities like those I had participated in Temerloh. I had stopped giving speeches and holding dialogues with the people, and instead spent more time socializing with them and trying to understand the trials and tribulations of their lives. I too spent more time reading and writing. Using various pen names, I wrote articles for light reading every week for *Utusan Zaman* and every month for *Mastika*. On many occasions, I used the name Kamal and on equally many occasions I wrote anonymously. The focus of my attention was usually the attitude of the Malays in facing particular issues, especially political issues, and I frequently emphasized their attitude rather than their actions.

Day by day, I became more convinced that superstitious beliefs linked to Islam were too deeply rooted in the Malay psyche. And I was also convinced that the revival of the Islamic reformation which at one time was organized and championed by a group of young Muslims under the leadership of Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin and Syed Syeikh al-Hadi had lost its impact to

enable it to influence the Malays into becoming more positive and aggressive in meeting life's many challenges. The influence of the feudal system kept alive by the policies of the British colonizers had conditioned the Malays into leaving everything to fate and accepting without question whatever was handed out to them by the powers that be. The basis of their support for PKMM and UMNO was not their own personal conviction but their blind belief of whatever was fed them by their leaders.

At the meetings of the PKMM leadership (at that time I was one of the leaders of the party), I frequently raised the issue of the people's lack of moral and inner strength, an issue which to the prominent leaders whom I regarded as more experienced and knowledgeable than me, was too idealistic, and one which served no practical purpose in the fight against the British and in countering the conservative elements in UMNO et cetera. Thus, all our plans were focussed on the physical and tactical aspects of the struggle.

Perhaps it was because of my youth and the fact that I had not had a wide experience in politics, or perhaps it was because of my educational and cultural background, I always felt rather uncomfortable having a leadership, be it in PKMM or UMNO, that was preoccupied solely with the physical and tactical aspects of the struggle. It could be said that I was pessimistic about the Malays being spiritually and mentally prepared to face the challenges of a post-colonial era. However, I was very confident of the leadership of PKMM which was more progressive and effective in harnessing the people's nationalistic spirit to achieve independence compared to UMNO, whose leaders were former administrators trained by the colonialists. To me at that time, UMNO was only working to attain independence by the administrative process, through the transfer of power from the British to UMNO. PKMM, on the other hand, had plans to change all prevailing systems, including the economic, social and political systems.

It was for this reason that I continued to be involved in PKMM's struggle although I had lingering doubts about the ability of any party to change the mindset and attitude of the

Malays. It weighed heavily upon my mind that the Malays lived a life steeped in superstitions and erroneous beliefs which they linked to Islam, as well as the influence of the feudal system which basically was a system the British had purposely preserved to quash any desire for freedom among the Malays. These influences, I believed, would render them too weak to face the challenges of their struggle and too weak to face them independently; it would render them uncreative, unimaginative, and because of that devoid of any initiative to change the systems in their lives. Outwardly, they appeared dynamic, but inwardly, that is deep in their souls, they were still not free, they were still buried under the debris of the feudal system and the false teachings which they associated with Islam. They, in actual fact, left everything to fate or at best, to the discretion of their leaders.

These concerns had caused me to spend more time reading and writing, and less time playing an active role in politics.

From Politics to Literature

When I went to Singapore to attend PKMM's Congress in 1947 and was offered a job by Utusan Melayu, I was already twenty-five years old. During the six years before I turned twenty-five, I always dreamed of going for further studies and increasing my knowledge, and taking part in the national movement for independence. This desire which began as the dream of a young man was coloured by naivety, romanticism and idealism. I never realized when exactly I began to think and behave like an adult, but there came a time when I could feel a change in my attitude and became less serious about my involvement in politics and instead, started to do a lot of thinking, reading and writing.

I rose quite fast in Utusan Melayu such that within only a few months, I was given less reporting work and was entrusted with editing work instead. I was also asked to assist in managing the content of *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika*. For that I was given a raise and paid $130.00.

At an extraordinary Congress of PKMM early in 1948 to discuss PKMM's position and stand in AMCJA-PUTRA as the Malay left-wing faction which can no longer work together with the right-wing faction particularly in opposing the establishment of the Malayan Union and in demanding independence, I made an important decision in my life. I would no longer continue to be involved in politics. This marked the climax of the inner turmoil that had overtaken my mind and soul which were becoming increasingly focused on the question of the people's desire and attitude rather than the political struggle for independence. It was while making this decision that I felt I was being tested as an adult.

I still aligned myself, nevertheless, with those who demanded total independence from the British along with economic and social policies that would strike a balance between the prosperity of the nation with the eradication of poverty and inter-communal domination, as well as a national policy that would safeguard the sovereign rights of the Malays as stipulated in the People's Constitution championed by PUTRA.

Once I had decided not to be actively involved anymore in the political movement, I began to give a lot of thought to the kind of ideas that I should try to disseminate through my writings to be published in *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika*. And because I was actually assigned to assist in managing the section on culture and literature, I thus focused my attention on these fields. I could immediately see that nationalistic sentiments and the struggle for independence had clearly influenced the form and content of literary works at that time, especially short stories and poems. Nationalistic aspirations and the independence movement were the favourite themes then.

New Trends in Malay Literature

New trends in Malay literature, especially in poetry and short stories, had emerged during the days of the Japanese Occupation. The poems and short stories published in *Semangat Asia* and *Fajar Asia* were no longer in form and

content entertaining stories or *syair*[4] or *gurindam*[5] that contained moral instructions, some kind of sermon or advice that the writer wanted to convey directly to the audience. The poems and short stories in the Malay magazines which I rarely read in those days because they had seemed to have been written by writers of "ancient times" had undergone dramatic transformation during the Japanese era.

It is the intellectuals who usually bring about changes. And *Semangat Asia* and *Fajar Asia* were the focal points for a number of intellectuals from Malaya and Indonesia. By intellectuals I mean those who have vast knowledge and experience, who continually plan and work towards instituting change to improve the value system of the people and the quality of their lives, those who constantly employ education at the lowest level to attain the highest level and widest extent of knowledge, and make use of whatever little experience or knowledge they have to triple their effort for the betterment of the people and mankind. Journalists like Ishak Haji Muhammad, A. Samad Ismail and Abdullah Kamil from *Semangat Asia*, as well as Zainal Abidin Ahmad from *Fajar Asia*, had brought visible changes to Malay writing and to the manner in which poetry and short stories were presented.

Before I began working at Utusan Melayu in 1947, some of my writings had already appeared in *Suluh Malaya, Kencana* and *Utusan Zaman* itself. In my short stories, I actually continued what *Semangat Asia* and *Fajar Asia* had started, but of course I did not inject Japanese propaganda into them. And when I selected short stories and poems for *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika*, I used the same criteria – that the style of writing, the presentation, and plot development must be consistent with those of the writers of the Japanese era, not writers of the pre-war era. And when the themes of the Japanese era which were loaded with propaganda about the greatness of the Japanese and the purity of the aspiration to establish *Asia Timur Raya*

4 A rather long poem made up of quatrains and is usually not recited but sung to the audience.

5 A poem made up of couplets with each line equal in length and rhyming.

masterminded by the same were done away with and replaced with themes of independence, freedom from oppression and colonialism, these works were naturally considered to be infused with new life. These were the types of writing that filled the pages of magazines and newspapers, especially *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika*.

Most of the writers who wrote in this new trend were romantic and idealistic young men who had great dreams about their future, the future of their people and their country. These works were thick with romanticism. And it was this that had made the short stories and poems popular among the young independence fighters of that time who were also romantic and idealistic.

Although in terms of form these works were sometimes more refreshing and vital, they lacked the maturity of ideas found in the works of prominent writers of the Japanese era such as Ishak Haji Muhammad and Samad Ismail. Eroticism, that is romantic love between a man and a woman, was the theme that dominated each and every story. (Comment: By "eroticism" I mean the love relationship between a man and a woman which is pure, and not sexual or physical). On the other hand, works published during the Japanese Occupation, for example "Ubi Kayu", dealt with life and humanity on a more realistic plane. This, I think is due to the intellectuality of writers such as Ishak and Samad. To attain intellectuality, one must have vast knowledge and experience which leads to maturity of thinking. However, the young writers of that time, including me, were still lagging far behind, be it in general knowledge or experience. I have not just realized this today but have done so since the time I was entrusted with handling *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika* in 1948. Where I was concerned, I had tried to do something about it, and I also tried to do the same when selecting the works of other writers for *Mastika* and *Utusan Zaman*. However, I only managed to make very little progress.

Most of the short stories and poems published in 1946 highlighted the struggle for independence for Malaya and Indonesia. This too was one of legacies of the Japanese

Occupation which in the political arena was championed by PKMM. I too wrote along similar lines for *Kencana*, *Suluh Malaya* and later, *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika*. However, due to the change in political thinking perhaps, this trend began to gradually weaken. From 1948 onwards, short stories began to focus on other themes. The theme Malaya-Indonesia recurred less and less only to completely disappear later.

As a writer and the person responsible for the columns on culture and literature in the magazine *Mastika* and the weekly *Utusan Zaman*, I constantly tried to impress upon the readers the need to change the attitude and mindset of the Malays. This desire to see it happen had influenced my writing and my selection of the works sent by other writers to *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika*. I did not believe that individuals who were intellectually and spiritually dead would be able to bring about any change. Feudalism, religious fanaticism and colonialism would never be changed by people who still left everything to fate, to the *keramat*,[6] and the spirits, still backward, still small-minded. Thus saw the proliferation of short stories and poems that looked at society in a critical light in addition to playing up the theme of the independence struggle. This was a new trend in the development of short stories and poetry which later led to the publication of works laced with critical comments about society at large which were colourfully presented employing various approaches. There were criticisms aimed directly at the flaws in the fabric of society itself but there were more aimed at those responsible for creating these flaws. In fact, there were many criticisms directed at people in high places who were considered to be the source or at the very least, the instruments responsible for the injustices in society and the blows it dealt to freedom of expression. The hypocrisy of the upper class and the old-fashioned clerics who only talked about death became popular themes and subjects of the works of that era.

6 A place or something considered by some as holy and endowed with supernatural powers.

Although the winds of change had started to blow, nevertheless, in the early parts of 1946–47, one could still find *gurindam* and short *syair* written by the young poets of the day as well as the veteran poets who were still unaffected by the changing tide. Except for Masuri S.N. who had brought changes to the literary landscape since the Japanese Occupation and a number of other young writers, most poets still wrote in a style almost similar to that of writers of the pre-war days. However, there were visible changes in the content of their works. Less and less works resorted to story-telling and talking about morals, rewards and sins. Even the choice of words was affected. Sanskrit words, for example, which were popularly used by Indonesian poets, began to show up in the works of local writers, although sometimes they seemed awkward as they were used in the wrong sense and in the wrong places. What I found interesting at that time was the tendency among these young poets to rebel against what is stereotypical and to choose words, expressions and metaphors freely. However, truly unconventional forms were not yet popular then. Every poem or short story you read had lines and alliterations reminiscent of the *syair* or *pantun*.[7]

I am not able to quote specific figures, dates, names or titles in this memoir. Likewise, I am not qualified to name particular authors or works as agents of change. However, I dare say that from what I had experienced and observed, the content and form of short story and poetry underwent change between 1946 and 1947. This change became even more greatly felt with the existence of a group of pre-war writers who although they accepted the themes and subject matter of nationalism and independence, rejected the form, style of writing and expression of the young writers whom they believed were destroying the Malay language and literature. These veteran writers still clung to what they claimed was pure Malay and a pure style of expression in Malay literature. This included

7 A poem which consists of four lines or verses with four lines, with the first two lines hinting at the message of the verse and the remaining two its actual message.

diction, style of writing and the use of figurative language. The incursion of words popular only in Indonesia, for example, and the use of free style in poetry which deviated ever so slightly from the *syair-gurindam-pantun* model, was a cause of great concern to them. Most of these writers had paid scant attention to the influences that sociology, global communications, politics and economics had on the development of language and literature. This resistance to change I imagine had some bearing on the attitude of those who had wanted independence for Malaya but could not free themselves from the fetters of colonialism which oppressed them through the preservation of the feudal system and outdated beliefs. These veterans had viewed the young writers as radicals who would destroy the Malay custom and tradition.

WHY SINGAPORE

Up to this point, my esteemed readers have seen how I had thrice relocated to Singapore (before the war in 1941; from 1942–46, that is during and after the Japanese Occupation; in 1947, after the PKMM Congress). I am sure you understand why I had to relocate, and why to Singapore. Although each relocation was for a different reason, they all, in the final analysis, had something to do with my involvement in literature. As a matter of fact, anyone who follows closely the development of Malay literature knows that Singapore was a must for every writer in those days. And any attempt to trace the development of Malay literature after the Second World War would be incomplete if the significant role of Singapore is overlooked.

Several collections of short stories, poems as well as novels that are still being sold up to this day, were written in Singapore.

A number of theses and academic papers in the collection of the University of Malaya and other universities discuss the authors, works as well as the literary activities of the 1950s in Singapore. In fact, the long essay written by Professor Ismail Hussein (who holds the chair of literature at the Malay Department, University of Malaya) for his bachelor's degree (B.A. Hons) was entitled *Malay Authors in Singapore after the Second World War*. Likewise, Dr. Syed Hussein Ali's long essay which he wrote for his bachelor's (Dr. Syed Hussein is a sociology scholar who was in political detention) was *Language and Literary Organizations in Singapore after the Second World War (specifically ASAS 50)*.

Without going into the findings of these scholars, at a glance we can see that Singapore was important in the development of Malay literature after the war such that it attracted the interest of scholars from institutions of higher learning to write about it. Without evaluating the collections of short stories, poems and novels published in Singapore then, at a glance we can see that post-war Singapore was the birthplace of many literary works and the meeting place of writers.

Several conclusions can be formed from the findings of the studies, research and surveys carried out on the role of Singapore as the centre for the development of Malay literature during the period after the war until the 1950s. Among them are, post-war Singapore was the hub of politics, the centre for trade, economic and industrial growth and consequently, the focal point for cultural and social activities. Singapore too was the communications centre for both the government and the people and subsequently the centre for broadcasting, information, publishing, printing, filming and so on, thus attracting artistically inclined individuals and professionals such as journalists, writers, singers, musicians, actors, and film stars.

When a big city develops into a political, economic, social and cultural centre, it needs a large labour force, be it manual labour, skilled labour, specialists or professionals. Young men from Peninsula Malaya who had been devastated by the Japanese Occupation saw Singapore as the Promised Land. To

them, Singapore was the most suitable place to start a new life. Singapore too had seemed to be the best place to continue pursuing any ambition one might have had but which was disrupted by the Japanese Occupation or one might have started to nurse during that period. Overnight, Singapore had become the melting pot for people from all fields. At the time when I was actively involved in politics in Temerloh, I was determined to return to Singapore as it was the hub of political activities. At that time too, I resolved to increase my knowledge of literature; and Singapore was *the* base for the development of literature, in terms of reading materials as well as broadcasting and publication activities. And I was one of the fortunate ones to be offered a job at Utusan Melayu when I attended the PKMM Congress of 1947. I had not only secured a place in Singapore but one at the very heart of the political and literary activities.

Thousands of young Malay men had flocked to Geylang Serai, Lorong Ungku Aman, Paya Lebar, Kebun Ubi and other Malay preferred areas. Most of them had come looking for a job but many too had arrived with a burning ambition to succeed in life. Among them were young men with leadership potentials in particular fields, who had been imbued with patriotic zeal and a social conscience since the days of the Japanese Occupation due to the oppressive nature of the Japanese rule. These young men later blossomed into leaders of trade unions and similar organizations.

Young men who were artistically inclined or skilled in some profession too had gone to Singapore to develop their talents. Unlike me who had fallen straight into the lap of Utusan Melayu, many were not as lucky. They had to endure hardship, working as labourers, policemen and the like. However, emotionally and spiritually, they were happy. Singapore offered them untold opportunities to cut a niche for themselves. Some had gone on to become actors, journalists, radio personalities and so on. A number had succeeded to become writers who later attained the status of *sasterawan* ("celebrated writer" or "literary luminary").

The young men who later became *sasterawan* were not yet in Singapore when I went there in 1947. At that time, the magazines *Hiburan* and *Kencana* were already in circulation. *Mastika* whose publication was brought to a halt by the Japanese Occupation too had been put back on the stands by Utusan Melayu. Harun Aminurrashid was the man behind *Hiburan* and *Kencana*. Harun Aminurrashid or Harun Mohd. Amin was one of the well-known writers of the pre-war days and a friend on the PKMM central committee. Unlike *Kencana* which was published in Romanised script and touted the concept of a joint cooperation for the independence of Malaya and Indonesia, *Hiburan* was of lower quality, both in terms of content and publication techniques. The magazine was run by Harun Aminurrashid to provide a training ground for young men who wanted to try their hand at writing and publishing. The young writers who were already in Singapore then, for example Hamzah, MAS (Mohd. Arif Ahmad), Rosmera and Jymy Asmara started their writing careers with *Hiburan*. Although MAS was studying in Tanjung Malim at that time, it was through *Hiburan* that he was able to hone his writing skills. Jymy Asmara was from Peninsula Malaya, worked as a policeman but had a strong desire to become a writer. He made friends with the people at *Hiburan* and was soon asked to manage the pen-pal column. Through this column he was not only able to forward his career as a writer but little by little began to establish contacts with many of his young readers in the Peninsula. Jymy eventually left his job as a policeman, lived in near poverty, but was a much happier person. In him I saw a young man who was full of hope, verve and determination. No one knew how poor he was until they saw what he had for lunch or stopped by the "box" where he lived in Geylang. A number of his pen pals who went to Singapore with big dreams in their hearts would first of all crash at his place as Jymy was only too willing to support them until they found a suitable job at some publishing house or film company.

Harun, meanwhile, had quite a following comprising not only the young writers whom he had trained but also teachers

and writers who had made a name for themselves since before the war, such as Mahmud Ahmad and Buyong Adil (both deceased) who, at that time, worked at the school broadcasting section, Radio Malaya. Two intermingling trends could be seen to emerge from the literary scene in Singapore; the first was exemplified by works that breathed new life into Malay literature and the second by the works of veteran writers who combined new content with old form. When I discussed a short story I had written with Harun Aminurrashid, I could at once sense that Harun himself was of the old school and still maintained the style he was used to in Tanjung Malim. The short story had appeared in *Kencana* before I went to Singapore. It was about the struggle of a young Malay who fought in the Indonesian independence army. Although much of the content was retained, Harun had heavily edited my writing style.

Thus, day by day, Singapore became more and more important. The Kampong Jawa area – Arab Street, North Bridge Road, Jalan Sultan – and the area around it became the meeting place of writers who had been bitten by the writing as well as the political bug. It was around this area that several Malay publishers like the Royal Press, MIBS and the Ahmadiyah Press had set up their offices. The Utusan Melayu journalists who lived in Geylang or Kampong Melayu would first of all stop at Kampong Jawa in the morning for a plate of *nasi rawan* or *nasi penganan* at Jalan Sultan or Bussorah Street, or a serving of *kacang pul* at North Bridge Road. Breakfast time was the time to meet up with friends from the Malay publishing houses. Discussions on culture, politics and literature would start there and would be continued in the late afternoon or evening at the stalls in Geylang Serai. I was at that time renting a room in a house on Jalan Sultan with a friend from my kampong who worked as a photographer in the police department. Our landlord was a police officer from the Special Branch. As a result, although my house was located at the meeting place of writers, it was not popularly used for discussions. My writer and journalist friends felt they were treated just like they were members of political parties – constantly kept under police surveillance.

Apart from the journalists, a group that was very active in Singapore at that time were the Malay teachers. They operated not through political parties such as PKMM but through their own associations. And the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union in those days was one of the most progressive teachers' associations in the whole of Malaya. It was, in fact, the first to become a trade union. Among its members were well-known writers like Mahmud Ahmad, Buyong Adil (who worked in the school broadcasting section of Radio Malaya), Yusuf Lana, Abdul Rahman Muhammad Said, Jaafar Muhammad, and many more. They too made Kampong Jawa their meeting place. Beside *Hiburan,* they also wrote for *Utusan Zaman.* They actively compiled and published schoolbooks. In the process, they became close to Harun Aminurrashid who was no longer a teacher then but a co-publisher of the Royal Press which published schoolbooks and Malay novels. Harun was one of the writers who wrote many novels after the war, in the early days of the revival of the publishing industry.

Left-wing Politics under Pressure

I did not live long on Jalan Sultan. The house was not suitable for someone like me who was involved in politics. However, I still wanted to live in the Kampong Jawa area as its location was just ideal. A number of my friends, in fact, lived there; Melan Abdullah and Salleh Daud lived on Minto Road, Dr. Burhanuddin and Abdullah Zawawi (now deceased), the secretary-general of PKMM who replaced Hamid Abdul, lived on Palembang Road, which was adjacent to Minto Road. Both roads were branches of Jalan Sultan on which I lived. In addition, PKMM's office was still at No.10 Bussorah Street. The Kota Raja Club, at which PKMM usually held its meetings without having to pay any rent, was located in the Kampong Gelam Palace area behind Bussorah Street. All this made me still want to live around Kampong Jawa even though it meant moving to a new address. Thus, Abdullah Zawawi and I moved to Orchard Road and rented a room in a bungalow at Anggulia

Park. Living on Orchard Road gave us some kind of prestige. The area was popular among the middle and upper classes. Only executives rented rooms there. The bungalows that did not rent out rooms were occupied by top level executives or the rich. I was not comfortable living there particularly because most of Abdullah's friends and mine lived in the Kampong Jawa and Geylang areas. However, quite a number of PKMM members who lived in the Tanglin area around Orchard Road were happy we were there. They were the ones who had found us the room.

The PKMM leaders held a meeting almost every night. Abdullah and I hardly ever returned to our room except to sleep. Reports from all branches and sub-branches of the party in Malaya showed that PKMM had increasingly come under pressure from the authorities. The pressure put on API had almost reached its climax. Not long after that, in June 1948, the government declared a state of emergency and detained the leaders of our party all over Malaya, including our number one leader, Ishak Haji Muhammad.

Every single one of us, the leaders of PKMM who lived in Singapore, had a visit from the police. Our homes and offices were searched. However, none of us was arrested. I was asked to go to the Special Branch office at the Police Headquarters, not far from Utusan Melayu. There, I was interrogated for hours almost every day for about a week. In the weeks that followed, I would sometimes be asked to go again to the Special Branch office to answer some questions. All throughout, I was not allowed to leave Singapore.

My interrogator was an Englishman. He was in plain clothes, rather tall, thin, pleasant-looking, very friendly, polite, and wore thick glasses. He told me his name and rank but I have now forgotten what they were. I would say that almost all the meetings I had with him were some kind of intellectual discussions on political ideologies and the techniques and tactics used in fighting for a cause. Sometimes we spoke in Malay, sometimes in English. His Malay was not too bad; my English was not too good either. And I could feel that he was trying

his best to convince me that he was an expert on communism. He put forward his questions in a very systematic manner. I realized this after several meetings with him. At first he asked my personal details, like where I was born, how old I was and so on. Then he went on slowly to enquire about my involvement in the PKMM, my relationship with the important figures in the party, my role in its leadership. Next, he brought us back to the days in Pahang, asking me about my activities then. Then, and this I felt was what he really wanted to find out, he asked me about the party members whom I had said I knew. This time, he wanted to know where they were. I answered his questions straightforwardly. I told him that those who had been detained were in detention; those who were in the jungle were obviously in the jungle. When he asked me from whom I had got the information about their whereabouts, I replied that I had got it from Mr. Thompson. He asked me who Mr. Thompson was; I told him that Mr. Thompson was the Director of Public Communications. He smiled. I knew that he knew I was only joking. In truth, the information we had received about the declaration of the state of emergency, the political detentions and the escape of members of the Malayan Communist Party into the jungle had all come from the Public Communications Office.

He made a rather cutting remark but it somehow boosted my ego a little. He said that he had a lot of experience as an officer responsible for countering communist ideologies. He had exchanged ideas with many political figures or interrogated them in his official capacity as he was doing so with me then, and he found that political activists from the literary circle were more sincere, frank and did not beat about the bush. I thanked him coolly. Again he smiled and went on to say that such people, however, were sometimes rather cynical. I smiled ironically (cynically, I suppose, according to his interpretation) and apologised, saying that I never did mean to be cynical. As a newspaperman, it was true that I did get the news about the detainees or those who fled into the jungle because of the emergency laws, from the Public Communications Office.

Their investigation of me ended after two months with a

statement from the officer saying that I was free to leave Singapore if I wanted to. I knew that what he had wanted was information about PKMM's ties with the Malayan Communist Party because a number of PKMM members had gone into hiding in the jungle in Temerloh and other districts. He got nothing from me because I did not know anything about the goings-on. The conclusion I came to was that the PKMM members who had fled to the jungle were radical nationalists, not communists. At the last meeting I had with the smart alec of an officer during which I felt I gained some experience, he stressed that although he had failed to get any information from me, he knew that there was some connection between the PKMM members who had fled to the jungle and the Malayan Communist Party. I took his words as a warning. And I told him that I would be disappointed if his statement was ever proven to be true. Actually I wanted to get it into his head that I was a political activist fighting for my country, not a terrorist. That was all there was to it. I knew that the officer was a very intelligent man. Even though he had wanted to find out my views and PKMM's on the Malayan Communist Party's insurgency, he never levelled any accusation at me nor hinted that I was personally involved with the Malayan Communist Party, much less that I supported their cause and principles. And as for me, I believed I was interrogated because I was one of the leaders of the party and had at one time been active in Temerloh where the PKMM members had disappeared into the jungle at the start of the Emergency period.

PKMM was almost crippled. Its leaders did not hold any meeting for a length of time while the police conducted their investigation. In addition, efforts taken by the party leadership to demand that every PKMM leader and member who was under detention be released or tried in court completely fell on deaf ears.

The Politics of Culture

With PKMM almost paralysed and API banned, the young

men and independence fighters who were at one time radical nationalists suddenly found themselves left without direction or guidance. Many of them had joined UMNO to help protect the rights of the Malays while the party struggled to stand up to the crafty and fastidious British. It was obvious that the British could no longer disregard the wave of nationalism among the Malays who were demanding for Malaya's independence. However, a new issue had quietly emerged in the process, this time among the non-Malays, particularly the Chinese who had begun to show some degree of political awareness. It appeared that obtaining independence for Malaya was not as simple as it had seemed because this new political awareness among the Chinese must first be addressed by not only the British but also the Malays themselves. On the surface it had seemed that the political awareness of the Chinese would further buttress the fight for independence, however, beneath the veneer of cooperation lay racial interests which had somehow developed into a problem. Unfortunately, the British would only grant independence to a stable and peaceful Malaya. Nevertheless, the British had no choice but to promise independence to Malaya as it needed the unstinting support of all the races to quell the communist insurgency.

As the communist insurgency had the support of all its members the majority of whom were Chinese, it enabled the Malayan Communist Party to devise political strategies and racist propaganda to harness the support of this group. The British authorities, meanwhile, required many young people in its security forces and could only enlist young Malay men for this purpose. The issue of Chinese farmers helping and supporting the communist terrorists thus developed into a very complicated problem. This is because almost all of the members of the peace-keeping and security forces who were forced to take action against them were Malays.

The resettlement of the Chinese farmers had some effect on the political struggle. Political rights had then to be given to the Chinese in order to instil patriotism in them as well as a sense of responsibility towards the country. The citizenship

issue arose then in the form of the demands of *Jus Soli*. This further strengthened the demands of the Malays who felt that Malaya was their native country. The demands for Malay sovereign rights and resistance towards the *Jus Soli* policy became a big issue. As a result, the political struggle for independence, the politics of races and the offensive against the communists became even more frenzied.

In such a political maelstrom, the Malays became even more nationalistic, more sensitive and more sentimental when it came to issues that were in some ways connected with their race or Malaya. In UMNO itself, racial problems and Malay rights were much debated issues apart from the politics of the independence struggle which had to be resolved with the other races on the one hand, and the British on the other. In the end, it was these issues that caused the late Dato' Onn to leave UMNO and form another party. And all throughout, that is after the collapse of PKMM and the banning of API, the young men and radical independence fighters who had lost their leaders spent a lot of time discussing the bases of national unity. Some viewed it solely from the angle of Malay nationalism consistent with the anti-Malayan Union slogans of the early days; others tried to come up with the bases of national unity for a Malay nation in which there were also races other than the Malays. Whatever the case, both views seemed to point to an agreement that there was a need to formulate the bases for national unity and that the Malay language was the most suitable language for uniting the different races in the country. Malay too was regarded as the foundation of culture as well as the instrument of communication most appropriate for promoting greater understanding.

Writers and teachers gave voice to these ideas in their writings which appeared in the various magazines and newspapers. The political fraternity was constantly under pressure from teachers who formed a pressure group in UMNO to ensure that Malay was accepted as the national language. The language issue was not only linked to the politics of national unity but also the politics of education and social order. And

from these ideas and activities there emerged a new trend in the Malay political movement. The impact of this trend began to be felt when a number of language and literary bodies as well as cultural organizations began to mushroom.

The politico-cultural thinking that had emerged caught on rapidly amongst the writers and teachers who to some extent had been involved in the struggle for independence since before the declaration of the state of emergency. It was during this time, that is in mid-1948, that Malay magazines and newspapers, including *Majlis*, devoted more space to language and education issues aside from hot topics like the politics of independence and resistance to communist insurgency. At that time too, novels began to proliferate in the bookshops. Harun Aminurrashid, Ahmad Lutfi, Ahmad Bakhtiar, Ahmad Murad, Abdullah Sidek and others began to be prolific once again. They were veteran writers of the 1930s. Although the novels they wrote still maintained the narrative style of the 1930s and 1940s, most of these works centred around the heroism, aspirations to sovereignty and the morale of the Malays. And most of these novels too provided glimpses of the past experiences of the Malay people, from the Malacca Sultanate to the Japanese Occupation, highlighting the staying power of the Malay culture which acted as the mainstay of the Malays throughout those turbulent and eventful periods.

Mastika Transformed

Meanwhile, we at Utusan Melayu who had been following closely the political developments, the racial disputes and so on prior to the formation of the Federation of Malaya which replaced the Malayan Union in February 1948, were proud that our daily, *Utusan Melayu* and our weekly, *Utusan Zaman* were selling very well, but were extremely disappointed that the sale of our magazine *Mastika* had steadily declined due to stiff competition from other magazines sold in and around Kampong Jawa.

Edrus and Hamdam who were responsible for *Mastika*

could not do anything much despite the help of friends and colleagues who had come up with ideas to put *Mastika* back on its feet. I myself had felt that *Mastika* was overloaded with articles similar in form to the ones published in magazines before the war, which were on the whole too didactic. The young Malay men of that time had begun to be exposed to a variety of lifestyles and were reeling under the pressure of their fast changing environment. And in more ways than one, these young men were more interested in light reading materials than heavy ones because they were involved in the serious business of fighting the Communist insurgents. It was also for this reason that Malay films at that time received an overwhelming response from the public.

After the establishment of the Federation of Malaya, the British government invited several senior journalists to visit England. The idea was to impress upon them that the British government were desirous of protecting the Malay states from the communist threat and eventually granting them full independence. Yusuf Ishak of Utusan Melayu was one of those selected for the trip. Before leaving for London, he told Ungku Hassan (the Manager) and Samad Ismail (the Chief Editor) that he wanted to see *Mastika*'s sales improve when he got back from England. He warned that if the sales target of 10 000 copies was not reached, *Mastika* would be closed down. According to him, it would be unprofitable to continue publishing a magazine that sold less than 10 000 copies, and he did not want *Utusan Melayu* or *Utusan Zaman* to suffer as a result of having to bear the losses incurred by *Mastika*.

As soon as Yusuf Ishak had left for England, Samad asked me if I was willing to take over the running of *Mastika* to help improve its circulation. I was at first reluctant because I figured that if the more experienced Edrus and Hamdam were unwilling to do so, what chance did a greenhorn like me have. However, in the end I decided to give it a try on condition that I was given the free hand to convert *Mastika* into a short story magazine and to print its cover in full-colour art paper. Although Samad had his doubts, he accepted my suggestion

because he too could see that the young Malay men of that era wanted light reading and entertainment. And a full-colour cover adorned with pictures of film stars would surely attract this particular group of readers. However, Ungku Hassan who worked out the costing and found that such an enterprise would involve a lot of money was not as easy to convince.

Apart from wanting to see the magazine's sales increase, I made the suggestion with the hope that it would help popularize light reading materials among the younger set. Some of my friends opposed the idea thinking that I had mooted it to please Yusuf Ishak but I told them that on the contrary, I had suggested it as a stop gap measure to save the magazine. *Mastika* had done the Malays a great service. Since it was first published before the war, it had always been a good magazine filled with meaty articles and short stories. Turning it into an entertainment magazine had of course seemed a retrograde step. However, closing it down would be a thousand times more retrogressive. In the end, the proposal was accepted. And I myself hoped and prayed that it would pay off. What I had actually hoped for was that some time in the not too distant future, Malaya would have a good literary magazine of its own, featuring short stories, poems, plays and important literary articles. Such a magazine would encourage the development of Malay literature and in the process promote the Malay language which is the foundation of the Malayan culture. We debated these ideas at Utusan Melayu and although many felt that they were good, they were however considered too idealistic.

When Yusuf Ishak returned from England, he was astonished when he saw the new *Mastika*. He himself had never visualized a Malay magazine with a four-colour art paper cover of relatively good quality print. In fact, the issue that he saw was the fifth and was a big improvement on the first. Later, he laughed when he saw the cover of the first issue because the picture of Kasma Booty which graced it did little justice to the actress who was regarded as the most beautiful film star at that time. Its colour separation left a lot to be desired, likewise its

printing registration. This was only to be expected as it was our first attempt at three-colour printing. The first issue, in fact, created a lot of problems for us. We had to apologise to Kasma Booty for the botched up photograph. Like us, she was unhappy to see her beautiful face turned into something unrecognizable, but like us too she later laughed it off remembering that Malay publishers in general and Utusan Melayu in particular, did not have much experience in the field. *Mastika* was one of the first Malay magazines to have a full-colour art paper cover. Yusuf Ishak was aware of that. He was quite pleased, as a matter of fact; he commended us for our initiative. He was even more pleased when Ungku Hassan informed him that *Mastika*'s sales had gradually improved. At the time he arrived from England, its sales had reached 9000 copies. He was confident and so were we that before the end of 1948, *Mastika*'s sales would exceed the 10 000 mark. And this was later proven to be true.

I included the episode of *Mastika*'s botched cover merely to share with the readers the lighter moments that we had at Utusan Melayu as we zealously strove to achieve our ambitions as writers and at the same time worry about the survival of *Utusan Melayu*, then a major Malay-owned newspaper publisher. Yusuf Ishak was a most practical man, totally business-minded and exceedingly honest in carrying out his responsibilities. It irked him to see the Malays indulge in daydream and fiction and he was most anxious when A. Samad Ismail whom he greatly respected, made a foray into literature. Samad provided my colleagues and me the impetus when we first struggled to transform *Mastika* into a fiction magazine. He himself translated many short stories written by famous European writers such as Anton Chekov, Alberto Moravia and several others. I myself began to be obsessed with writing short stories. At least two short stories every month for *Mastika* and one for *Utusan Zaman*. And to counterbalance the romantic stories which Yusuf Ishak disliked, I included detective stories as well in the magazines. As none of the stories sent in were detective stories, I requested the help of ZABHA who would

occasionally come up with the adventures of "Inspektor Saruan". However, ZABHA was not productive enough and I, under the pseudonym of Mr. X was forced to write at least one detective story per month. Thus, *Mastika* became a fiction magazine that published all kinds of short stories including the more serious ones which were of higher quality, translations of works by well-known writers from the west that is, as well as romantic, idealistic stories which revolved around the independence movement, and detective stories strictly for entertainment.

My more serious-minded friends at Utusan Melayu as well as those outside Utusan, including my comrades-in-arms in Peninsula Malaya whose activities had been crippled, felt that the magazine had deteriorated into a hotchpotch of poor quality literature. However, after listening to my explanation, quite a number of them began to share my dreams of one day seeing the blossoming of interest among the people in more serious literary works. To me, transforming *Mastika* into a fiction magazine was just the starting point.

Nevertheless, I was grateful to God that the magazine which had caused quite a stir among my fellow writers and the independence fighters proved to be quite a success and enjoyed a popularity that surpassed that of the other magazines until some commercial publishers brought out two-bit entertainment and film magazines two or three years later.

Singapore thus became an important base, one that was big enough to support all kinds of activities and stimulated the development of new thinking and endeavours which culminated in creating political awareness amongst writers and teachers. In reality, these new ideas and orientation were directly linked to nationalism and the independence struggle. Teachers, through their associations in Peninsula Malaya and Singapore became increasingly vocal about their demands for measures to be taken to develop the Malay language and elevate it to its rightful status. Writers, especially those who participated actively in or followed closely the political developments but whose movements within their own political parties then were already

rather limited, began to discuss culture in general and language in particular. Thus, slogans like "*Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*" (Language is the soul of the people) began to appear. And among the young as well as veteran writers who frequently met up in Kampong Jawa and Geylang Serai, such slogans often became their topic of discussion. However, the slogan "*Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*" was still at the stage where it was bandied about and mulled over. As yet, nothing had been done to translate it into action. In addition, not many good articles had been written about it.

The works of Indonesian authors as well as personal contacts with Indonesian writers, political activists and intellectuals who frequented Singapore had further kindled the spirit of "*Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*". Apart from creating the awareness that the Malay language was also the language used in Indonesia, it also made people realize the important role the language had played in uniting the 100 million people in Indonesia after the *Sumpah Pemuda* of 1928.

For people like me who were fascinated with the concept of Melayu Raya or Indonesia Raya (Greater Malay or Greater Indonesia) from the very moment I entered politics and got involved in the world of literature, there was nothing new in the knowledge that the Malays and the Indonesians shared a common language and culture. It was one of the historical facts which proved that there already existed a strong basis for unity among the people of the Malay Archipelago. However, the new trend of thinking had veered away from the concept of Melayu Raya. The new thinking regarded the Malay language as having a strong potential to foster understanding among the various races in Malaya and thus act as the foundation stone for national unity. Hence, national solidarity is vital for a nation that is struggling to attain independence. Briefly, in furthering the concept of Melayu Raya, the linguistic similarities in general and the cultural similarities in particular between the Malays and the Indonesians were elements which supported such an aspiration. In the fight for Malaya's independence, however, the Malay language and culture were the means to achieve

political stability. This was the line of thinking of most of the writers, teachers and politicians at that time. I could sense this in my discussions with the various groups. However, in the programmes drawn up for the independence struggle, this issue had never been taken up seriously.

Looking back, we can now say that the Malay language did become the political foundation of this independent nation as demanded by the leftwing Malay group, PUTRA, accepted by the non-Malay group, AMCJA, and included in the draft of the People's Constitution which was tendered to the British as a counter-proposal to the Federal Constitution compiled by a working committee set up by the British and UMNO to replace the Malayan Union. And as we know, the People's Constitution was rejected outright. It was the Federal Constitution of Malaya by which Malaya returned to its status quo before the war that was accepted by the British to fulfil the peoples' demand to reject the Malayan Union.

INDONESIAN INFLUENCE

Just as I had mentioned in the chapter "Introduction", I received my secondary education in Indonesia where religious instruction was not kept separate from secular instruction. Now, almost forty years after leaving school, I am confident that throughout my adult life I have been guided by the fundamentals laid down by that education system. Sometimes I feel quite alienated from the educated mainstream, be it the western educated or the religious educated. I feel I belong to a stream of my own and thus find myself at times understood by the western educated group and not accepted by the religious educated group, at other times it is the other way round, understood by the religious educated group and not accepted by the western educated group. I find it difficult to align myself with either group. I imagine that the main reasons for this dilemma are, one, I had no formal instruction after secondary

school and two, the education system in this country–until this very day – separates religious education from western secular education, resulting in the existence of two groups of educated Malays who know almost nothing about each other. The western educated are ignorant of the basics of Islamic thinking and the religious educated are ignorant of the fundamentals of western thinking. As a matter of fact, I have on several occasions observed how the group that is said to be Islamic educated display such a narrow interpretation of the principles of Islamic thoughts and likewise the group that is said to be western educated, close their minds to the developments in western thinking which is more advanced and which increasingly pays closer attention to the basics of Islamic thought. I have met many whose way of thinking is Islamic or western only in sentiment. There are, however, a handful of those who are western educated or Islamic educated who truly understand the fundamental differences and similarities between these schools of thought.

As regards literature, many people in the beginning thought that I was totally influenced by the Indonesian language and literature. There is some truth in this as I did not learn Malay formally until I attended secondary school and college in Indonesia. (I forgot to mention at the beginning of this book that I studied in Indonesia for seven years). I learnt Malay using the books written by Madung Lubis not Za'ba, but I did use the reader *Penimbau Akal* when I was at Malay school in Malaya, meaning that the linguistic intuition I developed was for the Malay language of Malaya. Likewise, it is true that I read *Dian yang Tak Kunjung Padam* and *Layar Terkembang* before I did *Putera Gunung Tahan*, but then again I had already had the taste of Malay classics through books like *Canai Bacaan*, *Pelbagai Ceritera Melayu* and *Hikayat Abdullah* while studying at the Malay school in Malaya.

Nonetheless, when I first returned from Sumatra, I did find the articles published in Malay magazines and newspapers, as well as Malay storybooks "antiquated" and absolutely uninteresting. This was the effect or perhaps the influence of

the education I had had and the reading I had done during my formative years in Indonesia. In fact, I was not just merely influenced by it all like most of my friends who began their writing career after the war and who were clearly motivated by the books published by Balai Pustaka and Pujangga Baru, and the works of Angkatan 45, I was directly involved in the developments of Indonesian literature and had been so since I was still at school. I started writing short stories in Sumatra at the tender age of sixteen. I was then a "devotee" of Pujangga Baru, if not a more ardent devotee than some of my Indonesian friends who studied together with me, one who was just as ardent.

I had great respect and admiration for Ishak Haji Muhammad, A. Samad Ismail and Masuri S.N. because they were among the Malay writers who emerged during the Japanese Occupation bringing a breath of fresh air to Malay literature, consciously or unconsciously, in the manner of Pujangga Baru. I used the phrase "consciously or unconsciously" because perhaps to Ishak and Samad, the influence on their style and content had come from the west, just as was the case with Pujangga Baru. The influence had not come directly from Indonesia, as had been the case, I reckon, with Masuri S.N.

After the collapse of PKMM and API, less and less short stories and poems which smacked of Malayan-Indonesian politics were written although a wider range of reading materials from Indonesia was available to the young writers in Singapore. And as I had mentioned earlier, the politics of culture which was founded on language slowly began to emerge. This being the case, attention continued to be focussed on the linguistic link between Malaya and Indonesia although this time it was in a different form and on a different premise. It was this issue that appeared repeatedly in the poems and short stories of that period. Magazines which paid little attention to quality were filled with writings that clearly imitated the style of Indonesian writers. Poems and short stories were replete with words like "*sembari*", "*kendati*", "*lantaran*", "*nian*", "*samadi*", "*nirwana*", "*busa*", "*bias*", "*mungkin*", "*puspa*", "*kembang*"

(for flower), "*rembulan*" (for moon), "*mentari*"(for sun), "*lazuardi*" and hundreds more. Sometimes this tendency to imitate became so obvious because the words were used indiscriminately and in the wrong contexts, implying that the writer did not know their real meanings. Among the readers too, many were confused because they did not fully understand the words and because the words were printed in the Jawi script so that "*bubar*" for example, was read as "*bubur*", "*buruh*" as "*boroh*", "*kuno*" as "*kunu*", "*konco*" as "*kuncu*" et cetera. In short, the use of Indonesian words was absolutely chaotic.

This phenomenon provoked two different reactions towards the young writers of that period. One came from a group from among the young writers themselves, that is, those who closely followed the developments of the Indonesian language and literature. They found themselves up against fellow writers who frivolously imitate the Indonesian style of writing in their works. The other was from writers and language enthusiasts of the old school who opposed this new trend not because of the flaws in the young writers' attempts at imitating the Indonesian literary style but because they felt that copying this style was in itself shameful and would seriously undermine Malay literature. We, at Utusan Melayu in general, *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika* in particular, had to deal with both groups. It was not an easy task as it involved contending with groups with two extreme orientations – the orientation of the young writers who copied the Indonesian style to the extreme and the orientation of the old guards who were extremely narrow-minded. It was difficult to make either group see the light because one group lacked knowledge about the Indonesian language while the other lacked cultural-political awareness. The first group finally realized their mistakes when the works of Indonesian writers began to flood the market, be they novels, literary magazines or magazines for general reading, or grammar books. However, the second group, that is the old guards, stuck to their guns, and I suppose till this day there are still remnants of them around who show a similar attitude towards what they call the imitation of the western style of writing and

the inclusion of English words in the Malay vocabulary.

A Season for Novels

The rapid increase in the number of young writers whose short stories and poems filled the pages of various magazines and newspapers and the subsequent objection of the old guards to their style of writing had prompted several veteran writers who had made a mark for themselves before the war, to start writing novels again. Syed Edrus who had left Utusan Melayu after *Mastika* became a short-story magazine, immediately set up his own publishing company. Edrus was an all-rounder who could typeset manuscripts, operate printing machines, bind books, write, edit and sell books. He left Utusan Melayu not merely because *Mastika* had been transformed into a short-story magazine but also because he felt that the clash of opinions between him and the management of Utusan Melayu had left an even wider gap between them. He was a man of principles, especially where religion is concerned. He was rather "modern" in his views on Islam but was quite rigid and inflexible when it came to all other matters. Basically, he wanted to bring people around to thinking about religion, beyond politics, beyond culture or anything else. When he looked at the political developments of the Malays, all he saw was the application of Islamic principles in their politics. In actual fact, he was given the opportunity to make *Mastika* a success but the essays on religion which he wrote for the magazine was very much of the old style, too didactic and rambling. Such a style of writing did not appeal much to the readers who were beginning to be drawn towards the new style of writing. In addition, he had the tendency to object and oppose rather than to guide and lead. Apart from that, he did not really get along with the young reporters. With Yusuf Ishak too he had a long-standing dispute which went back to the *Warta Malaya* days. As was common knowledge, Yusuf was one of the founders of Utusan Melayu which was established to counteract the influence of *Warta Malaya*. The opposition to *Warta Malaya* arose out of

the narrow interpretation of nationalism by some Malays who wanted to wipe out the influence of the Arabs and Indian Muslims who had made them feel like second-class citizens, in all fields. As we know, *Warta Malaya* was owned by a wealthy Arab who was a well-known community leader in Singapore. Edrus himself was of Arab descent and at first worked together with Yusuf at *Warta Malaya*. This personal animosity between them would rear its head every time a new conflict arose, for instance, the ones occasioned by Edrus' position in Utusan Melayu at that time.

Edrus immediately started to write books, typesetting them himself, and sent the materials he had composed and typeset to be printed elsewhere. He even bought the metal plates. This, according to him, was the first step towards setting up a printing company of his own while waiting to raise enough capital for it. Through sheer grit and determination, he finally succeeded in setting up a printing company called Qalam and brought out a religious magazine of the same name which later became very popular. Under the pseudonym Ahmad Lutfi, he wrote and published countless number of books including novels which viewed society in a critical light. Unfortunately, in the 1950s, these novels were considered "pornographic". In actual fact, his intention was to highlight the moral decadence that was happening then and offer advice on how to deal with it the religious way.

Apart from Edrus, Harun Aminurrashid too wrote a lot of novels. Most of Harun's novels portrayed the culture of the people in North Borneo where he worked before the war broke out. Harun too wrote historical novels which depicted the courage and the glorious past of the Malays. It was obvious that these novels were aimed at rekindling the spirit of nationalism among them.

From the Malay Peninsula came novels by veteran writers such as Ahmad Murad, Ahmad Bakhtiar, Abdullah Sidek, Mashur Malaya and others. Most were historical in nature and recounted the glory and brave deeds of the Malays during the period of the Malacca Sultanate. Very few were about the

turbulent developments that were taking place in the society then. And almost all of them were romantic novels.

This reawakening of the veteran writers had spurred the young ones to begin writing novels as well. Among them were Hamzah, Rosmera, Wijaya Mala and others. Between 1948 and 1949, they wrote one or two novels each. In 1949, I too tried my hand at it.

On the whole, the veteran writers had returned to writing novels as a show of their old spirit and to complement the efforts of the young writers who were turning out short stories and poems at a rapid rate. Looking at their lack of popularity, it was obvious that novels had not caught on with the reading public. This could be due to the style of writing which was rather dated or because the Malays had not yet cultivated a reading habit. Perhaps it was a combination of both. Even the novels written by the new generation of writers which revolved around the social issues of the day did not get the desired response. Although the style of writing was quite refreshing, it was still too romantic. Compared to the Indonesian novels, the techniques employed were ineffectual.

My novel *Korban Kesuciannya*, however, received quite a favourable response. Perhaps it was because the name Keris Mas was already well-known and not because of the novel itself. The novel was totally romantic and idealistic. The language was flowery and heavy with sentimental metaphors. A very romantic and idealistic fan of Keris Mas from Malacca who called himself Tongkat Warrant sent me a letter in which he wrote,

> Your novel *Korban Kesuciannya* really touched me on the matter of love, language and literature. I keep on thinking of the character Busu and even picture him in my mind, whoever he may be. The language of *Korban Kesuciannya* has such an impression on me: the portrayal of Busu's relationship with his sweetheart, Busu's beautifully written letters in which he describes Aminah as a blossom at the end of a branch, beyond his reach as his hands were splayed on the ground....

Such were the comments of Tongkat Warrant from Malacca who, in 1949 (twenty years ago), had just turned his hand to writing. What would his comments be like today?

The late Aminuddin Baki who was then an undergraduate at Raffles College, Singapore, wrote a fairly lengthy comment about *Korban Kesuciannya* in *Utusan Zaman*.

His commentary, which today would be termed a critique, certainly gave me food for thought. When I started comparing *Korban Kesuciannya* with the Indonesian novels old and new, I could not stop thinking how much more superior theirs were to mine. And when I compared *Korban Kesuciannya* with the English novels that I read almost everyday, I felt that I was probably the world's most incompetent writer. I could not understand why the Indonesian and English novels I read did not leave their mark on me, did not improve my skill as a writer. Unfortunately, not many educated Malays at that time gave as much attention to Malay literature as Aminuddin Baki did.

The other novels written by my young fellow writers between 1948 and 1950 were very much similar to *Korban Kesuciannya*. Perhaps some were even better, although in terms of form, subject matter and technique, there was very little that was different. On the whole, the season for novels which reached its peak in 1948, 1949 and 1950 did not bring any significant changes although there were some variations in terms of technique, language and theme from the novels written by the veteran writers who were quite prolific during that period.

Books and Writers

In 1949, *Utusan Melayu* rose in popularity among the readers. *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika* too became two of the most widely known weeklies and magazines in Malaya. This was due to the dedication of the journalists and the other employees, and especially the impeccable honesty of the management in conducting their business. A number of the experienced journalists in Singapore were transferred to Kuala Lumpur and Penang leaving those who remained behind busier than ever. I

myself, apart from assisting the editor of *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika*, was given a page of *Utusan Melayu*, that is the "Readers' Page" (*Mimbar Pembaca*), to handle. At times I was asked to write the editorials for *Utusan Melayu* and *Utusan Zaman*. However, I was not given the full responsibility for it. Perhaps I was being trained for the job as writing editorials require a lot of experience and a good knowledge of the various aspects of reporting and current affairs. *Utusan Melayu*'s editorials reflected not only the newspaper's policies but also the general opinion of the Malays. The editorials of *Utusan Melayu* and *Utusan Zaman* frequently attracted the adverse attention of the government. It was not uncommon for Yusuf Ishak to be called up by the authorities and sometimes by General Templer himself in connection with a particular editorial which had touched on certain government policies or the stringent emergency laws of that time. And because *Utusan Melayu* was once a supporter of the left wing movement for independence initiated by PKMM, at a time when the emergency laws was implemented to control such leftist leanings and movements from being manipulated by the communists, it was inevitable that the paper should constantly be under the watchful eye of the authorities. Whenever I was asked to write the editorials, I would always be reminded to be extra cautious. It resulted in cramping my style and making the task rather onerous.

The new duties assigned to me not only made me more circumspect and attentive to government announcements and notices but also caused me to spend more time at the office. Sometimes for days I would not meet up with friends who worked around Kampong Jawa. And each time I had the chance to walk around the area, I found that more and more Indonesian books and magazines were being sold at the bookstores. The shop MIBS in particular, sold all manner of the latest publications from Indonesia. I was told by Amir Haji Omar, the owner of the bookstore that those who bought the books and magazines were all young people, especially writers, journalists and teachers. MIBS also had a regular clientele and

sole agents all over Malaya. In short, the bookstore had become the biggest importer, distributor and seller of reading materials from Indonesia.

I took the stand that these reading materials must be scrutinized and carefully read in order to ascertain the lines along which to realign public thinking, in particular that of the younger set who were the greatest consumers of the books and magazines. I agreed with the young writers then, the teachers and the Indonesian language and literature enthusiasts particularly, that we should welcome changes and adopt the concept of one culture and one language with Indonesia. However, I felt that such sentiments and aspirations must not lead us to deviate from the true path and cause unhealthy developments such as indiscriminate imitation of Indonesian works and style which I had mentioned earlier. This made my workload even heavier as already I was responsible for *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika* and burdened with the new duties recently assigned to me.

I observed that the new literary trend from Indonesia had begun to attract the interest of the local writers. Several of the works sent to *Mastika* and *Utusan Zaman* clearly showed some indication of this. Chairil Anwar had begun to surpass Amir Hamzah in popularity. Idrus had in fact overshadowed Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana. Angkatan 45 was starting to replace Pujangga Baru. And meanwhile, magazines like *Mimbar Indonesia* and others were a great influence on the youth of that time. Indonesia which had many good essayists easily attracted the attention of our young writers, teachers and journalists. And at that time, the socialists' movement was extremely chaotic in Indonesia. Indonesian magazines were filled with elements of leftist socialism, democratic socialism and liberal socialism apart from the usual religious didacticism, all of which coloured the nationalist and independence movement in Indonesia. These ideologies influenced the younger generation especially those who were still loyal supporters of the defunct PKMM and API. The young men who were religiously inclined but modern in outlook, who at one time formed the backbone of

PKMM also followed closely every new line of thinking that evolved from the activities of the Islamic parties in Indonesia, through the Indonesian reading materials that were deluging the market.

Masuri S.N. once again started the trend of writing poetry in the manner of writers like Chairil Anwar. The rhyme and alliteration in poetry inherited from the days of the Japanese Occupation had begun to disappear. However, the philosophy of universal humanism which was subscribed to by the Angkatan 45 had yet to have its influence on the Malay writers. The short stories and poems sent to *Mastika* and *Utusan Zaman* still revolved around the precept that it is society that shapes the individual and not the individual that shapes society. In short, Indonesian influence only affected form and technique, not content or ideology. Even so, there was still a disparity of form and technique between the Indonesian and Malayan writers.

Do not then be surprised if the subject matter of most of the short stories then was society. The message was very clear – the Malays were a victimized and oppressed lot, and had become an abject and downtrodden race because their social structure had been usurped by the political and economic systems of the colonizers who oftentimes employed the services of irresponsible individuals as their dupes. Do not be surprised if the focus of these short stories were the downtrodden. And do not be surprised if this long-suffering people were delivered from their misery and given protection and the handful of people at the top who were said to be of high standing and successful were always opposed and continued to be so. This, however, does not mean that none from the upper class was gracious and noble but from society's point of view, the upper class, whether or not they were aware of it, were the tools of a group who in reality were oppressors. The young writers of that time did not, even if for the fun of it, have the inclination to delve into the hearts of those individuals who, consciously or unconsciously, had become the hirelings of the colonizers. The young writers of that period were confronted with a Malay

society that was oppressed and victimized. If they were to examine closely the evil in society and the treacherous behaviour of certain individuals or groups who were partly responsible for it, their work would be considered outside the scope of the theory of literature which only circumscribed works which were refined and of high quality. Thus, the young writers of that era gave no thought to the flaws in society at all, nor did they care about it. However, their works were not without an objective; they propagated literature for society. I too shared the same view. The portrayal of the individual and his behaviour, irregardless of his position or wealth – people are the same everywhere; some are good, some are bad – certainly it is not something that is difficult to understand. But I, and I am confident that most of the young writers at that time too, chose to focus our attention on society, not on the individual purely for the sake of the individual.

Magazines other than *Mastika* and *Utusan Zaman* too received and published similar works. I did notice a lot of technical errors in these writings but since I did not have much opportunity to discuss them with my friends in Kampong Jawa and Geylang, we therefore hardly had the time to exchange views about this new trend and at best could only continue to read our own and each other's publications. Sometimes *Mastika* would republish the works of Indonesian writers in the form of an anthology such as the collection of short stories *Dari Ave Maria ke Jalan Lain ke Roma* by Idrus, for example, with a short introduction, in the hope that it would help influence the readers' taste and also guide those writers who were inclined to emulate the works of Indonesian writers.

Generally speaking, the works of Indonesian writers were well-composed and of high quality compared to those of the Malayan writers. Perhaps this was because most of our young Malay writers at that time had very little knowledge of grammar. Aside from that, I observed that language use and style of expression were not dependent solely on knowledge of grammar but also on clarity of thinking. A mind that is foggy and cluttered, whether it is due to a lack of understanding of what one

is writing or the like, would cause the language to be rather sloppy. This I found to be very common in the works of Malayan writers. Even teachers whose command of the language can be said to be satisfactory, or journalists who usually were able to write concisely and succinctly, too made grammatical errors and used vague expressions due to their lack of knowledge of the subject matter they were writing about. Ishak Haji Muhammad, A. Samad Ismail and several others who were educated in English and read numerous works by Indonesian writers but were not much influenced by either the English language or the Indonesian style of writing, were able to express themselves very clearly. This was due to the fact that they had a good knowledge and understanding of the subject they were writing about. Whenever they used language as a medium of expression, their thoughts were crystal clear and organized. This was lacking in some of the young writers, thus causing their works to appear to be mere imitations.

As I saw it, the problem with our writers at that time was that they not only imitated the style and language of other writers but also, to a certain extent, their ideas. Generally speaking, they did not restrict their copying only to the works of the Indonesian writers but also extended it to include those of our very own writers whom they admired and idolized. This was the practice of some of the writers who came from areas where the only reading materials available were local publications.

Our efforts at *Mastika*, publishing translated short stories in order to expose our writers to the works of foreign authors to broaden their literary horizon, did not have the widespread effect that we had hoped for. It certainly did not have any effect on the techniques used in the short stories that we received. And it did not help when from 1949 onwards, it can be said that none of us at Utusan Melayu or the other writers from outside of Utusan Melayu, had the opportunity to do any translation. A. Samad Ismail who had all along been the pioneer of such efforts, was busy with his new duties as a result of the transfer of a host of Utusan Melayu's journalists to the

Peninsula. As a substitute for this, we sometimes republished Indonesian short stories with a brief introduction to explain our objectives in publishing such materials.

Meanwhile, *Mastika* was slowly being transformed back to its old form, that is a magazine for general reading, in accordance with the original plan that its transformation into a short-story magazine was only to be a temporary measure. The time had not come for the Malays to have a magazine dedicated exclusively to literature.

Surprisingly, none of the English-educated Malays had emerged as a writer. Thus, at that time, the writers who dabbled in literature unanimously declared that the responsibility of developing Malay literature then was to be "borne by stupid people like us". I believe that what was happening in the Malay literary world at that time was quite appropriate. We, the non-English-educated writers, were better equipped to sow the seeds of modern Malay literature infused with nationalistic fervour and tagged with a Malay identity than the intellectuals who were western educated and whose support for Malay nationalism was doubtful. At the time the University of Malaya was established in Singapore, I was very hopeful that in a decade, at the latest, there would evolve from the university a new breed of intellectuals full of new aspirations. I had hoped that from among them there would be those who were blessed with literary talent. I, in the meantime, continued to read Indonesian books and magazines as well as English novels in order to increase my knowledge and experience besides improve my writing skill. My friends who could not read English had no other choice but to read books and magazines from Indonesia. Aside from this, I began to befriend several students from the University of Malaya such as Aminuddin Baki and one or two others. The university had just been established after the merger of Raffles College and King Edward College of Medicine.

The attitude of some of the undergraduates was quite nauseating. Some were still feudalistic, pro-colonialism, and very much in awe of the British. They looked down their noses at the Malays who were their own race. And they busied

themselves preparing for the day when they would lead those whom they looked down on, much like those who at one time studied in England, who upon their return became district officers, serving the people they considered beneath their class; not unlike the Englishmen who prepared to leave for the colonies to serve as administrative officers at the colonial office and rule a people whom to their mind were still uncivilised. However, I take my hat off to a number of the early undergraduates, for example the late Aminuddin Baki who had said to me that what we needed was not only intellectuals but also leaders who had the peoples' interest at heart. And I told him that in the literary world, more than highly educated people, we needed intellectuals who apart from having the people's interest at heart also possessed literary talent. Aminuddin Baki in the end frequently put up the night at my place on Orchard Road, bringing his books along with him and sometimes discussing Malay studies as well as Malay literature. Among the books he read were Indonesian books.

A NEW MOVEMENT TAKES SHAPE

When I think of the innumerable personal letters I had received from the scores of language and literary enthusiasts during my early years of service at Utusan Melayu, I regret that I did not keep them well. Had I kept all of those letters, perhaps they could be compiled, edited and published as a book which could throw some light on the rather nebulous history of the developments of Malay literature, or at the very least, the developments in the thinking of Malay youth in general and the literary writers and fans in particular, thirty years ago at a time when the nationalistic ferment in literature had just begun to bubble up. In truth, circumstances had made it quite difficult for me to be meticulous about keeping letters or any other written materials. When I was under police investigation after the declaration of the state of emergency, many of the letters sent by my friends from Peninsula Malaya were

confiscated by the police; some were even made an issue of by the officer who interrogated me. Then in 1951, when A. Samad Ismail was detained in Singapore, I was again placed under investigation and many more of my letters were taken away. Following this incident, I no longer kept personal letters in which the sender expressed his ideas and aspirations. Until today, I not only do not keep letters but also rarely receive them because I refuse to reply the ones that I receive. Some of the letters that I regret I did not keep were those written by young men who are now important figures in their various different fields.

Now I can only recall that among the letters, there were those which suggested that I should leave Utusan Melayu and start my own publishing company to help boost the development of the Malay language and literature through the publication of books and magazines. There were also letters that urged me to join UMNO to give added strength to the group in UMNO which was fiercely fighting for the sovereignty of the Malay language. There were letters from angry readers accusing me of encouraging the young writers to imitate the works of Indonesian writers. And there were letters demanding that I should use my influence to bring in well known Indonesian writers to join Utusan Melayu. In a nutshell, I received all kinds of letters, some with logical suggestions, some illogical. I answered them all, according to the issues they raised.

Discernible from these letters, something that attracted my attention at that time, was the unity of thought that existed among the many different groups, especially the young people who were keen on writing and the teachers, who believed that the Malays should not only use language and literature as a tool to whip up nationalistic fervour and sustain the spirit of independence, but that they should fight for the Malay language itself so that it could gain acceptance as the national language, the language of national unity and the symbol of Malaya's sovereignty. It was as though a new movement had taken shape amongst the Malays who were imbued with aspirations to fight for the sanctity of the Malay language.

For some time it was evident that some kind of a new movement had evolved among the young writers who tried to "modernize" Malay literature in terms of technique (which included language and style of expression) and content (which encompassed ideas on national politics, commentaries on society, the economy and culture). And like I had said earlier, this so-called "modernization" was very much influenced by the language and literary developments in Indonesia and was still not free of the romantic and idealistic perceptions of their writers. In relation to this, I remember how my friends who were more exposed to the influences of the more advanced western literature like A. Samad Ismail, Dahari Ali and Mohd. Salleh Daud, a number of whom were from Utusan Melayu, sometimes regarded us young writers, including me whom they considered the "literary buff" at Utusan Melayu, young men whose heads were full of day-dreams.

One particular thing that had such an effect on me, that had emerged out of the criticisms that would sometimes surface during discussions with friends whom I considered intellectuals at Utusan Melayu, was the indisputable fact that most of us young writers had little knowledge of the theoretical aspects of literature and the mechanics of writing in the various genres (short story, poetry and novel, that is). Most of these writers had developed and honed their writing skills by reading Indonesian works and the works of Malay writers whom they considered more experienced and better known than they themselves. Most of us too were unable to fully understand the branches of knowledge which concerned society, politics, economics, culture and morals. In addition, we also did not fully understand the science of the mind or psychology, be it in relation to human behaviour or human reaction to the environment and vice versa. In fact, we paid scant attention to the basics of philosophy such as the rules of logic and the like. On the whole, what are said to be the elements of ethics and aesthetics lacked cohesiveness and vitality in most of our works at that time. Nevertheless, in terms of form and content, the works of the writers of this new movement were quite distinct

from those of the pre-war writers. *Utusan Zaman* as well as *Mastika*, tried to publish articles on the technique of writing in the hope of being able to motivate writers to strive for greater maturity.

Such was the mood that enveloped the young writers who increasingly felt themselves bound and drawn to a movement that was restlessly searching for innovations and improving the ones already introduced. And in this atmosphere of wanting to mature as writers apart from wanting to increase and deepen their understanding of mankind and the environment, there arose a new awareness which, like the force that drove them to pursue innovations at that time, was born out of the political ferment that beset their lives then. As I had said earlier, the growing socio-political awareness had brought to the forefront the issue of the sovereignty of the Malay language and literature.

This new way of thinking almost immediately caused the circle of people who were genuinely interested in language and literature to widen. Those who were not writers but were language enthusiasts including politically-motivated young men, young labourers, even the young men in the security forces with a literary inclination and patriotic teachers who felt they were involved in the fight for independence, at once felt that they were part of a national movement and part of the independence struggle. In fact, society at that time had begun to show signs of pursuing the political struggle from within their own separate groups. The economists and the industrialists were preoccupied with the idea of setting up a *Bank Rakyat* (People's bank) or a *Bank Kebangsaan* (National bank) as well as cooperatives; the labour group, the educators and the religious fraternity had each started to strike out on their own. The language and literature group was one of the many that was driven by the spirit of nationalism and aspirations for independence. They were insistent that Malay, not English which was the language of the colonizers, be accorded the status of national language in independent Malaya and convinced that the status of English as the official language in many states of the Federation as well as in Singapore, Malacca and Penang, was clearly undermining the sovereignty

of the Malay language and culture.

A New Force in Singapore

During this upsurge of heightened feelings for the Malay language, Singapore became the focal point for artistic, patriotic young men. The film industry at that time looked poised for success. Like the world of writing and reporting, the film industry too attracted a great number of young and talented nationalists. The late Rohaizad was one of those in the industry who was close to the leaders and the younger members of PKMM. Romai Noor from Temerloh who grew up and studied in Bentong went to Singapore bringing with him the rich experience he had gained from his escapades in the Indonesian islands as a result of being captured by the Japanese and later fleeing from an Allied attack. He lived on an island near Papua and was given the nickname "Romai" by the islanders. "Romai" means "prince", and "Nor", "island". On another island, he was engaged by the Allied forces as their interpreter, sailed from island to island until he reached Australia and finally when the Allied operations on the islands had ceased, "Romai" returned to Malaya. We met in Temerloh where we were both actively involved in politics. Young Romai Noor whom we called Taib (his real name was Mohd. Taib bin Salleh) was very interested in the cultural activities organized by the PKMM youth wing. By sheer coincidence, his younger brother, the late Mohd. Yusuf Salleh who was good at acting and singing, was a member of the PKMM youth. For a while, Romai Noor became a part of the PKMM youth theatre group. He could sing and play the guitar. He was even better at acting than his brother Mohd. Yusuf. He became well-known in Temerloh not because of his political activities but because of his artistic talents. Not long after I joined Utusan Melayu, Romai Noor arrived in Singapore. He told us that he wanted to set up a little business. However, he ended up spending a lot of time with Ishak Haji Muhammad and with us at Utusan Melayu.

Eventually, he chose the silver screen and forgot all about his business ambitions. I suppose his heart was in the arts rather than in business.

Besides Rohaizad and Romai Noor, there was this handsome and talented young man who later became the idol of the Malays, the late P. Ramlee. Unlike Rohaizad who wanted to become a political activist or Romai Noor who wanted to be a businessman, he was completely devoted to the arts. He was someone the arts world badly needed at that time, someone who had talent for music, singing as well as acting. These three young men were the best hopes of the Malay film world at that time because all three were very nationalistic. They dedicated themselves to the arts not only for the pleasure of it but had dreams of bringing the Malay film industry on a par with the other film industries in the world. The three of them were always surrounded by young Malay – men and women – who were involved in the film industry. Some were actors and actresses, whose parents were also actors and actresses. Some were young hopefuls who wanted to try out their luck. Almost all were influenced by these three patriotic young men.

The arrival of Jamil Sulong, a member of the literary fraternity, in the film world in Singapore only strengthened the ties between the new wave writers and journalists and the new wave artists.

Meanwhile, we at Utusan Melayu had a new addition to our staff, a young man who had left his job as a clerk in Kuala Lumpur to be in Singapore. He had left not only his job but also his family, which was considered one of the well-to-do families in Selangor, purely because he wanted to further his talent as a writer. He was a high-spirited young man. Singapore to him was a city one migrates to fulfill one's ambition to serve the people and the country. His interest and talent lay in language and literature. Fortunately for him, on his first day at Utusan Melayu, the person assigned to welcome him was the very one he had asked for – Keris Mas. He asked Keris Mas himself for Keris Mas. Asraf bin Haji A.Wahab was immediately brought into the fold of *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika*.

At about the same time, several young men from the Peninsula who had tried their hand at writing short stories and poems had quietly slipped into Singapore. Abu Yazid Abidin who was better known by his pen-name Wijaya Mala, was already working at REME while waiting for an opportunity to join the newspaper industry or other publishing concerns which would bring him a step closer to the writing profession. Awam-il-Sarkam was also in Singapore in the early 1950s, working as a policeman at the RAF in Changi, and was similarly waiting for an opportunity to join any publishing company that would bring him closer to realising his dream to become a writer. Jamil Sulong too had gone to Singapore at about the same time to work at *Melayu Raya* which had just published its first issue. In the end, they all joined *Melayu Raya*, as did Hamzah and Jymy Asmara.

These young writers were members of *Sahabat Pena* (the Pen-pal Club) which was managed by Jymy Asmara. In fact, Jymy was the person responsible for giving all the necessary encouragement and assistance to enable them to gain a foothold in their own separate fields in Singapore. Although he was in straitened circumstances, he was willing to share whatever he had with his new friends who had come to the city with big dreams and undiscovered talents. While waiting to find employment, irregardless whether it took a short or a long time, they would move in with this big-hearted young man who was like their protector. But as I had said earlier, these young men had not gone to Singapore in search of wealth, in fact, and this was true in many cases, they had left a comfortable life behind. They were driven by their ambition to develop their talents, an ambition that was suffused with a desire to serve their people and country.

In relation to the migration of young, talented writers from the Peninsula and the close relationship which gradually developed among these young men who worked in all kinds of establishments in Singapore, whether they be publishing houses or newspaper offices, film companies or the various departments of the military, as government servants, members of the police

force or as blue-collar workers, Jymy Asmara is clearly unforgettable. He was not one of those high-calibre leaders, an influential journalist or a renowned literary figure. That was more or less how people summed him up when they read his works, newspaper reports or essays. It cannot be denied that he was not highly educated and knew nothing about ideologies and theories. However, throughout his life, and in his own way, he was a genuine supporter of nationalism and the fight for independence. He did everything he could to make possible the birth of a group of young writers who were able to work together to take Malay literature to new heights. Much was said about the hard life of Jymy Asmara. However, I never heard Jymy himself complain or say that he wanted to get out of the struggling world of the literary activist and live a life of luxury. The income he made as a police constable was enough for him and his family, like all other constables who felt secure in their jobs. However, Jymy chose to lead a frugal and difficult life just to be able to hone his talent as a writer and help others do the same until some actually became even more successful than he himself.

Around about that time, a new wave writer from Singapore by the name of Mohd. Arif Ahmad (MAS) whose writings frequently appeared in *Hiburan*, *Mastika* and *Utusan Zaman* had just returned from the Tanjung Malim Teachers' Training College. So had the well-known poet, Masuri S.N.

The arrival of these young writers in Singapore resulted in an increase in the number of young people filled with the desire to work together in the field of writing. Unfortunately, I did not meet them; I only heard that they were in Singapore. I barely had the time to walk around Arab Street in particular, or Kampong Jawa, or Geylang Serai. However, I kept myself abreast with the developments in their way of thinking with the help of friends who were still actively involved in activities outside the workplace, like Asraf for instance.

It was around about this time that it became very noticeable that there existed two groups of writers in the field of Malay letters, the new generation writers and the writers of the old

school. Asraf himself who although new at Utusan Melayu was very strict about language use, an inclination typical of the new generation writers. Asraf not only scrutinized the language of writers whose works appeared in the various publications of Utusan Melayu as well as other publishers, but also that of some of his colleagues at Utusan Melayu. The books that he bought and read, be they Indonesian or English, were mostly books on language rather than literature. We, at Utusan Melayu and at most of the other publishing houses in Singapore, prepared copies of works in Romanised script. In the copies he himself prepared, Asraf consistently used the *Fajar Asia* spelling system. He went to great pains to explain the accuracy of this particular spelling system in his effort to bridge the gap between Malay and Indonesian.

Like Hamzah, Jymy and MAS, Asraf instantly became one of the young writers in Singapore who spent a lot of time mingling with the writers and teachers who made Kampong Jawa and Geylang Serai their unofficial meeting place. Hamzah had a lot of contacts, many of which were established during the time he was with *Hiburan*, and these he brought with him when he joined *Melayu Raya*. Jymy had friends all over Malaya because of his Pen-pal Club. MAS together with Masuri became important links between the young writers and the teachers. Asraf provided the connection between the restless youths and Utusan Melayu. I had wind then that the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union was considering a proposal by its Literary Wing to hold some kind of a meeting for writers.

At that time, the Information and Cultural Attaché of the Indonesian Consulate made numerous overtures of friendship to Malay publishers like Utusan Melayu, Melayu Raya, Royal Press, Ahmadiyah Press, MIBS and others. This was probably because Malay newspapers and magazines were sympathetic towards the struggle of the Indonesian people. These overtures were also extended to journalists and writers. Each time a dignitary from Indonesia came to visit, our publishers, writers and journalists would be invited to meet him.

Faced with the literary and language groups of the old

school on the one hand who considered them radicals who were influenced by the Indonesian writers, and with Indonesian notables on the other whom they had the chance to exchange views with once in a while, the young writers increasingly felt that they were bonded by similar interests and a common goal. They became a new force, always looking to broaden their horizons in their desire to elevate the Malay language to its rightful status. It finally dawned upon them that putting the Malay language in its rightful place was not merely a political-cultural move or a political-linguistic struggle. It involved efforts to promote the use of the Malay language and popularize modern Malay literature consonant with the aspirations of pre-independent Malaya.

In Search of Fame?

Most of the young men who were eager to fight for the sovereignty of the Malay language and literature did not seem to be concerned about their own personal problems. They were young and unencumbered by family responsibilities. In addition, they were not highly educated and their spirit, I can safely say, was not undermined by the education system of the colonial era such that their main aim in life became the pursuit of status and personal glory. Aside from that, throughout their teens they had suffered hardship and indignity at the hands of the Japanese, and later in life were doused and soused by the violent eddies of the independence struggle. Disillusioned with the existing way of life, they became radical in their thinking and planned to fight their battles in their own way. They thus became young men who were overly idealistic and romantic. When their leadership suffered a crushing blow following the declaration of the state of emergency, there was not a single institution in society that they could turn into their battlefield. They went to Singapore because Singapore had become the land of hope for them to further their ambitions and to continue their struggle. They were talented writers, talented actors, talented musicians. And it was in Singapore that they finally

found a place conducive to their aspirations and struggle to elevate the status of the Malay language and literature which was part and parcel of the fight for independence.

Thus in the years 1948 till the 1950s, these young men stretched their talents to the limit and filled the newspapers and magazines with short stories, poems and articles in an attempt to reinforce and advance their ambitions. They eventually became some kind of a new movement with new aspirations, fighting a new cause. They had absolutely no inkling that they would be scoffed at as writers who were overly romantic and idealistic, who produced superficial and stereotype works. On the other hand, they were well aware that they were labelled as young writers who were anti-conservatism, anti-colonialism, and opposed to injustice. They also knew that a particular group of writers and language and literary enthusiasts had branded them corruptors of the Malay language and literature. They knew they were different from the writers of the old school.

Sometime in the 1950s, they were stigmatised as fame seekers. I was one of those who had to go through the bitter experience of being labelled such. Once I had taken on more work than I could handle, I was not able to write prolifically. However, I continued to lead *Mastika* and *Utusan Zaman* as to me, they were the means by which I could help expedite the process of modernizing Malay literature and developing Malay into a dynamic language, consistent with the needs of a newly independent nation. I was consequently accused of using Utusan Melayu to advance the ambitions of friends who were of the same bent. I had to contend with the diehards who founded Utusan Melayu for the sole purpose of countering the influence of the DKAs (*Darah Keturunan Arab*, or people of Arab descent) and the DKKs (*Darah Keturunan Keling* or people of Indian descent). These diehards preferred to read ghost stories rather than the short stories that kept the nationalistic fervour burning. Those who had read the early issues of *Mastika* would surely have come across the ghost stories featured in it. I had to publish them to prevent the

short stories which revolved around the independence struggle from being totally banned from the publications. The old fogies who were in power and who had every right to control Utusan Melayu which owed its establishment to them, were afraid that the Malays would become day-dreamers from reading too many short stories, but were not at all worried that the Malays should become overwhelmed by fear of ghosts and phantoms. It was these people in power who accused me of using Utusan Melayu as a stepping stone. However, I did not let it cloud my judgement of them as they had in their time, made a great contribution by giving the world Utusan Melayu. Furthermore, I knew that they, probably without their knowing it, were merely the tools of those who were more powerful, who looked askance at the young writers' movement.

Although there was some kind of an on-going silent "campaign" to ridicule and vilify the new generation writers, their influence continued to be felt despite their being said to be uneducated, writing because they had nothing better to do, and so on and so forth.

The Beginnings of the Writers' Association

As the new generation writers intensified their efforts in the field of writing and became more and more vocal about their aspiration to preserve the sanctity of the Malay language and literature, Singapore was abuzz with rumours about the impending formation of a writers' association. A teacher by the name of Mahmud Ahmad, a somewhat open-minded writer of the old school who often stopped by Utusan Melayu to exchange ideas with the staff there, and who often wrote for *Utusan Zaman*, was appointed chairman of the Information and Literary Bureau of the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union. He informed us at Utusan Melayu that one of his committee members was a new generation writer, Mohd. Arif Ahmad (MAS). According to him, MAS had put forward a proposal urging the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union to hold a gathering of Malay writers from Singapore and Johor with the

objective of gauging the response for the establishment of a writers' association for the whole of Malaya.

This bit of news was soon on every writer's lips. At Utusan Melayu itself, some reporters had started to make all kinds of speculations about it but most of us decided to wait and see the reaction of the writers themselves and the stand taken by the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union when the proposal was officially presented by its newly formed Information and Literary Bureau.

In any case, for a month or so there was no reaction from the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union. However, from the feedback we got from the writers and teachers, it could be surmised that they were divided on the issue. The teachers and writers of the old school the majority of whom were very influential agreed in principle with the idea but doubted that there was any real possibility of uniting the old and the new schools under one association. Moderates like Cikgu ("teacher") Mahmud did not anticipate any problem in achieving this at all. To Cikgu Mahmud as well as to a number of other teachers, the proposal was an excellent one and was quite likely to bridge the gap between the two groups which in fact did not have many fundamental differences except in their style of writing and language use. As regards their aspirations for the country and their commitment to defend their oppressed countrymen, the two groups were hardly at variance with one another. The journalist-writer group too were divide on the issue whether the old school and the new could be effectively united under one banner. However, on the whole, no one opposed the idea that writers should have their own association.

Within Utusan Melayu itself too opinions were divided. Actually, there were not many of us at Utusan Melayu but each of us had his own ideas on the matter. Asraf agreed totally that writers should come together under one association. He clearly supported the idea and was convinced that an association would bring writers closer together. However, several people whom I regarded as intellectuals at Utusan Melayu did not see the need for an association. To them, what was important was

that writers should continue to write and should always work hard at increasing their knowledge and understanding of literature. Samad Ismail was one of these intellectuals who held that opinion. However, he was not opposed to the idea if an association could provide the means by which writers could gain a better understanding of society, mankind and politics, as well as provide a forum for literary discussions.

The first few months after learning about MAS's proposal from Cikgu Mahmud, the ripples the proposal had created were only evident within the writers' fraternity. The effects it had on the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union were anybody's guess. Nevertheless, an idea had been born and had given rise to all kinds of speculations.

A new development which came about after the idea of the writer's association was mooted was the polarization of the literary community. Writers of the old school became even more adamant about upholding their traditional views. The need to defend their convictions was more pronounced among these writers who were not too comfortable with the political inclinations of some of the new generation writers. As was common knowledge, most of the young writers were to some degree or other radical in their outlook and supported radical changes. Politically, they were not too happy with the more moderate approach of gaining independence by cooperating with the British; they wanted the British administration to be destroyed root and branch. Socially, they worked against the upper class, the orthodox religious groups and the people who were only too willing to allow themselves to become the tools of the colonialists. It was this line of thinking, this demand for radical change, which the writers of the old school were not in favour of much as they were desirous of change, of their country's independence and of seeing the Malay language and literature become progressive and developed. They were also not in favour of the Malay language and literature being influenced by the Indonesian language. There were many more things that they did not see eye to eye with the young writers.

Among the younger group, there was talk that MAS'

suggestion which was channelled through the Information and Literary Bureau of the Teachers' Union, was not given due consideration because many of the Union leaders were of the old school. Apparently, these leaders were worried that the establishment of the proposed writers association would further strengthen the young writers' movement. However, their suspicion was quite baseless. They had no proof at all. Cikgu Mahmud himself was of the opinion that the delay was because the Union's administrative system was tied up in too much bureaucracy, too much red tape, too much correspondence and too many meetings. Although there had been no official or formal discussions about it, the proposal had been widely debated by individuals and groups alike within the circle of young and veteran writers. Consequently, it created a lot of anxiety among the younger set. Quite often one would hear clamorous voices calling for separate associations for young and old writers. It was reported that the staff at *Melayu Raya*, *Hiburan* and Harmy were very excited about the idea of establishing a young writers' association. As was common knowledge, Hamzah, Jymy and Rosmera not only had a huge following but also many supporters in Singapore as well as in Malaya. The first gusts of the winds of change bringing the message "we are a new movement" from the young writers began to be felt. But in reality, I did not see any serious rift between the two groups. Both groups wanted a writers' association. In addition, the presence of level-headed well-respected figures within each group had prevented any untoward confrontation from happening. People like Cikgu Mahmud from the Teachers' Union and Ramli Abd. Hadi from Radio Malaya were the moderating influence.

THE BIRTH OF A WRITERS' ASSOCIATION

Nearly three months had passed since we first heard from Cikgu Mahmud about the proposal submitted to the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union to hold a meeting to discuss the establishment of a writers' association. The Teachers' Union was still tight-lipped about it. Cikgu Mahmud himself, when he visited us at Utusan Melayu, was unable to clearly explain the stand taken by his Union on this matter. But the writers, whether individually or in their separate groups, were still talking about their aspiration to form such an association.

One night in June 1950, someone I had wanted to meet for a long time came to my room at Orchard Road. I recognised him even before he introduced himself. The young man was Mohd. Arif Ahmad (MAS) whose name I had heard mentioned numerous times, whose ideas were only too familiar, and whose writings I had often read. We immediately became friends. He

introduced his companion to me. He was friendly and overly respectful, which embarrassed me somewhat. He was one of the members of the Pen-pal Club managed by Jymy Asmara.

Arif too showed a deference towards me that was more than what a writer normally showed another writer. However, he joked a lot and thus prevented the meeting from becoming formal. In fact, he had come on official business, bringing greetings from fellow writers who wanted me to work hand in hand with them to form a writers' association. I told him that I would like to dispense with formalities and that there was absolutely no need for them to send any greetings. They could just call me at my office and I would not hesitate to meet them, especially if it concerned the establishment of an association which I felt was beset with problems.

When I asked Arif about the proposal submitted to the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union through its Information and Literary Bureau, he replied in a quiet voice that the older generation were usually slow to act, that we should not wait for them, instead should take the lead ourselves. I understood that by "we" he meant the young writers. Arif went on to inform me that a consensus had been reached among the new generation writers to invite both writers and literature enthusiasts to a gathering to discuss the formation of a writers' association. Jymy Asmara had many contacts and knew the addresses of the writers and fans who were members of his Pen-pal Club. Arif too explained that our "friends" had agreed to hold the gathering at his house at No. 24, Block H, Henderson Road. I would be informed later of the date and time of the gathering.

We talked until the small hours of the morning. After Arif and his companion had left, I was filled with a kind of anger at myself. I prayed that Arif had not sensed it as he had absolutely no intention of making me feel uncomfortable. He had come with the hope that I and the writers who were of the same bent, whom he referred to as "friends", would work towards setting up the association, a venture that had my unstinting support. What hurt me was that Arif had felt it necessary to

invite me to join our "friends" to form the association as if I was no longer moving in tandem with these "friends", as if I was so far removed from them, from their aspirations and struggle, until I had to be approached and invited.

What I found most worrying was the unhealthy situation that had developed at that time which clearly undermined the relationship among the Malay publishers in Singapore. Since *Melayu Raya* first went to press, some kind of a confrontation could be said to have developed between Utusan Melayu and the newly published paper. I had thought that it was only natural for that to happen as both papers were competing for the same market. Competition in business is normal. However, what irked me about this competition was that it resulted in an uneasiness which arose out of the overzealous loyalty of employees to the newspapers they worked for to the extent that they became suspicious of employees of newspaper companies they regarded their rivals. I was worried should my friends at Melayu Raya and the other publishing houses nurture similar feelings towards me, especially as I had not spent much time with them for quite sometime. Indeed in cases like this, one need to be pure at heart and matured in thinking in order not to get the different issues mixed up, issues which outwardly appear to be one and the same. I was worried this mixing up of issues had already taken place and that I was regarded as an enemy, as someone who had purposely distanced himself, whereas to me, the interest of writers who share the same cause came first above everything else. I wanted the much-discussed association to be established immediately so that the unhealthy competition among the publishing concerns did not destroy the unity of purpose and the aspirations of writers who worked for the various rival publishers.

On the night of our meeting, Arif did not at all touch on the issue of the competition among the publishers. I suppose he was not quite aware of it as he was not involved in the publishing business. He was a teacher, not a journalist. He was more eager to find out what I thought of the objectives, the aims and programmes of the association which was to be

established. I suppose I fully agreed with what Arif had outlined as the objectives, aims and programmes he and his fellow organizers had thought up. Basically, I was aware that all the proposals he had laid out that night were aimed at fusing together the ideas and consolidating the energy of the young writers in an effort to develop and modernise the Malay language and literature consistent with the developments in thinking, knowledge and politics, as well as the rapid social and economic changes.

Angkatan Sasterawan 50

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of ASAS 50 (the acronym for *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* or Generation of the Writers of the 50s), that is twenty-five years after Mohd. Arif Ahmad came to see me about establishing a writers' association in Singapore, a visit I have just finished describing, he wrote:

> It is public knowledge that ASAS 50 was born on 6 August 1950 at my house at No. 24, Block H, Henderson Road, Singapore 3, but not much is known about the events that took place prior to its birth. Researchers (be they those who researched on ASAS 50 in order to write about modern Malay literature or in preparation for their post-graduate theses) have only written about the movement's activities after its inception.
>
> On this silver jubilee of ASAS 50, before we take a look at its activities these past twenty-five years, it seems a good idea to reflect for a moment on a number of events which took place before its formation – at the very least it would be information for the younger members of our association.
>
> The desire to invite writers from this region (by this I mean Malaya, including the states of the Peninsula, Singapore, Labuan and Brunei) to unite under one association had been there since I was a student at the Sultan Idris Teachers' Training College, Tanjung Malim (1946–49). This desire was subsequently conveyed through personal letters to my pen friends all over the country; but this desire did not become a reality until 21 March 1950.

When I was appointed a member of the Information and Literary Bureau of the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union, of which Cikgu Mahmud bin Ahmad was chairman and Cikgu Sulor bin Haji Baidzawi its secretary, I put forward a proposal at its meeting on 21 March 1950 suggesting that our organization take the initiative to bring together writers, editors and Malay language experts in Singapore, Johor and the neighbouring states, for the purpose of establishing a writers' association.

As had been the tradition, decisions made by sub-committees like the Information and Literary Bureau could not be immediately implemented. It must first be presented before the administrative committee, reviewed and decided on. The Secretary-General of the Union would then be directed to pass the decision down to the Secretary of the Information and Literary Bureau. The Secretary would then call a meeting, and only then could the decision be acted on. Needless to say, the process took a long time.

On 29 April 1950, a number of editors and journalists from Utusan Melayu and Melayu Raya as well as several *penulis budiman* or honorary writers (at that time writers were referred to as *penulis budiman* because they did not receive any payment or honorarium from publishers for their work) were invited by the Indonesian consul to his office at the KPM building for an informal discussion with an Indonesian language expert, Professor Sutan Muhammad Zain who was visiting Singapore.

During the get-together with the Professor, we (that is Masuri S.N., Asraf, Hamzah, Jymy Asmara, Rosmera and I) were introduced by Hamzah as writers of *Angkatan 50* (the 50s Movement). That was the first time the phrase "Angkatan 50" was used. And the phrase had such an effect on me that I felt I could barely wait (I was only twenty-five years and four months old then) for the Teachers' Union to invite us writers for a gathering, like the one I had proposed on 21 March 1950.

"The older generation tend to be slow to act; they are fastidious and pay too much attention to conventions – why don't we take the initiative and invite these writers ourselves?" asked Rosmera.

Jymy Asmara who managed the Pen-pal Club and had the addresses of its members (most writers were members of the Pen-pal Club) was willing to send out the invitations; but the question that arose was where to invite them to? I then offered my house as the venue for the meeting, and so did Hamzah. Hamzah's house was at No. 20, Lorong 108. However, Lorong 108 in 1950 was a terrible place to be at when it rained (unlike what it is today, a first-class residential area). Thus, my fellow writers agreed to have the meeting at my place, No. 24, Block H, Henderson Road, Singapore 3.

As soon as we had got the problem of invitations and venue sorted out, there arose the question of who was to be the "star". Asraf suggested Keris Mas (Kamaludin Muhammad), a young writer who was quite well-known at that time. I was asked by our friends to get in touch with Keris Mas although I had never met the young man myself. I found out from a pen friend, Abah Hayme Abdullah bin Alang Ghani, that Keris Mas lived at Orchard Road (Singapore Hilton now stands on the former site of the house he used to rent). One night in June 1950, I went to see Keris Mas at his house accompanied by a friend, Mohamad Amin bin Rasimon. I discussed with Keris Mas the possibility of forming an association for writers.

It was only when the invitations had been sent out that I received the invitation to a meeting (which I had suggested on 21 March 1950) in July from the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union. Both meetings eventually did take place. Our gathering on 6 August 1950 witnessed the birth of the *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* while that organized by the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union on 1 September 1950, the formation of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*. By coincidence, the young writers became members of ASAS 50 and the old-school writers, members of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*, although there were also writers who became members of both associations."

That was how ASAS 50 came into being. And four prominent young writers from Singapore, Mohd. Arif Ahmad, Hamzah, Jymy Asmara and Rosmera were the force behind it.

It was due to their initiative that the association was formed. How refreshing and spontaneous the phrase "Angkatan 50" had sounded when it was first uttered by Hamzah at the meeting with the Indonesian language expert at the Indonesian Consulate in Singapore. As a matter of fact, Professor Sutan Muhammad Zain, before his meeting with the young writers which was arranged by the Consulate, had earlier paid several Malay publishers a visit. He had also called at Utusan Melayu and during our discussion had highlighted the emergence of a new movement in Indonesia called the *Angkatan 45*. He inquired whether in Malaya too such a group of young people had organized themselves into a similar movement. Apparently he had raised the same question during his meeting with writers at the Consulate. And there he had received the spontaneous reply from Hamzah. If we were to try to reconstruct the discussion, it might have sounded something like this:

Prof. Sutan M. Zain:	Gentlemen, you all look very young to me. Is it possible that you are united under a movement similar to that of the writers in Indonesia who call themselves the *Angkatan 45*?
Hamzah:	All of us are members of the "Angkatan 50".

I was not witness to this event because I was not present at the meeting with Professor Sutan Muhammad Zain at the Indonesian Consulate. I did receive an invitation from the Indonesian Consul but as I had a lot of work to do and because I had already met the much respected professor; I did not attend the meeting. However, I do not doubt in the least that all this had happened. Professor Sutan Muhammad Zain was really keen to find out if in Malaya too a group of writers had banded together in an effort to distinguish themselves from the writers before them. Incidentally, the young writers who were at the meeting were preoccupied with the issue of the differences between them and the old school writers. In addition, they

were also busy looking at the possibility of establishing a writers' association and debating whether they should form one of their own which was separate from that of the veterans'. Knowing Hamzah to be a young man who was very active and always quick to respond in any given situation, I had no doubt at all that the phrase "Angkatan 50" which he had so spontaneously uttered had come straight from his heart, from the thoughts that preoccupied his mind, which attested to his commitment to the group of writers whom he felt had brought changes to Malay literature which were more progressive and stimulating, and quite unlike those introduced by the group before it.

During the meeting at Arif's house on 6 August 1950, an agreement was reached to form a writers' association. When the time came to suggest a name for the association, *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* with the acronym ASAS 50 was already available, merely waiting to be endorsed. The name seemed to be the natural choice for an association born in a climate in which a new generation of writers chose to follow a path which deviated from the one taken by the earlier generation. Presumably, the older generation writers would not readily embrace all the changes and the new ideas on language and literature espoused by the new generation. The young writers were a new movement, a new generation who had chewed over and digested the new concepts they brought with them for several years before stepping forward to proclaim their existence under the name *Angkatan Sasterawan 50.*

The house at No. 24, Block H, Henderson Road was a government quarters, situated in a good clean area, and surrounded by big shady trees. It was rather pleasant holding our meeting on the veranda of the house although it was a bit small for twenty people. I did not see the faces of well-known writers like Cikgu Mahmud Ahmad, Buyong Adil and Harun Aminurrashid there. Nor did I see the faces of my friends from Utusan Melayu. A. Samad Ismail was not there, neither was Asraf. I was the only one from Utusan Melayu. However, those who were there, such as Hamzah, Jymy

Asmara, Rosmera, Arif Ahmad who was the host, Masuri S.N., Awam-il-Sarkam (he had not joined Utusan Melayu yet at that time) and Abdul Jalil Haji Nor, were influential figures who represented the young writers. I did not see any writer from outside Singapore except Cikgu Kumasi Haji Dainuri from Johor.

The atmosphere at the meeting was rather calm. There were no heated arguments. It was as if there was a consensus on all issues. At the end of the meeting, a pro tem committee was set up comprising ten members elected from those attending, with the express responsibility of drafting the association's constitution. Mohd. Arif Ahmad was elected chairman, Hamzah secretary, and Rosmera, Jymy Asmara, Masuri S.N., Awam-il-Sarkam and several others, committee members.

It feels rather strange when several well-known researchers claim that A. Samad Ismail, Keris Mas and Asraf were among the more important founders of ASAS 50. I do not know if A. Samad Ismail or Asraf agree with the "findings" of these researchers and scholars but I do know that the founders, the brains and planners of the association were Mohd. Arif Ahmad (MAS), Hamzah, Rosmera and Jymy Asmara, together with several others such as Masuri S.N. and Asraf (who were involved in the discussions, as were many other writers who spoke of their aspiration to establish an association for writers). If at all credit should be given to anyone it should be to Arif Ahmad, Hamzah, Jymy Asmara and Rosmera. Stranger still is the "finding" that Tongkat Warrant (Usman Awang) was one of the founding fathers of ASAS 50. To my knowledge, when ASAS 50 was formed on 6 August 1950, Tongkat Warrant was still in Malacca working as a police constable. At that time, he had just begun contributing, for a year or two, his writings to *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika*, and even that, once in a while. He had gone to Singapore in 1951 hoping to join the editorial team of *Melayu Raya* which was going into publication again after its operations had been suspended for some time; *Melayu Raya* had been accused of inciting the

Malays in what was known as the "Natrah Riots".

Arif Ahmad, in an article which he wrote on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of ASAS 50 did mention that our friends who were at the time busy discussing the establishment of a writers' association (which was later named ASAS 50) had wanted a "star" to grace the meeting to discuss this. My name was suggested. However, that night in June 1950 when he came to see me at my room on Orchard Road, the question of my being needed as a "star attraction" or a respected figure or whatever, did not crop up at all. His visit to me was no more than a social call by a fellow writer who wanted to discuss matters relating to the establishment of a writers' association. And I had gone to the meeting like everyone else, not as a "star". I can clearly remember that at that time I listened more than talked, and agreed to the proposals regarding the objectives, basic aims and action plans of the association to be formed. And when a pro tem committee was set up to draft the association's constitution, it was those who had come up with the proposals who were entrusted to implement them. They were the real pioneers of ASAS 50 as it was they who had contributed the ideas, energy and time.

The formation of ASAS 50 was complete when about a month later the first meeting to ratify the constitution drafted by the pro tem committee was held. The meeting was attended by many young writers like Asraf, Jamil Sulong and Wijaya Mala (Abu Yazid Abidin), who were not able attend the gathering on 6 August 1950. This meeting was held at Hamzah's house at Lorong 108, Changi Road, Geylang. The first executive committee for 1950–51 was elected at the meeting. Hamzah was voted in the first Head, Masuri S.N. the second Head, Arif Ahmad the first secretary, Rosmera the second secretary and Jymy Asmara, the treasurer. Asraf and I and a few others were elected as committee members. The organizational structure of the committee, to my mind, was ideal. The five who were elected to the important posts were those who had put in a lot of

effort and had worked out the contents of the constitution that clearly reflected the aspirations of the new movement.

Lembaga Bahasa Melayu

At the meeting to discuss the formation of ASAS 50 on 6 August 1950, I was rather disappointed to find that only about twenty people were present. Almost all were young writers who were reporters or members of the Pen-pal Club. Only two were teachers, that is, MAS and Masuri S.N. I had thought that the older generation writers who were moderate in their thinking, for example teachers or literary enthusiasts from Radio Malaya like Cikgu Mahmud Ahmad and Ramli Abdul Hadi, would have at least come to observe the proceedings, even if they had no intention of joining the proposed association. It was then that I became quite convinced that the divide between the younger and the older groups had deepened and would soon become apparent. Sure enough, before two months had passed, the older group held a gathering under the auspices of the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union just as MAS had proposed earlier.

The gathering was held at the Kota Raja Club where the PKMM once used to hold its important meetings. The Kota Raja Club was a popular meeting place for the Singapore Malays. It was actually a social and sports club but had gained respectability as it had been used as the venue for innumerable important events and conventions. The fact that the club had been chosen as the venue indicated that the formation of this second writers' association had the support of the local notables. As a matter of fact, the leaders of the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union were well-respected by the Malays of the island. It was not surprising then that political figures like Dr. Burhanuddin and Taha Kalu who were the former Chief Adviser and Acting First Head of the PKMM respectively, attended the gathering and thereby lending it a certain reputability.

This new writers' association was given the name *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* (Malay Language Board) or LBM. Many at

that time began to speculate that ASAS 50 which had not yet had the time to be operative had already found stiff competition in the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*. The setting up of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* came as a shock to us as not only observers but also we ourselves felt that we were up against a stronger force that was not only better known but also influential. The establishment of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* was enough to put unbearable pressure on us young writers none of whom had achieved fame like Harun Aminurrashid, Buyong Adil and Mahmud Ahmad. We became even more anxious when Dr. Burhanuddin was elected head of the association. We realised that we were nowhere compared to distinguished figures like Dr. Burhanuddin.

I was, for quite some time, filled with anxiety until I was able to discuss with Cikgu Mahmud Ahmad and scrutinize the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*'s constitution which he was drafting. The *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*'s constitution was endorsed by the authorities in April 1951 whereas ours was only ratified in June the same year. After several discussions with Cikgu Mahmud Ahmad who was a key figure in the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*, and scrutinising the objectives stated in the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* constitution, I was finally convinced that basically we had no call for anxiety. The *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* was basically not at cross purposes with ASAS 50 as both associations strove to develop and promote the use of the Malay language. In fact, the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* emphasized, among other things, the need "to adapt the Malay language so that it remained an effective communication tool". And ASAS 50 meanwhile, aimed "to introduce innovations in literature without destroying the elements that were already there", or to put it in a different way "to develop and improve the Malay language, to create, coin, refine, augment its vocabulary in order to enrich it".

I became hopeful of seeing the two writers' associations working together when Cikgu Mahmud Ahmad disclosed that there was no provision in the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*'s constitution for the development of Malay literature. He added that

while many of its members were writers, they no longer concerned themselves with new directions for Malay literature or ways of promoting it; their interest was merely to increase their output individually as writers. Cikgu Mahmud admitted that the old school writers would not be able to keep up with or adopt the changes introduced by the young writers of ASAS 50. They were set in their ways and too comfortable with their style of writing. He himself confessed to wanting to be involved in developing the new style and the new content of literature as what the young writers were actively doing, but regretted that "I can only try to understand their ideas, but will not be able to put them into practice. My writing style has become so much a part of me that it would be difficult to change." That was more or less his stand on the matter. It was clear to me that Cikgu Mahmud accepted the new ideas introduced and was not likely to oppose them, either personally or through the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*. He stressed that in the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*'s constitution literature was given prominence. *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*'s goal was solely to develop the Malay language. He then went on to say that the first step the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* would take would be to set up a small board comprising people who were capable of compiling a comprehensive Malay dictionary. In fact, he invited me to become a member of the Board.

To me, Cikgu Mahmud was, then and till the end of his days, a language, literary and cultural activist who always understood the changes that were associated with social, economic and political influences. He never once opposed our new movement although he was one of the most active and capable leaders of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*.

Apart from Cikgu Mahmud Ahmad, another key personnel from Radio Malaya who was on the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* was Ramli Abdul Hadi who shared Cikgu Mahmud's viewpoints on literature and culture. It was to these two people that I usually turned for advice and ideas whenever a conflict arose between the young writers and the old school writers of Singapore. I suppose it was due to their astuteness and moderate

approach that several young writers who were members of ASAS 50 were drawn to sign up as members of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*. Asraf, for example, was a member of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* as well as an active member of ASAS 50. Asraf, I reckon, must have been attracted to the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*'s agenda to develop and promote the Malay language. Meanwhile, others such as MAS and several young teachers too were members of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* besides being leaders and active members of ASAS 50.

I do not know what kind of a relationship or rapport my fellow young writers had with Cikgu Mahmud, Ramli Abdul Hadi and other *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* members at that time, but I always freely discussed the conclusions I formed of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* like the conclusions I came to after my discussions with Cikgu Mahmud. I suppose among my fellow young writers there were those who were more radical who considered me not radical enough, just like there were members of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* who felt that Cikgu Mahmud was very much influenced by the new generation writers. Whatever the case, at the early stages of their establishment, both associations – ASAS 50 and the LBM – were not involved in any conflict that undermined or interfered with the activities of either party.

The Malay Teachers' Union which was the parent organization of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*, was a trade union which was proactive in many ways, especially in the position it took on the people's plight and the social structure of the Singapore society, as well as in its efforts to protect the interest of its members in the teaching profession. As such, the union was able to understand the aspirations of the young writers in general, and ASAS 50 in particular, with regard to the development of new ideas and the modernization of thinking through literature. However, as the members of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* were not only teachers but also writers and language activists of the old school, such as the staff of Radio Malaya, it cannot be denied that there was bitter opposition from certain quarters in the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*. At Radio Malaya for

instance, prominent figures like Othman Kalam (deceased) and Buyong Adil (deceased) regarded the radical approach of the young writers as the root cause of the corruption of the Malay language. And since then, not only journalists and writers were active in language and literary activities in Singapore but also well-known personalities from Radio Malaya. It was quite evident, however, that political activists like Dr. Burhanuddin and Taha Kalu were not really involved in the rapid developments of the Malay language and literature. It was purely by chance that they were given important posts in the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*. However, as they were detained before the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* could be officially registered by the government; there was no time to officially appoint them to the leadership of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*. Dr. Burhanuddin and Taha Kalu were arrested for alleged involvement in the Natrah Riots.

New Trends in Thinking

Tension among the old and the young generation writers began to ease once ASAS 50 and the LBM were officially registered and their objectives clearly delineated. ASAS 50 immediately made plans to participate in the Special Night Market (*Pasar Malam Istimewa*) at the New World. This was no ordinary trading market like the ones usually held at this popular amusement park. This particular night market was a "cultural" market where stalls were rented out to Malay cultural show organizers and booksellers of Malay and Indonesian reading materials. Other cultural events included exhibitions on the development of the Malay language and literature. Exhibitions on a grand scale such as the Special Night Market had never before been held at the New World, Singapore. The night market was indeed useful publicity for ASAS 50.

Although I was a committee member of ASAS 50, I hardly played an active role in arranging the movement's participation in the event. Actually, I was busy making preparations for my own wedding. I was twenty-eight years old then and earning a

salary of $300 per month. At Utusan Melayu, there was no such thing as a fixed annual increment. Pay rises were based on dedication and hard work. I had only worked for three years, earning $100 per month when I first started, but during the three years my salary was raised a couple of times. I was thankful to God that the authorities at the Utusan Melayu had considered me worthy of these salary increases. Actually, I was not the only one who was well rewarded. There were several other journalists, besides the editor A. Samad Ismail, who rose quickly in the organization like Othman Wok, Salleh Daud and Dahari Ali. With the $300 and another $200 from my prospective wife, Rosewita Haji Ali who was a reporter with Utusan Melayu, we would have a combined income of $500 a month. We were confident that we would be able to live quite comfortably and therefore made plans to get married. The Special Night Market in which ASAS 50 participated was held on 8 October 1950, that is, on my wedding day.

My wife and I went about our work as usual. We only took one week's leave. Following the Night Market, discussions on language and literature became even livelier among our group members and the members of the LBM. The hot topics were the Romanised spelling system, the status of the Romanised script and the Jawi script in relation to the modernization of Malay, and the question of the Riau-Malay and Indonesian-Malay pronunciation.

At Utusan Melayu, Asraf was the brainpower behind these new trends of thinking. Apart from reading a lot of English and Indonesian books on language, he also began to pay increasing attention to literature. He started reading Guy de Maupassant, Gorky and others. Foremost in his mind was his concern that the modernization of Malay should take into account the morphological and syntactic rules that were being developed for the Indonesian language. He was fully convinced that in order for the Malay language to become the national language, the language of knowledge and literature, it should be modernized and developed along the lines of Bahasa Indonesia. For this, he felt that not only the grammar, morpho-

logy and syntax of Malay but also its pronunciation, spelling and vocabulary should be as close as possible to the Indonesian language. Asraf's views echoed the spirit of cultural and political cooperation between Malaya and Indonesia, which at one time was the clarion call of the PKMM, API and AWAS. Only, what he proposed then had nothing to do with politics but with culture, and specifically with the modernization of the Malay language. Asraf found many weaknesses in the Malay grammar which had not been revised since Za'ba's grammar, which by then was almost half a century old. And he noted that while there were weaknesses in the use of vowels in the Romanised Malay spelling, there were weaknesses in the use of consonants in the Indonesian spelling system. Thus, he stipulated that the spelling system used by *Fajar Asia* during the Japanese Occupation was the most suitable for Malay and Indonesian. As for pronunciation, Asraf was of the opinion that although the official pronunciation used by Radio Malaya was the Johor-Riau dialect, the standard pronunciation should be that which is typically used in Indonesia. Not everyone agreed with Asraf's ideas, neither did everyone disagree with them.

Tan Sri Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad
(Za'ba)

Ishak Haji Muhammad

Mahmud Ahmad

A. Samad Ismail

Harun Aminurrashid

Masuri S.N.

Jymy Asmara

Awam-il-Sarkam

Hamzah

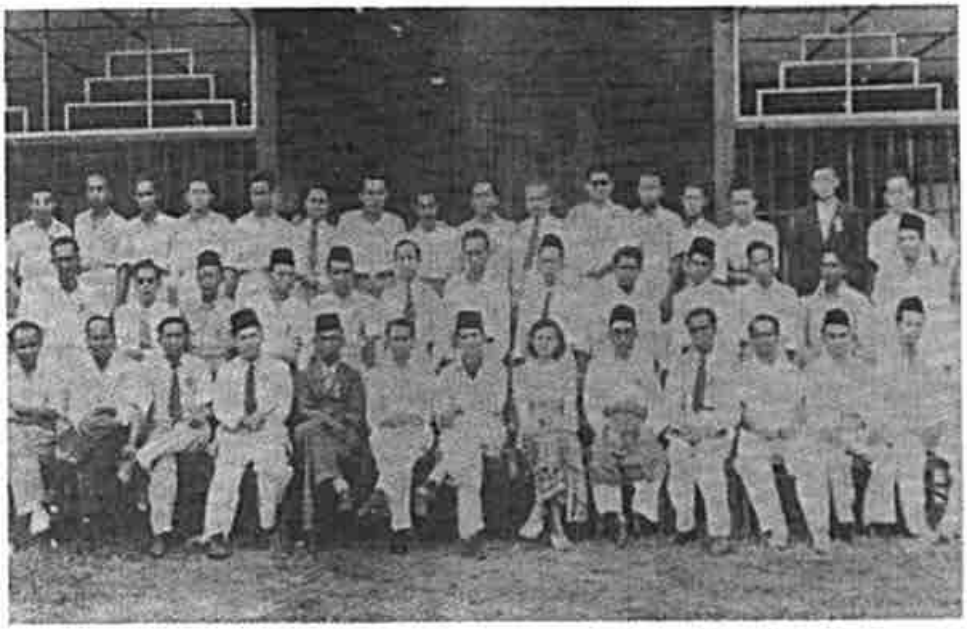
Mohd. Arif Ahmad (MAS)

Usman Awang
(Tongkat Warrant)

Abu Yazid Abidin
(Wijaya Mala)

Asraf

A. Samad Said



An emergency meeting of the delegates of the Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM) in 1948 as they came to grips with the Emergency laws, just before the party was banned. Picture taken at the Kota Raja Club, Singapore.

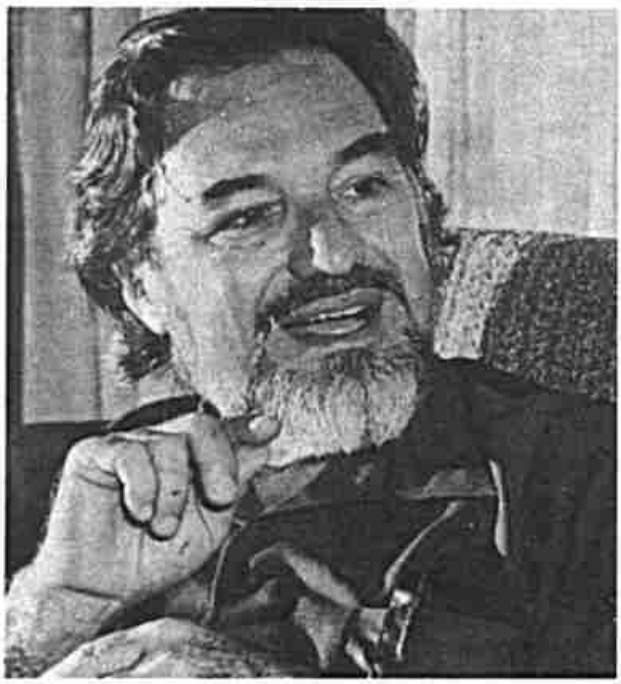
A picture taken with friends at Utusan Melayu, Singapore (1948). From left Salleh Daud, Hussain Hamid, Noordin A. Rahman, A. Samad Ismail, the author and Othman Wok.

The author who was chairman of the First Malay Language and Literature Congress which was held at the Seaview Hotel, Singapore in 1952.

Being part of the delegation to the Language Congress in Medan, 1954.

The staff of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka with their Director, Ungku Aziz, in Johor Bahru, 1957.

... the accolades they showered on me at the farewell party, referring to me as a successful administrator and leader, unnerved me as it was not my original intention to be a successful administrator and leader.



Prof. Ungku Aziz

Tan Sri Syed Nasir Ismail

Shahnon Ahmad

Baharuddin Zainal

Muhammad Haji Salleh

Latiff Mohidin

Prof. Ismail Hussein

Prof. A. Bakar Hamid

Prof. Mohd. Taib Osman

THE TURBULENT YEARS

Although political turbulence began in 1946 when the British attempted to impose colonial rule on the Malay states by forcing them to accept a system of administration known as the Malayan Union, one that was similar to that which was already in place in Singapore, Malacca and Penang, the worst political upheaval only started after the communist insurgency which led to the declaration of emergency rule in 1948 and the assassination of Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner, in a guerilla ambush near Fraser's Hill in October 1951. The new High Commissioner, General Sir Gerald Templer arrived hard on the heels of these incidents, that is, in January 1952. General Templer was given full powers to crush the communist insurgency and end racial conflicts, especially between the Malays and the Chinese. Civil administration continued under the leadership of the Deputy

High Commissioner, Sir Donald McGillivray.

Fierce physical and psychological battles were fought to quell the communist rebellion. The psychological war or the war of nerves as it was also called, was not only directed at the Chinese who were fence-sitters, who supported the communists to protect themselves and their own interests, but also at the Chinese and Malays in general, who were fighting for independence. In this struggle for independence, the Malays were as they were in 1946 when they opposed the Malayan Union – still chanting the slogan "The Malay States for the Malays". The Chinese, meanwhile, had eventually reconciled themselves to accepting their position in the country after the collapse of the Kuo Min Tang (led by Chiang Kai Shek) and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (communist) in 1949, and were beginning to worry about their future relations with the new Chinese government, as they wanted to live comfortably and be free to carry out their business as well as their work without having to sever their ties with their relatives and forefathers who were in China. They began to look at Malaya as the one place for them to enjoy this freedom for they were not communists, although some did become communists and took part in the insurgency. The number involved, however, was not significantly large.

In order to continue to live freely in the country, they should no longer owe an allegiance to China which had turned communist but instead become citizens of Malaya. Thus, the Chinese began politicking to gain citizenship of the country although they were determined to preserve their Chinese culture and way of life. In the meantime, the Malays had become increasingly wary of the consequences of the influence of this race as the latter was economically strong and largely middle-class. Although the Malays wanted the Chinese to join their struggle for independence as required by their British rulers who cited racial solidarity as a prerequisite for self-rule and the establishment of a fully independent nation, they were reluctant to extend citizenship to the Chinese whose loyalty they still doubted. Faced with this conflict, the Malays thus continued

to demand that the sovereignty of the Malay rulers, the special rights of the Malays, the Malay custom and tradition, Islam and the Malay language be protected and accepted as the fundamental bases of the new independent Malaya. Hence, the problem of forging a Malayan people which met the British requirements in order to create a strong united front against the communist loomed even larger than before.

In this state of turbulence, we at the newspapers were under extreme pressure from General Templer's administration to toe the line. We were instructed not to highlight Malay-Chinese racial issues, and in addition, were asked to publish news reports and articles aimed at fanning the flames of complete opposition to the communists. As I recall, there were times when we, on General Templer's orders, were made to publish anti-terrorist articles written by the Public Communications Office in Kuala Lumpur. Once I was asked to pay a visit to AlFadhil Kiyai Haji Fadhlullah Suhaimi (deceased), a prominent and well-known *ulama*, in order to persuade him to contribute anti-communist articles to be published every Friday. The religious leader, as it happened at that time, was the editor of *Melayu Raya*. Nevertheless, he was kind enough to agree to it, and as a result, every Thursday morning, one of his sons would deliver the draft of his article to my house before I left for the office (when I got married, I rented a house in Kampong Melayu which was not far from Kiyai Haji Fadhlullah's house). We were forced to resort to such measures although there were writers at Utusan Melayu who were capable of writing these articles. Yusuf Ishak wanted the weekly anti-communist article to be written by a well-known *ulama*. According to him, he was acting on General Templer's orders. All this happened at a time when we at Utusan Melayu were short of staff, especially as our editor, A. Samad Ismail, had been detained on allegations of involvement in subversive activities.

At the same time, we were also required to publish news of raids by security forces on communist terrorist bases in detail, in the way they were reported by the Public Communications Office. We were thus forced to increase the number of our

reporters and agents in Kuala Lumpur. Othman Wok, one of our senior reporters, had to be transferred to Kuala Lumpur to assist Abdul Aziz Ishak, Associate Editor of Utusan Melayu for Malaya. Othman Wok was frequently asked to join the security forces when they carried out their operations in the jungle. The news and photographs he sent were to be published in full. Most of us who were used to having a free hand in shaping public opinion our own way, began to feel awkward and pressured although we supported the Government's policy of stamping out communist insurgency. Although we felt that we could help the government influence public opinion by presenting news, articles and commentaries our own way, it was not possible to do so as we had to comply with General Templer's orders.

The Need to be a Pressure Group

With each passing day, the tension caused by racial politics and the political agitation for independence became more intense resulting in members of ASAS 50 and the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* in Singapore who were journalists and teachers, to spend more and more time discussing and pondering over the important role of Malay. These writers were as if untouched by the complexity of the political challenges faced by political parties like UMNO at that time. They were also apparently oblivious to the efforts undertaken by the government to stamp out the communist insurgency. It was as though they knew that at the end of it all the Malay states would become an independent nation. The people of the Malay Peninsula and Singapore would most certainly want their country to be independent. In this regard, as writers and teachers who from the beginning of the struggle for independence had focused on cultural politics and emphasized the importance of language in nation building, increasingly directed their attention on the role of Malay in the newly independent nation.

Their ideas were well received in the Federation of Malaya. As a result, writers' associations began to sprout up. These

include the Malay Writers' Association of Malacca, the Negeri Sembilan Writers Movement or ASAS Negeri (*Angkatan Sasterawan Negeri Sembilan*), the North Malaya Writers Movement or ASAS UTAMA (*Angkatan Sasterawan Utara Malaya*) in Penang, and the Pahang Malay Literary Council or DPMP (*Dewan Persuratan Melayu Pahang*).

After A. Samad Ismail's detention, besides being responsible for *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika,* I was also given a lot of other work. However, at that time, Asraf who was becoming more active and dynamic helped me a great deal in managing the sections on culture and literature in *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika*. As a member of the editorial team, Asraf was not only efficient and productive but was also in constant contact with many of the writers and language and literary activists of ASAS 50 and the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* who were not from Utusan Melayu. What intrigued me at that time was the growing conviction and commitment which was reflected in the ideas and activities of these writers and language activists, which incidentally was consonant with the political developments then.

As I had mentioned earlier, the Malay political struggle had begun to attract the participation of groups and organizations which took an interest in developing national consciousness and unity, whether they be political parties that fought for everything that was of national interest, or groups which carried out their own activities and fought their own causes within their own profession, for example the business fraternity, workers, teachers, religious groups and those whose main interest was culture, language and literature.

ASAS 50 and the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* which had emerged as the pioneers of the movement championing Malay language and literature and had attracted a following amongst the various groups in many states of the Federation of Malaya clearly had a very strong national conviction. ASAS 50 and the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* were not political bodies. However, the objective of their struggle was not to develop the Malay language and literature for their own sake, but to develop them for the express purpose of preparing them for

the role they would play in the new independent sovereign state.

Within ASAS 50, there evolved a strong sense of commitment and a collective belief that each and every one of us, at the very least the committee members and the ordinary members who frequently held discussions and attended intellectual gatherings (mini seminars as they are probably called now), had become as it were crusaders for the Malay language and literature. In all the activities we were involved as writers, journalists and teachers; we continued to build on this commitment in our own individual way. We disseminated our ideas and proposals to society at large through our own channels of communication and influence. In ASAS 50, there were former members and sympathizers of left-wing parties such as the PKMM and API, as well as supporters of UMNO and followers of Dato' Onn; there were also those who supported the causes championed by the trade unions and the Islamic movements. Within their own circles, they propagated their ideas and offered suggestions on ways to develop the Malay language and literature. Party politics did not restrict or separate us. This I feel was what made ASAS 50 influential particularly among the younger generation. And as our relationship with the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* could be said to be close, through their channels of influence we were able to augment our movement's sphere of influence and spread the message of our cause to a wider section of the populace all over the Peninsula. The *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*'s influence on teachers in Peninsula Malaya through its affiliate, the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union, which could be said to be one of the most progressive and influential teachers' associations at that time, was in no way insignificant.

ASAS 50's first annual general meeting was held in September 1951. The fact that this meeting was attended by observers comprising representatives of several local publishers and influential members of the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* as well as the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union showed that ASAS 50 was well received and had the support of the community.

Indeed we felt that their presence was an honour to our association and that it helped boost our spirit as well as made us more confident of our goals and strategies. At the meeting, I was elected First Head. The committee members for 1951–52 who were elected alongside me were to my mind among the most active and influential young writers, journalists and teachers in Singapore at that time. They included Hamzah (Second Head), Mohd. Arif Ahmad (First Secretary), Rosmera (Second Secretary), Jymy Asmara (Treasurer) and six committee members – Masuri S.N., Asraf, Awam-il-Sarkam, Jalil Haji Noor, Wijaya Mala and Jamil Sulong. Incidentally, these young men represented writers from almost all of the influential and well-established publishers in Singapore such as Utusan Melayu, Melayu Raya and Harmy, as well as young teachers.

It was at this general meeting that a proposal was made to hold a conference for writers from all over the country which, at that time, was dubbed "the national writers' conference". What we had hoped to achieve from the "conference" was to create a powerful group comprising writers from all over the country that would help promote our cause to elevate the status of the Malay language and literature. We wanted a pressure group that would exert influence on political parties to include our cause in their political agenda.

At first, we were confident that the conference could be held soon after the meeting. Our assumption was based on the volatile political climate then. The Malays, whether or not they were members of political parties, were all fired up by the racial sentiment of the Chinese who unanimously, as it were, used the citizenship issue as a bargaining chip for their active participation in the independence struggle. The Malays, as a result, became more insistent in their demands that their special rights be preserved, recognized and guaranteed. We were thus certain that a conference involving writers and language activists at that point in time would get a good response. But little by little we realized that organizing a conference of such scale required a lot of effort, a lot of money, and a lot of influence whereas we had not as yet built up our strength in those areas.

In the end, we invited the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu*, the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union, the Singapore Malay Youth Literary Society and the Malay Shorthand Institute Association to work together with us. And they graciously accepted our offer.

If I am not mistaken, the conference was held on 12 April 1952 and attended by representatives from more than twenty organizations from all over Singapore and the Peninsula, each of which was involved in promoting language and culture. On the first day, the conference successfully passed a resolution to set up a loose alliance of language and cultural organizations which would act as the nucleus for language activities aimed at upholding the sovereignty of the Malay language. This body was to be called the Malay Language and Literature Congress and any organization or society that had as its goal the development of the Malay language and literature would become an affiliate of it and be referred to as a "Friend of the Congress". It was also agreed that the session on the next day would become the first sitting of the Malay Language and Literature Congress. This first meeting as it turned out was rather heated and clamorous as the representative from the Cultural Committee of UMNO, the late Syed Jafar Albar and Qalam's representative, the late Syed Hamid al-Edrus, staged a walkout to protest against the standing order. Probably ASAS 50 and its co-sponsors were not very well versed about standing orders, but then again the Congress had just been set up and there were no fixed regulations as yet. The Congress then went on to draft some kind of a constitution called the Charter of the Malay Language and Literature Congress which became the basis and guideline for organizations that were Friends of the Congress, whenever the need arose, to contact another member, for the purpose of convening a convention or conference.

The first meeting of the Congress too passed an important resolution based on the speech that I, as chairman, delivered. The resolution was roughly as follows: That the Malay Language and Literature Congress shall, from time to time, take steps to ensure that the Malay language be elevated to

the status of the national language.

The second resolution of this First Congress was to set up a research committee to investigate and study the use of Jawi (modified Arabic script) and Romanized script in Malay writing in all fields, be it in the field of publishing, administration, or in the day-to-day life of the private individual. This decision was made following a proposal by ASAS 50 that the Congress considered the use of Romanized script as the official script. This proposal was hotly debated as clearly many were of the opinion that Jawi was so much a part of Malay society, and that it had become an integral part of the Malay culture. A compromise was reached whereby a comprehensive survey would be carried out to see the extent of the use of both Jawi and Romanized script in Malay society. The proposal by ASAS 50 was made with the realization that the Malay language had the potential of becoming the national language of the country and therefore would have to be learnt by the non-Malays who would find the Romanised script easier to handle. The proposal was also made with the realization that Romanised script was also a more suitable script in efforts to modernize the Malay language and prepare it for its role as the language of education and administration of the future. Furthermore, if Jawi was to be the official writing, all the weaknesses of the script, particularly as regards its vowels, must be first resolved. However, the arguments provided by both sides required careful scrutiny before any decision could be reached. Consequently, a special committee was set up. Its findings were to be discussed in the Second Congress.

After the Congress, I could not help but feel a sense of pride and joy. It was the first time in my life that I had headed a conference of such scale. The Congress was not only grand in the physical sense, that is, it was attended by representatives from many organizations and held at a posh place – one of the most reputable hotels in Singapore, the Seaview Hotel – but that it was of great significance to the struggle to uphold the sovereignty of the Malay language. I, as well as my friends from ASAS 50 and other organizations that together helped

organize the event, were confident that we had come to a turning point in our effort to sow, among the Malays, the seeds of the struggle to uphold the sanctity of the Malay language.

The objective of ASAS 50 in organizing the event which at the beginning was dubbed "the national writers' conference" was to create a pressure group in the national political struggle for independence. The first sign that this objective was being achieved manifested itself in the establishment of the Malay Language and Literature Congress.

Art for Society

During the first year of its establishment, that is between its inception on 6 August 1950 and its first general meeting on 13 September 1951, as an association ASAS 50 had not organized many outside activities. The activities within the organization itself were not very meaningful apart from those aimed at creating greater esprit de corps among members and improving members' understanding of the association's stand on issues of language and literature. Asraf's ideas about the unification of the Malay and Indonesian languages, the spelling system and pronunciation were among the topics of discussion favoured not only by members of ASAS 50 but also the language and literary fraternity of Singapore in general. These ideas which were published in *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika* attracted a lot of interest. However, as they required a deep understanding of the workings of language, the issue that got immediate attention and action instead was the solidarity of commitment amongst language and literary activists as regards the political status of Malay. And as has been shown earlier, these ideas had resulted in the birth of the Malay Language and Literature Congress. The problems inherent in the language itself needed further research and consideration. Firstly, if Malay was to become a national language which was well-equipped to fulfil the needs of a modern society in an independent country with a multiracial population, the question of ease of learning the language should be given serious consideration. Hence, the question of the

Romanised script was brought up for discussion at the first congress.

Admittedly, ideas about modernizing Malay and facilitating the learning of the language which was to be given national status was mooted by ASAS 50. However, it was the people who championed the cause of upholding the sovereignty of the language who must decide. I myself could see at that time the enormity of task of trying to modernize the language so that it became the language of education, administration and cross-cultural communication of an independent country. The objection to these ideas would come not only from the Chinese community but also from the English-educated, including the Malays, who would find them difficult to accept. The standard of the Malay language at that time rendered it only suitable for primary education. It had absolutely no economic and academic value.

Thus, when ASAS 50 first brought up the matter of raising the status of Malay to that of national language during the Malay Language and Literature Congress, ASAS 50 and all Friends of the Congress were confronted with a bigger issue, that is, the task of strengthening all aspects of the mechanics of the language. And this was no mean task for language enthusiasts and activists. The question of language research and research into language teaching and others began to surface. Issues such as the writing system (Roman or Jawi), the orthography (again Roman or Jawi), grammar, terminologies for all the new fields of knowledge, all required expert knowledge which at that time was sadly lacking. One possible shortcut was to accept the accomplishments of the Indonesians for whom incidentally Malay was their national language. But I realized that this time-saving approach was not without obstacles as I myself had once experienced failure in our attempt to establish Melayu Raya which at that point in time could be said to have completely come to grief. In our society then there existed a group from the old school whom Asraf called "*bodoh sombong*" ("stupidly arrogant") who refused to admit, least of all accept, that Indonesia at that time was more advanced

than us. In actual fact, this group was not "*bodoh sombong*" but too traditional and in many instances still regarded the knowledge and skill we acquired from the British as superior to those acquired by the Indonesians from the Dutch.

The conclusion I came to at that time was that we should first focus our attention on the political status of Malay and later, use political clout to develop and modernize the language. However, I do not deny that in many cases we were forced to follow the developments of language and literature in Indonesia. The experiences they had gone through proved to be invaluable when the time came for us to choose the more practical approach to take. And considering that Indonesian is also the Malay language, whatever the Indonesians had undergone to develop and modernize their language we would inevitably undergo too.

As head of ASAS 50 at that time, I always emphasized my ideas in my discussions with friends. To my mind, no one actually opposed them. However, outside ASAS 50, there was opposition to the idea of modernizing Malay through its writing system, spelling, grammar and so on as such an effort, it was felt, would defile the purity of the Malay language. Some groups went to the extent of accusing ASAS 50 of unwittingly weakening the effects of Islamic education on the Malays by opting for the Romanised script. These were some of the challenges we faced. However, we did have strong support from certain groups in the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* and also the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union.

In the field of literature, members of ASAS 50 adopted a style of writing that was refreshingly different; employed language in a novel way compared to writers of the old school; used society, politics and culture as the themes of their work so as to whip up pro-independence sentiment and the desire to be self-sufficient as a sovereign nation with its own identity; struggled to uphold justice; and opposed oppression. This new trend had long been the trademark of young writers who because of the changes and new ideas they brought with them created a situation which eventually led to the establishment of our association which we called *Angkatan Sasterawan 50.*

We considered ourselves part of a new movement or generation of writers who could no longer accept the literary concepts of the generation before us. We decried the defects in the fabric of society and the groups whom we regarded as responsible for engineering these defects. We denounced colonialism and its henchmen, that is, the upper class whose hearts had been hardened by feudalism and superstitious beliefs as well as deviant practices which they erroneously linked to Islam.

I was very happy with the developments in short story and poetry writing at that time. In 1946, 1947 and 1948, not many writers shared my enthusiasm for or tried their hand at the new writing style. And for most of them, their contribution in terms of literary works began to decline from 1949 onwards. However, A. Samad Ismail was still the most prominent guru whose style and way of thinking had been emulated by many writers since the days of the Japanese Occupation. Likewise, in poetry writing, Masuri S.N. was the pacesetter during the years after the war. I had great hopes for young, dynamic and prolific writers such as Hamzah, Rosmera, Wijaya Mala, Awam-il-Sarkam, and Tongkat Warrant.

However, the years of whipping up fervent feelings of 1946, 1947 and 1948 were coming to a close. The writers who had shown promise of being productive in the early years of ASAS 50 were then more critical of the happenings around them. Although I was busy with my work at Utusan Melayu, the developments in thinking which were manifest in the works published in *Utusan Zaman*, *Mastika* and other magazines did not escape my attention and I was convinced that these budding writers seriously thought about the meaning of the movement they were a part of. Not long before we organized the First Malay Language and Literature Congress, I remember ASAS 50 had held several important discussions on literature. One question that was hotly debated was the meaning of "Art for Society". On the whole, everyone agreed that the new generation writers had the obligation to write about the life and struggles of the Malays, especially in the context of their political endeavours to attain independence. Everyone agreed

that it was time to lay bare the root causes of the Malays being incapacitated, oppressed, miserable and degraded.

I would like to cast my mind back to my reflections on the attitude of some Malay youths in the kampongs during the time I was actively involved in politics in Temerloh several years ago. I recall what to my mind was a mental illness afflicting the Malays who were willing to fight for independence in order to free themselves from economic subjugation but were still shackled by superstitions and the influence of feudalism and teachings which they linked to religion. These influences resulted in them leaving everything to fate and caused to lack self-confidence. In all the discussions on "Art for Society" that I took part, it was really these issues which I regarded as the main themes in literary writing which could help increase social awareness. I did not think that literature could change the structure of society directly. However, literature could become the medium through which social awareness and progressive thinking are channelled to society. One of the functions of literature is to free society from the fetters that control the mind and soul. Literature for society to me is literature that is useful for putting right existing social imbalances, literature that is written with the sincere wish to liberate society from suppression and oppression, to free the people from thoughts and feelings that shackle them and make them passive, fatalistic and disinterested. The oppressed should be defended and made aware of their rights. Members of society who were tools of the oppressors should be opposed and made aware of their treacherous acts and weaknesses.

Literature that has these objectives sometimes loses sight of the fact that it is first and foremost a work of art, a work of aesthetic value; this thus gives rise to works that are technically weak and superfluous in content. However, literature that has no clear objectives or has objectives other than protecting the interest of society, too can lose sight of its main function and become weak in technique and content. The quality and value of a literary work largely depends on the writer's talent and sensitivity. The writer is an artist who uses language as his

tool of communicating with his audience.

These were more or less my views at that time on what was referred to in our discussions as "Art for Society". The same views, or more or less the same views, were shared by practically all young generation writers and my colleagues in ASAS 50, although our approaches might have differed.

Meaningful and Meaningless Conflicts

At that particular time, the concept of "Art for Society" was widely and openly discussed in the newspapers and magazines, such that much finer details of it began to surface. Hamzah, who from the very beginning was not too happy with it, argued that the concept advocated the abolition of old, traditional Malay beliefs amongst which, according to him, was the belief in the divinely unseen such as heaven and hell. Therefore, he contended, literature for society which aimed at liberating Malay minds from old out-moded beliefs might also undermine their religious beliefs, and in fact would perhaps encourage anti-God sentiments. I could understand Hamzah's misgivings but I could not accept his rationalization as to me, we were clear from the beginning that the old beliefs we were opposed to were the superstitions and other antiquated beliefs that were misguidedly linked to religion. To me, superstitious beliefs which were usually linked to all things invisible such as ghosts, devils, demons and the like were not the teachings of Islam. Islam teaches us to believe in the unseen such as the angels, the devil, and the day of judgement, heaven and hell but does not enjoin us to associate any of these unseen phenomena with God. The Malays, on the other hand, believed that these invisible beings had certain powers and thus sought their help and protection. Such heretical acts, apart from being sinful for attributing divine powers to other than God, destroyed rational thinking. This, in my opinion, should be strongly opposed.

What made the groups which were said to be religious easily offended and highly sensitive about issues they perceived were related to religion was the wave of communist and socialist

propaganda that was sweeping the country then. Suggestions of rooting out outdated and superstitious beliefs were quickly interpreted as anti-religion and anti-God propaganda which, it was claimed, were ideas that had been subtly planted by the communists who believed there was no God and wanted to destroy the belief system of the Malays. However, it was not only the communists who did not believe that God and invisible divine beings and realms existed. Many westerners were agnostics, heretics and atheists but yet were not communists. Again it was not this that made me not quite convinced by Hamzah's anti-"Art for Society" arguments. In fact, I became a greater supporter of "Art for Society" because outdated and heretical beliefs which were erroneously linked to religion and which should be wiped out were still very much in existent. To start a debate in the manner of the old generation versus the new generation like in the good old days would be quite a feat for the writers' fraternity. Through literature alone, I reckoned, the Malays could be slowly taught to hold on to beliefs that were rational and based on clear thinking.

That was how I viewed Hamzah's arguments on the matter. Asraf, on the other hand, must have felt that he and I were of the same opinion as he was a staunch supporter of the concept "Art for Society". However, when he wrote the poem, "Syurga" I was quite taken aback. I felt that this particular poem of his was likely to create confusion and misunderstanding. And my misgivings were proven right when friends, especially foes, accused Asraf of being an atheist. Unfortunately, the accusation was also directed at ASAS 50; thus the concept "Art for Society" was said to smack of communism which disclaims the existence of God. I did not know, neither did I believe that Asraf was an atheist but I could not deny that the poem was capable of creating misunderstanding and confusion especially when A. Samad Ismail was arrested on charges of complicity with subversive elements. Unfortunately, nobody really knew whether Samad was a non-believer just as nobody really knew whether Asraf was an atheist.

I did not want to be associated with any creed that was

anti-God but in the conflict which arose between the supporters of "Art for Society" and those of "Art for Art's Sake" I totally disagreed that the poem "Syurga" written by Asraf should be used as an excuse to debunk the concept of "Art for Society" as one that would make people disbelieve in God. To me, it was the supporters of the concept "Art for Art's Sake" that was in greater danger of forgetting that they were servants of God, that the beautiful artistic creations that they had created were not wrought by their own hands but were inspirations from a divine power that is the source of all beauty – God. "Art for Society" would not lead people to stray from the right path which requires man do good and to avoid evil deeds. Whereas "Art for Art's Sake" had no other objective than to satisfy the artist. Encouraging society to do good and forbidding it to do wrong was not its responsibility. If someone like Nero were to stumble upon this concept, it would be catastrophic for human civilization.

Till this very day, I still uphold the concept "Art for Society". And I believe that most people still do, especially members of ASAS 50 which is still thriving in Singapore today. My worry was that the day might come when Malay society becomes ultra sophisticated like Western society due to its affluent lifestyle and inattention to God's command to do good and avoid evil, such that the concept "Art for Art's Sake" will secure a strong foothold in the Malay psyche. And when that time comes, we will see Malay society collapse not because of economic oppression but because of arrogance and selfish over-indulgence in beauty and the goodness life has to offer. We must not forget that beauty is relative and subjective. Only by upholding the concept "Art for Society" that one can prescribe limits for subjectivity and relativity.

It is not my intention here to discuss at length the concepts "Art for Society" and "Art for Art's Sake" as the debate on the issue, at least where ASAS 50 was concerned, had come to a close way back in the 1950s. I brought up the matter to show that on the one hand the debate was meaningful but on the other, totally meaningless. It was meaningful as it introduced

the Malay people in general and the writers' fraternity in particular, to two concepts which they had never discussed before although these ideas had been debated in the West for centuries. Considering the level of thinking and the level of knowledge of the Malays at that time, getting involved in these debates was good for them. It was not possible for them to take the matter to a deeper level. The debate was meaningless in that opposing the concept "Art for Society" did not bring about the desired effects. It only resulted in personal attacks being levelled at certain individuals.

A Writer's Life in Singapore

The life of a writer in Singapore was no different from that of a non-writer. Some led a hard life, some a relatively comfortable one. Much depended on the kind of jobs they had. Writers who were members of ASAS 50 worked as teachers, journalists, clerks, police constables, manual labourers and so on. Writing was not yet a profession then. As such, there was no job or position with the designation "writer" or "literary luminary".

We have heard many stories about the destitution and hard lives led by young writers from the Malay Peninsula who had converged on Singapore between 1948 and the early 1950s. Some stories are true, some are not. Stories of writers being forced to live in cramped rooms with walls made of metal drum sheets, roofs of kerosene tin scraps, using candle for light, stacks of newspaper as pillows, and keeping company with mice and cockroaches – again some are true, some not. Some, meanwhile, are partly true, and partly untrue. On the whole, these young writers particularly those who had come to Singapore from the Malay Peninsula, faced hardship before they secured themselves a job. During the first few months that they were jobless, they would stay with a friend. And the friend might just be a policeman or a manual labourer; thus they lived in pitiful living conditions. To be jobless was indeed hard. But to my knowledge, most of the young men from the Malay Peninsula who were talented did not stay jobless for long. Most had established contacts with Jymy Asmara who was Head of

the Pen-pal Club before coming to Singapore. Jymy gave them a place to stay, albeit a very modest one, before they found a job. Staying with Jymy who was kind enough to take them in meant living on the bare minimum as Jymy did not have a well-paying job or a big house.

In an earlier paragraph, I touched on the reasons why these young writers had flocked to Singapore. As a matter of fact, they went to Singapore to develop their talent because Singapore was the place where ample opportunities and facilities were available for them to hone their talent by increasing their knowledge and experience, and making the most of the mass media and the publishing industry. Thus, the question of them looking for jobs, leading an easy or hard life is not an issue that should be highlighted, especially when writing about writers who in their later lives became successful or otherwise. In any case, what was apparent to us then was only their physical life. We cannot be sure what effects this physical life had on their emotional and spiritual lives.

Let us look at a few examples. Wijaya Mala, for instance, had contacted Jymy Asmara before he went to Singapore. And before deciding to reside there permanently, he lived in Singapore for several months to assess the situation and the opportunities available. It was only a few months later that he finally went to settle in the city. What kind of situation and opportunities could it be that he was assessing? Could it be the job market and employment opportunities? From Wijaya Mala's letters, I could surmise that what he was assessing was the possibility of him increasing his knowledge and experience, and enjoying better facilities in order to advance his talent. He wanted to be a man of substance, not just a villager, no matter how wealthy or comfortable his life was. To prove this, he left his lucrative business as a rubber dealer in the kampong. The life of a rubber dealer in the village was in no way hard that he had to go to a big city like Singapore to look for work.

I still have in my keeping a note that Wijaya wrote me which reads:

I have been filled with the desire to write ever since I learnt

to read in 1936. At first it was just a little stirring of the soul but it grew with each passing year. I developed this desire by practising writing. Before I sent my work to a newspaper or magazine, I would practise writing it in exercise books.

I can recall very clearly practising to write as long a piece as I could. I did not care about the content, format or language. I wrote pieces that were enjoyable to read and those that were really sad. It so happened that at that time, I thought that being able to write lengthy pieces was proof that one was a good writer.

I then sent my first piece of work for publication. It was a poem. It was published in the newspaper, *Majlis* in 1946. The first short story that I submitted was published by *Hiburan* in 1948. Since then I made a decision to explore the world of writing.

To become a writer, it is important to have not only knowledge and experience but also contacts and connections within the literary circle.

The place where I lived was far from the hub of literary activities. There was nothing in its physical environment that could inspire me to write creatively. It was just a place that provided me with a good livelihood.

As a rubber dealer, I handled money everyday and followed the ups and downs of the stock market. I had more than enough food and clothing, and my lodgings were more than satisfactory; I was even offered a girl to marry. However, the burning desire to become a writer became increasingly overpowering.

I was agitated, restless and filled with the desire to write, and my thoughts were in turmoil for as long as they could not be expressed. There was a possibility that this state of mind was detrimental to my health as I had to suppress my hidden talent.

So in 1949, I migrated to Singapore. Before that, I had gone to Singapore in 1948 to see what opportunities lay in store and to establish contacts with members of the Pen-pal Club headed by Jymy Asmara (the late Jaafar Muhammad) and several others.

When I was in Singapore, I used every opportunity that presented itself to me to develop stronger ties particularly with well-known literary personalities. My way of thinking

too became more matured thanks to my frequent interactions with literary greats like Masuri S.N., Rosmera, Hamzah, Asraf, Tongkat Warrant, Rayuan Sukma, Awam-il-Sarkam and many others, right up till the time of the formation of ASAS 50.

When Wijaya Mala came to live in Singapore, he found life more difficult than the life of the rubber merchant he had left behind. For a while he worked with REME until he was offered a job by *Melayu Raya*. As was common knowledge, life as a reporter at *Melayu Raya* could hardly compare with the easy life of a rubber dealer. However, Wijaya was happy. He wrote three novels, *Muda Tak Sudah* (1949), *Saka Kampung Gergasi* (1950) and *Mata Intan* (1951), plus several short stories.

Some years later I asked him whether he had any intention of doing business again as he was once a rubber dealer and the business opportunities available then were more than before. He replied, "My first priority is literature. The rest, like politics, economy, social issues and their attendant problems are materials for the writer to write about. I feel I am better off using the pen."

I first met Tongkat Warrant (Usman Awang) in Malacca when I was invited to officiate the inaugural meeting of the Malacca Writers Association (*Ikatan Penulis Melaka* or IPM) some time in 1950 or early 1951, I cannot quite remember; it was definitely not long after the formation of ASAS 50 in Singapore. As he is today, Tongkat Warrant was a handsome young man, in fact handsomer then he is now as he was still young then. He hardly left my side throughout my two or three day visit to Malacca. He spoke of his desire to leave his job as a policeman and travel to Singapore. He had this great desire to write after his writings got published in *Mastika*. He told me that he did not like being a police constable. It was not what his heart desired. I told him not to hesitate, and to just go to Singapore as there were bound to be opportunities there. However, I also cautioned him to be prepared to live a hard life. He said that he was not afraid of hardship. A policeman's job was undeniably secure and the pay was enough to help sustain the family; but he did not get any sense of fulfilment from it, he said.

Not long after that, I heard that Tongkat was already in Singapore staying with Jymy Asmara. However, he did not want to meet me because he did not want me to think that he needed my help. Tongkat was a rather sensitive man. Perhaps that was why he was not happy as a policeman. I heard that he was making preparations for a screen test with Jamil Sulong. But in the end, Tongkat became a reporter at *Melayu Raya* while Jamil Sulong became an actor. (Jamil had been in Singapore for some time, working with *Melayu Raya* until the paper was closed temporarily due to the Natrah Riots). I too have in my keeping a note written by Tongkat Warrant, which reads as follows:

> I did not go to Singapore to earn a living as there are no paddy fields in Singapore, no orchards, no plantations. It would be unusual for the son of a farmer to go to Singapore to eke out a living, unless he is trying to get over unrequited love or something like that, but to earn a living – no. After the "wet rice" incident following the treachery of Sang Rajuna Tapa, Singapore does not plant rice any more.

Actually, Tongkat Warrant's note was quite long. Perhaps it would be a good idea to read it together:

> 1948, the year emergency rule was declared, I had already served two years in the police force. My interest in literature had flowered since I attended Malay school; I grew up in Malacca where the sea and the straits worked its magic on romantic souls. The desire to write was very strong, induced by a mixture of romantic feelings and the spirit of the independence struggle which had reached fever pitch then. So I tried my hand at poetry and short story writing. In 1949, once or twice my work got published in *Utusan Zaman;* I was filled with pride and the desire to write began to burn more fiercely.
>
> My friendship with some young teachers in Malacca influenced me in my writing and afforded me access to a lot of reading materials. I am most indebted to Cikgu Alimin who offered me his whole library to read. I read hundreds of Indonesian books. This happened before 1948; I had never read so much in my life, I was reading at the rate of one or two books per day.
>
> While in Malacca too I felt the stirrings of the desire to

fight for independence. Several unforgettable incidents had awakened this nationalistic spirit in me. Once, I guarded a police lock-up where a number of political detainees were held, the most prominent of whom were Bung Karim, head of API Malacca, and Wahi Anuar. I even asked Wahi Anuar for his autograph. And once I was put in charge of controlling the traffic when PKMM held its big rally in Malacca. I saw rows of trishaws which took part in the rally flying the red and white flag. I listened to the speeches of the late Dr. Burhanuddin al-Hilmy, Ahmad Boestamam, Shamsiah Fakeh and Bung Karim. And I read the articles in *Utusan Melayu* which fanned anti-colonial feelings. All these happened in Malacca at the end of 1946, 1947 and 1948.

My unhappiness at being a policeman became more apparent and unbearable. What irked me most was the OCPD's attitude. Every month he would send for me whenever it was clear from the list of police personnel that I had not served any summons or made any arrest. How could I arrest Wak Sarji, the *sate* seller who operated his business without a licence? Not only did I know him well, I also knew that he was poor and destitute. How could I arrest the hawkers who sold drinks along the five-foot way because they too wanted to earn a living? As for the other minor offences in the penal code such as cycling without the bicycle light on, riding pillion on a bicycle – to me it sufficed to just give the offenders a warning. I could not bear the weekly "cleanliness inspection" either. Of course, a certain standard of cleanliness had to be maintained but it was just too much when they started harping on things like buttons must be polished till they shone, shoes must be shone till they gleam, uniforms must be freshly laundered, gun barrels polished to a high lustre and all the other equipment too shining and neatly arranged.

I too could not stand it when many of the young inspectors would deliberately walk past us so that the public could see us salute them and stamp our feet. Sometimes when they were walking with their sweethearts or girl-friends, they would purposely walk in front of us. And when we saluted them, they would give us a slight nod and looked very pleased with themselves. I sometimes felt terribly humiliated. I also felt that whenever I was in uniform, everyone would look at me with contempt and disgust because the uniform

symbolized the job of those who arrested and detained people. I found all this very disturbing. I knew that it was just my personal feelings and that the reality might be quite different; however, the fact remained that I was miserable.

What was important was that I felt I had no freedom, that I was constrained by too much discipline which left me perturbed. I felt that people like me should not be in the police force. In 1948–49, when *Utusan Melayu* devoted a whole column to the security forces and the police, I sent quite a number of my writings to the paper which to my joy accepted them for publication. It was during this period that the Special Branch, without my knowledge, spied on me and observed my every movement. One day, the Inspector ransacked my black box (where unmarried policemen kept their uniforms and other belongings) apparently looking for something. This happened after I wrote an article criticising the quality of the rations distributed – maggoty dried fish, dried chillies in scraps, cheap rice, et cetera. So I resolved to leave the police force.

Through my correspondence with Jymy Asmara and my conversations with Jamil Sulong, I became attracted to the idea of going to Singapore. If I could find a job at a newspaper or magazine there, I would be able to establish closer contacts with writers and journalists. In Malacca, I was close to several journalists like Yusuf Harun and Syed Omar al-Habshy. I knew that in Singapore there were many writers, literary personalities and journalists whose works I was already familiar with.

My aunt who raised me, my father and family were not happy when I left the police force. They said that I should not have left, that as a policeman I had a fixed income, security and many more. In Singapore, what job could I possibly get, how was I to sustain myself? All the same, I went to Singapore to try my luck, not to look for a job but to fulfill my desire to become a writer and to work for a publishing house, no matter which. It appeared that *Melayu Raya* which was closed down after the Natrah Riots was to go into publication again. Meanwhile, Jamil Sulong was planning to return to Singapore and to move there. Jamil was from a well-to-do family. He was a good friend of mine.

Every month he would go to Malacca to collect rent from the tenants of his house and land. When I told him of my desire to go to Singapore, he immediately asked me to move there with him. Jobless, we stayed at Jymy Asmara's house. Jymy's house was in a sad state – it was dilapidated, full of sand, and had a leaky roof. When we slept, mice would crawl over our bodies and in between our legs. We ate *nasi bungkus* ("packed rice") and drank cold water. When we didn't have enough money, we shared one *nasi bungkus* or bought bread that was still warm and drank water from the tap. And slept.

Jamil who had a large circle of associates in Singapore and knew Rohaizad and Omar Rojek was advised to work at the Shaw Brothers Production at Jalan Ampas. Jamil invited me to go along with him for a screen test. We were given an appointment. But on the day of the screen test, I did not keep my appointment as I was told by Jymy Asmara that there was a vacancy at *Melayu Raya* for the post of proof-reader. I was interviewed by Harun Aminurrashid and was accepted for the job. Before I got my pay, life was really hard. I could not help thinking of the easier times I had as a policeman when my income was more than sufficient; I could afford to send money to my family in the kampong every month, had enough clothes and could go to the movies, drink beer with friends and flirt with opera girls. But somehow, having found a job at the newspaper I felt carefree and happy especially as I had started to make friends with writers and journalists whose writings I had read such as Masuri S.N., Hamzah, MAS, Asraf, Rosmera, and Merayu Rawan (Abdul Jalil Haji Nur). And I met Keris Mas again whom I had become acquainted with during the time he officiated the opening ceremony of IPM's inaugural conference."

Thus Tongkat Warrant, a man of the arts, a romantic and humane man, migrated to Singapore. The reason he did so was similar to Wijaya Mala's which we already know. Likewise Jamil Sulong's reason and this we learnt from Tongkat Warrant in the preceding paragraphs. Perhaps, it was the hardship Tongkat experienced while living with Jymy and Jamil Sulong when he first arrived in Singapore that has become the basis of the story

recounted over and over about the hard life led by the young writers who migrated to Singapore and eventually grouped together to form a movement known as *Angkatan Sasterawan 50.*

As for the other writers, Asraf for example, I have already mentioned how he joined Utusan Melayu and touched on his family background as well as the job he had before he went to Singapore. Awam-il-Sarkam too had already started writing before he went to Singapore where he joined the R.A.F prior to working at *Melayu Raya*. Awam too had gone to Singapore to develop his writing skills. Finally, Tongkat Warrant and Awam-il-Sarkam left *Melayu Raya* to join Utusan Melayu, to help ease the staff shortage there. Apart from Tongkat and Awam, there were several other young writers who were also brought into the fold of Utusan Melayu at that time and later became well-known journalists; examples of such writers are Mazlan Nordin, and Said Zahari.

I had known from the very beginning that the writers who had migrated to Singapore from 1949 onwards, had done so to develop their talents and serve the nation and country through the media they felt they knew best, that is literature and writing. The rumours which circulated claiming that they had fled to Singapore to escape arrest under the emergency laws as a result of their involvement in leftist politics were unfounded as at that time, that is in 1949 and the years that followed, political arrests were no longer the threat they were in 1948 when a state of emergency had just been declared. Furthermore, none among these young writers were political figures who could be considered a threat to national security. In addition, the stories which claimed that they had gone to Singapore because of their straitened circumstances are illogical because practically all of them had comfortable jobs or, like Jamil Sulong, came from well-to-do families. And they had left their kampong fully aware that life in Singapore would not be as easy as the life they had left behind. They had been warned of this by their friends in Singapore, especially Jymy Asmara. Lastly, there were also stories which claimed that they had written about the misery and sufferings of the people not out

of any noble intention to protect the interest of the oppressed but because they themselves were despondent and thus motivated to highlight such sufferings. I consider these rumours an insult to those who regarded it their duty to uphold justice and protect the downtrodden. And because they were writers, they strove to achieve this through their writing. They had started their writing career and struggle against social imbalances long before they stepped foot on Singapore soil. And like I had said earlier, there was no telling whether they were disheartened or contented, happy or disappointed although to all appearances they led a life of hardship and suffering. Happiness for a writer is being able to write and have his work published, as well as to be able to openly express his opinions and aspirations. As God is my witness, I would not be happy if I were to have all the physical comfort but yet am unable to freely express my thoughts and desires in writing. The happiness of a writer, like the happiness of a true political activist or a philosopher, cannot be gauged from outward appearances. It would be erroneous to conclude that someone's apparent destitute state or his wealth is the reason for which he writes. In fact, a life of comfort or privation is an invaluable and enriching experience for a writer.

Leaving Utusan Melayu

With the First Malay Language and Literature Congress successfully accomplished and writers' associations sprouting up in almost every state in the Malay Peninsula, the struggle to uphold the sovereignty of the Malay language became more intense. Newspapers and magazines carried reports of the frenzied activities of language and literary groups. The polemic "Art for Art's Sake" and "Art for Society" which continued to take centre stage caused many to enter the fray and further fuelled the desire to see the Malay language installed in its rightful place. Short stories and poems began to take a more critical look at society, were saturated with nationalistic fervour and became increasingly more bombastic such that they

provided new ammunition for the "Art for Art's Sake" group to argue that "Art for Society" was propaganda masquerading as art, not art in its true form. However, up till that time, I had not come across short stories or poems which filled the newspapers and magazines that did not touch on the issue of a just society or that did not fan Malay nationalism and the desire for independence. In short, literary works of that period were still not free from the society that spawned it, that is the Malay people who were then furiously fighting to disentangle their country from the shackles of colonialism and free their people from oppression and humiliation. Rightly or wrongly, Malay literature at that time was literature for society. The polemic "Art for Art's Sake" remained purely theoretical.

Throughout that period, that is between November 1951 and the end of 1953 (before the First Congress was held and till long after that), ASAS 50 took turns with the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* to give fortnightly lectures on the radio. Most of the lectures by ASAS 50 centred on literature and language for society.

Another plan of action to be pursued by ASAS 50 based on the decision made at its first general meeting during which I was elected First Head in September 1951, was to fight for the demands made by writers from all over the Peninsula to be paid by publishers for their work. This was one of the many important resolutions passed at the general meeting which also included convening a "conference of writers from all over the country", organizing discussions on literature which ironically led to the polemic "Art for Art's Sake" versus "Art for Society", and giving lectures on language and literature over the radio (which was already under way).

As regards the demand made unanimously by writers from all over the country to be paid for their work, ASAS 50 had acted promptly on it. About ten days after the annual general meeting, letters were sent out to all publishers in Singapore and Malaya, seeking their good offices to consider the writers' demand. This letter marked the beginning of the practice of paying honorarium to writers for their published poems and short stories. However, it did not happen overnight. In the

beginning, the appeal made by ASAS 50 did not seem to have any effect. But as each publisher, particularly the ones that were influential in Singapore, had many writers in their employment who were members of ASAS 50, it was possible to apply pressure from within to make them agree to it. Awam-il-Sarkam, Tongkat Warrant and Asraf were among the leading proponents at Utusan Melayu who fought for the payment of honorarium, and because of this Utusan Melayu was among the first to do so to writers whose poems or short stories were published in either *Utusan Zaman* or *Mastika*.

During the time pressure was brought to bear on Utusan Melayu to agree to the writers' demand, I was up to my ears in work at the Editorial Department. In fact, I did not feel qualified to shoulder the heavy and complex responsibilities given to me, but as our experienced editors were not around anymore, for example, A. Samad Ismail was in detention, Salleh Daud had left Utusan Melayu, Dahari had been transferred to Kuala Lumpur to take the place of Othman Wok who had been called back to Singapore, Hashim Hassan, Othman Wok and I had no choice but to accept the responsibility of assisting Yusuf Ishak, the Editor-in-Chief as well as Director and Manager of Utusan Melayu in his decision making. All of a sudden I found myself disagreeing with some of Yusuf's opinions. I was not aware that my attitude had caused him to be rather annoyed with me. I did not give much thought to how difficult it must have been for him to accommodate the policies of the General Templer administration such that I frequently criticized him for presenting news reports and articles in *Utusan Melayu* in a way that enhanced the image of General Templer at the expense of our own leaders such as Dato' Onn. What I had meant to impress upon him was that we should always project a good image of our own leaders. However, because of the difficult situation he was in, Yusuf somehow formed the opinion that I wanted Utusan Melayu to go against General Templer. This had caused him to lose his temper once and to remark that if I was so interested in politicking, I should publish my own newspaper and not make use of Utusan Melayu. I was stunned

and perhaps because I was young, I lashed out at him rather harshly. On the matter of the payment of honorarium to writers, we too had our differences. I was said to have put the interest of writers before Utusan Melayu's, and to have little regard for the difficulties faced by my employer.

In early 1952, my health began to decline. I had chronic abdominal pains that could not be cured despite my taking all kinds of medications. This health problem added to the mental stress I was undergoing due to continued confrontation with Yusuf Ishak, my unflagging support for the cause of developing the Malay language and literature, and the continual increase of work load at the office. Approximately six months later, I was admitted to hospital for surgery. But the pain did not get better despite the pills, the elixirs and injections. A few months after that I was admitted again for a second operation.

After these operations, I really felt the need to rest but there was a mountain of work waiting for me at Utusan Melayu. At the time ASAS 50's second general meeting was held, that is in November 1952, I realised that I would not be able to contribute effectively to the movement's activities. Thus, I stepped down and became an ordinary member. My post as First Head went to Asraf. Meanwhile, the disagreements and clashes with Yusuf Ishak came to a head and finally at a very tense meeting, I walked out leaving Yusuf and the others in the meeting room. I straightaway typed a short letter stating my intention to resign, giving a 24-hour notice. I immediately packed my things and left the letter with the manager's clerk. Ungku Hassan, the manager, was still at the meeting.

I reached home at eleven o'clock. At twelve noon, the late Salleh Haji Ali, the manager of *Melayu Raya* and the late Hamid Abdul, one of *Melayu Raya*'s editors called at my house and offered me a job at the newspaper. I was quite surprised when they came calling. It appeared that news travelled real fast. After some discussion, I accepted the offer on condition that it was on a temporary basis and that I would go to the office in the afternoons only. As fate would have it, it was Hamid Abdul together with A. Samad Ismail who had brought me into the

fold of Utusan Melayu, and then it was Hamid again who had brought me into the fold *Melayu Raya*. Hamid Abdul was at one time very close to Yusuf Ishak; something must have happened between them to make Hamid leave Utusan Melayu and join *Melayu Raya*. Then, at about 2.30 in the afternoon, Ungku Hassan and another acquaintance from Utusan Melayu, if I recall correctly, Hashim Hassan, came to my house. They told me that they were shocked and puzzled at my hasty decision. They also told me that Yusuf Ishak himself was shocked and that he had asked them to inform me that he was not willing to accept my resignation. I too felt that it was not good to act in such a hasty manner but as it had become unbearable to work for a superior who no longer saw eye to eye with me, I did not retract my letter. I did not have a contract with Utusan Melayu. If Utusan Melayu wanted me to pay them a month's or a week's salary (Utusan Melayu paid us weekly instead of monthly wages,) I was prepared to do so and asked Ungku Hassan to officially notify me of it. However, until today I have not received any such letter of demand. Actually, I was very sad having to leave Utusan Melayu where I gained a great deal of experience, knowledge and respect, and where I had made many friends. Till this very day, my relationship with old friends and former colleagues at Utusan Melayu is still good although most of them are not with Utusan Melayu anymore. In fact, Yusuf Ishak and I continued to be friends right till the time he became President of the Republic of Singapore and until his death (may God have mercy on his soul).

To Penang and Back to Singapore Again

I worked for *Melayu Raya* for about three months and then moved to Penang to join *Warta Negara*. I went to Penang by night train with my wife and child on 26 September 1953. That same afternoon before leaving Singapore, we held a small thanksgiving ceremony or *doa selamat* for my eldest child who had just turned two.

In the three months that I was with *Melayu Raya*, I discovered that the newspaper did not really require my services. In fact I was of the opinion that the paper needed to downsize its operations. It is not necessary to have many employees; what one need to do is to make the best use of their dedication and skill. I felt that my presence was redundant; I was an addition to the staff that was totally unnecessary. I only helped to write editorials and outline the presentation of important and unimportant news, something that could be done just as well or better by other journalists such as Melan Abdullah who was working at *Melayu Raya* then, who were equally if not more competent and experienced than me. I could not see any way of helping *Melayu Raya* expand its operations as it was in a somewhat difficult financial straits. I was positive the rest of the staff were all desirous of finding ways and means of expanding its activities to include the publication of magazines for general reading in addition to the movie magazine which appeared to be doing well, for example, but I knew, however, that such ideas would not be approved by the administration due to lack of funds. So I started thinking of ways of getting out of the establishment.

One day (I've forgotten the exact date), two of my friends, Zaki Mohd. Isa from Penang, an editor with *Warta Negara*, and Azahari Taib from Alor Setar, another key person with *Warta Negara*, came to my house. They had just attended an UMNO convention in Batu Pahat and had come to Singapore for a visit. The purpose of their visit was to see whether I would be interested to join *Warta Negara* as a journalist.

For some reason or other, at that time I felt that I was both a journalist and a short-story writer. At Utusan Melayu where my talent in the two fields had developed, I had many opportunities to hone it further to the extent that I could not say for certain whether I was a journalist or a literary writer. If the need arose, I felt that I would be able to manage a newspaper or magazine just as I would be able to write and improve my literary efforts a little at a time. From books, my own personal experience and interactions, I had learnt much about the

theories and practices of both fields. However, when Zaki and Azahari from *Warta Negara* tried to elicit my response as to whether I would like to work at *Warta Negara*, I somehow needed time to think about it. I informed them that I needed that little time before I could give them a definite answer. Several thoughts came to my mind then, among them, the question of my wife and child; secondly, whether I had a better future working at *Warta Negara*. These questions flashed through my mind because I knew that *Warta Negara* was only a local newspaper which concentrated on news and issues from the north. The paper was not as yet a national newspaper from the point of view of its news coverage and the issues it highlighted. Would I be able to enjoy the facilities I would need to further my career in journalism and literary writing working for such a newspaper? Sometimes I regretted leaving Utusan Melayu as compared to the other publishers; it obviously provided the most number of opportunities for those who want to develop as a journalist and writer.

Apart from that I also wondered if Penang could provide the same kind of professional stimulation that Singapore could. Singapore was the hub of literary and cultural activities; of political activities too, although these activities originated in Kuala Lumpur. However, the reverberations were felt mostly in Singapore because Singapore had newspapers with greater influence on the readership and wider circulation than other newspapers including *Majlis* in Kuala Lumpur and *Warta Negara* in Penang. These were the issues which I turned over and over in my mind at that time. Eventually it became clear to me that I no longer wanted to continue to be a burden to *Melayu Raya* which unfortunately was unaware that I was, and that I had no desire to go back to *Utusan Melayu*. Thus, on 26 September 1953, I moved to Penang.

Deep in my heart, I had hoped for three things when I left for Penang. Firstly, that in Penang where life was less hectic, I would be able to rest a little and regain my health. Secondly, the peace and calm in Penang would be conducive for me to look deep into myself in order to discover my weaknesses and correct

them. And thirdly, I had hoped to be able to influence *Warta Negara* to expand its business and become a national newspaper.

In Penang, I did not live on the island but in Butterworth where I rented an average-sized house with below average furniture as we did not bring ours from Singapore and I did not wish to spend more than necessary on such items. In fact, I did not even have a writing table. Whenever I needed to write at home, I used my wife's sewing machine as a desk. The sewing machine was brought over from Singapore as my wife usually sewed her own clothes as well as our child's. It was my choice to live in Butterworth. I was, in fact, offered to live in a house near the Malay mosque on Acheen Street which belonged to one of *Warta Negara*'s directors, Tuan Syed Omar Almashhur who came from a well-to-do family, but I preferred that we should live on our own. They had promised me a house which will be paid by the newspaper but since I had turned down the house offered me, *Warta Negara* generously gave me a small housing allowance. Butterworth twenty-five years ago was still a quiet little village. It was not the Butterworth it is today which is part of Penang, bustling with activities day and night.

First of all, the peace and tranquility in Butterworth was a pleasant change from the hectic pace of life in Singapore. The air was clean and fresh. Every Sunday morning, our family of three would comb the beach for a type of clam called *remis*. In the evening, we would soak up the sea breeze and enjoy the beauty of Padang Kota at sunset, and watched the pale lights glimmering on the other side. Once or twice a month we would go to Georgetown and to the beaches in Penang as though we were holidaymakers. Working at *Warta Negara* was not as hectic as working at Utusan Melayu or Melayu Raya. There were very few cultural and literary activities, unlike in Singapore. And I made it a point not to get involved in too many activities. Praise be to God, after almost a year working at *Warta Negara*, I felt healthy and rejuvenated. However, I started to feel that the peace and tranquillity were rather disquieting. So, I began to read more and engaged in more discussions with friends. I did not have friends in Butterworth except for a

number of Malay teachers like Zakaria Salleh (writer of *Ahad*). However, there was one Malay intellectual and activist who provided me with ample opportunities to discuss politics and culture and loaned me a lot of books. I did not need to buy books (by this I mean English books) as his house was full of books that I could borrow and read. His name is Mohamed Sophiee bin Sheikh Ibrahim. At that time, Sophiee was working as a Social Welfare officer in Seberang Prai but lived in Butterworth. In Penang, I had many friends, such as Mohd. Nor Ahmad, who were interested in culture, literature and politics. I began to spend a lot of time with them although I purposely limited the time I spent on such social activities. However, during the nationwide national language campaign led by several political parties and language and literary bodies urging the Federation of Malaya Legislative Assembly (*Dewan Undangan Persekutuan Tanah Melayu*) to pass a law on the national language, I joined Sophiee and Azahari Taib on the campaign trail. We took part in public rallies in Seberang Perai and southern Kedah, and even in Upper Perak and Kuala Kangsar. I too attended the launching of LEPAS in Kuala Kangsar.

(The proposal to declare Malay as the national language was finally tabled in the Federal Legislative Assembly in May 1955 if I am not mistaken, by a representative of Partai Negara which was led by Dato' Onn. The representative who put forward the motion was the Hon. Abdul Rashid Ahmad. The proposal was accepted and approved by the Assembly).

My attempts at self-analysis provided me with some useful insights into my strengths and weaknesses. I once again was able to reflect on how much experience and knowledge I still lacked, and on how much experience and knowledge I had acquired in the past ten years but did not fully utilize. Whatever religious instructions I had received had not been put into practice satisfactorily, mainly because I unwittingly allowed arrogance to creep into my soul. The last few years before I moved to Penang, I had begun to be inflicted with feelings of conceit and arrogance. My accomplishments in the fields of journalism and literature got to my head and made me haughty

and egoistic. This haughtiness and egotism might not have been obvious to the outside world but they inevitably influenced my actions and decisions – I felt that I was always right and that the public did not know better. It was true that I had not done anything that was damaging or harmful to others, but I always felt that I was right, I was successful, I was famous. These were some of the feelings that I had allowed to develop in me, that I regretted having entertained, when I was able to delve into my soul during my self-imposed solitude in Penang.

I knew that I had made significant strides in the field of literature. My short stories had advanced from romance to realism, and my style of presentation had progressed from the bombastic to a more subtle approach. It made me think that I had finally arrived and caused me to become conceited and arrogant. While in Penang, I realized that I was only one step closer to success. I was still a long way from achieving creative excellence. My techniques were still crude. In Penang, it dawned on me that those who were less fortunate needed the help of others, their advice and criticism in order to find the path which would lead them to success. However, for those who were fortunate, successful and famous, especially those who had attained success and fame through their own determined effort to uphold the truth and develop themselves, then the best advice and criticisms came from within themselves. The advice and criticisms offered by others were usually pretence.

Thus, in Penang I spent more time reading and analyzing myself than writing. I did not take an interest in the literary segment of *Warta Minggu*, a weekly published by *Warta Negara* which featured short stories and poems. *Warta Minggu* was managed by a colleague of mine, Ahmadi Asmara and for a period of time, by Ibrahim Leguri. I discovered that *Warta Negara* was well managed and financially sound. The paper's editors who were also shareholders of the company, Wahab Zain and Zaki Isa, and its manager Tuan Jailani, agreed with my proposal that we should upgrade the newspaper to a national newspaper. I wrote a working paper outlining the financial implications, manpower requirements, and administrative

changes. However, this proposal which was presented by the above three shareholders was rejected by the other shareholders. They preferred *Warta Negara* to remain as it was, so that their capital investment was secure and they could always expect a good return at the end of every year. Any move to expand the business would involve taking risks for which no return is guaranteed.

After two years in Penang, I seemed to have fully recovered; in fact I felt better than before I was hospitalized. More than anything else, I was at peace with myself. Then I started to feel that I should look for a suitable base to develop whatever talents I had and put into practice what I had learnt from my self-examinations, to correct my weaknesses and improve on what I had achieved so far. It was the same feeling that I had when I was in Temerloh. By then, I had given up trying to convince the powers that be in *Warta Negara* to turn the newspaper into a national daily. I was quite certain that Penang and *Warta Negara* would never become a suitable place for developing my writing skills or an effective base for developing Malay language and literature.

Through letters, I continued to keep in contact with my friends in Singapore. I once wrote to Tongkat Warrant stressing how important it was that friends do not allow the ongoing debate on literary theories to degenerate into personal conflicts. I explained to him that all the young writers, particularly those who were members of ASAS 50, were proponents of "Art for Society". I also emphasized that some good had come out of the debate "Art for Society" versus "Art for Art's Sake" – it had broadened the horizon of literary thinking. To me, the supporters of both theories could hold on to their views for as long as literature continued to function in line with the goals of ASAS 50. I personally proposed to Tongkat that he should begin to write novels.

At the end of October 1954, I attended the Indonesian Language Congress in Medan as a representative of the Malay Language and Literature Congress of Malaya. I received a lot of news, some good and some disturbing, about the develop-

ments and activities of fellow writers in Singapore from friends who were part of the Singapore delegation. Some of them asked me when I would be returning to Singapore. Among those who inquired were Mahmud Ahmad and Harun Aminurrashid. Perhaps they were just being polite or perhaps they were indirectly telling me that I had sunk into oblivion in Penang had become deadwood. I took it well although their question kept echoing in my mind: when was I going back to Singapore? A. Samad Ismail who was among the Malayan delegates told me that I was "stupid to have left Utusan Melayu; stupider still for having gone to Penang". I accepted his comments. Samad was not one to mince his words. He was always forthright and I was only too familiar with his ways. I really did feel that it was idiotic for someone like me to have left Singapore and gone to Penang. However, I told him that he could say what he did because he had no knowledge what it was like at Utusan Melayu at the time I left (he was in detention then). Although it could not be denied that Utusan Melayu was the ideal place for me to develop my talent and work for the advancement of the Malay language and literature, the tension was such that if it had been Samad instead of me, he too would have left, or perhaps he would have fought back and outmanoeuvred Yusuf Ishak. For me, the second alternative did not exist. I left Utusan Melayu not because it was not a good place to work but because of the differences I had with Yusuf Ishak.

Not long after returning from Medan, I went on leave to be with my wife and child who were already in Singapore, living with relatives. My wife was waiting for the arrival of our second child. It was during this visit that Yusuf Ishak invited me for lunch with some old friends from Utusan Melayu at a well-known restaurant on High Street.

Yusuf Ishak had taken the first move to heal the rift between us which had happened two years before that. Not long after, friends began to urge me to return to Singapore and work with Utusan Melayu again. The cause of the rift was actually non-existent. Yusuf Ishak had not meant to promote General Templer's image at the expense of our Malay leaders. And I had no

intention of using Utusan Melayu as a tool to advance any political ambition that I might have had. It was all a misunderstanding that had arisen out of the political tension at that time.

Developments in Singapore

I have forgotten the date but it was definitely in the fourth quarter or at the end of 1955 that I resigned from *Warta Negara* and returned to Singapore to once again work at Utusan Melayu.

During the two years that I was away in Penang, ASAS 50 had organized all kinds of activities. In addition, literary writing had progressed by leaps and bounds in the newspaper and magazine industry in Singapore. The debate "Art for Society" versus "Art for Art's Sake" apparently had resulted in personal accusations being levelled at one or two members of ASAS 50. Among other things, they were accused of being anti-Islam and dictatorial in their leadership. Hamzah and several others had left ASAS 50 and established their own association. However, the association set up by Hamzah lacked influence and the activities it organized as well as the works produced by its members fell short of general expectations. Meanwhile, language and literary activities seemed to be better planned and more forward-looking. So were literary works. Writers began to be more critical in their thinking. The age of romanticism and idealism was coming to a close and harsh realism which replaced it was slowly creeping into the short stories and poems of that era. The exponents of "Art for Art's Sake" like Hamzah himself contributed quite a number of short stories to *Mastika*. In my estimation, however, they smacked of "Art for Society" although the technique used was better and more refined. Other writers such as Tongkat Warrant, Awam-il-Sarkam and Masuri S.N. began to be less bombastic in their use of language. *Mastika* had once again become a magazine for light reading featuring articles on culture and general knowledge. And, Asraf, meanwhile, had successfully reintroduced translated works of western writers in *Mastika*.

What really pleased me most when I first returned to

Singapore from Penang was to find that ASAS 50 was still going strong and still active as a pressure group in the political fight for the Malay language and literature as well as in its resolve to develop literature along the lines of "Art for Society". Looking at how resilient and stable the movement was, my disappointment at learning of Hamzah's defection as well as that of several other young writers who were among the founding members of ASAS 50 disappeared. Arif Ahmad who was the First Head for two consecutive years during the crisis, that is from 1953–54 and 1954–55, along with other friends like Masuri S.N., Jymy Asmara, Abu Zaki Fadzil, Asraf, Tongkat Warrant and Awam-il-Sarkam, not only succeeded in defusing the crisis but also managed to organize many activities. During the two years, ASAS 50 had managed to compile a report of the First Malay Language and Literature Congress which was later presented at the Second Congress held in Seremban between 28 December 1953 and 2 January 1954. It also succeeded in supporting the motion brought by Singapore Malay Teachers' Union at the Second Congress which called for Romanised script to be used as the official script and Jawi as an alternative script. It succeeded in compiling a general memorandum which offered a comprehensive analysis and reasons to explain why ASAS 50 supported the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union at the Congress which took the decision to accept Romanised script as the official script without doing away with Jawi. The memorandum which was drafted by Asraf and Usman Awang (Tongkat Warrant) who used rational and logical arguments and research methods which were somewhat academic was able to show quite clearly that ASAS 50 was not a tool for undermining the influence of Islam as accused by some quarters. It also clearly showed that the memorandum was aimed at proving that the use of Romanised script would increase the likelihood of Malay being accepted as the national language, the language of administration and education. ASAS 50, since the convening of the Second Congress in Seremban, or rather since it first proposed Romanised script as the official script at the First Congress in Singapore in 1952, had always been firm in its

stand that it was not against the use of Jawi. ASAS 50, from that time on, had agreed that Jawi must not be abolished and drew attention to its weaknesses so that they could be rectified, thus ensuring the continued existence of the script.

When I was in Penang, the British government had set up a Commission to draft a new constitution for Singapore. The Commission was headed by Sir George Rendel and was better known as the Rendel Commission.

In December 1953, ASAS 50 sent a memorandum to the Commission, emphasizing the importance of the language issue. Among other things, the memorandum recommended that:

> The Malay language should be recognized as the language of communication among the people and specific provisions must be made for the language to be taught at all centres of learning. Malay should be taught as a second language in English, Chinese and Indian schools. Steps must be taken to introduce and promote Malay as the language of instruction in Malay-medium secondary schools. The current chair of Malay language at the University of Malaya must be converted into the Department of Malay Language Teaching, and entrusted with the task of developing Malay as an academic subject to be taught at all levels in schools throughout the country."[1]

Although ASAS 50 was facing a crisis brought about by the supporters of the "Art for Art's Sake" movement, it was still respected and regarded as a reliable literary organization throughout the Second Malay Language and Literature Congress held in Seremban. At the Congress, ASAS 50 was given the task of representing the Congress and liaising with all the language bodies in Indonesia with the aim of working together to standardize the spelling system of Malay and Indonesian. The First Head of ASAS 50, Arif Ahmad, wrote

1 As this book is a memoir and no footnotes are given about reference books, readers who wish to read the full text of the memorandum of ASAS 50 mentioned above, which relates directly to the issue of the Romanised script, or any other memorandum mentioned later on in the book, can refer to the book *Memoranda Angkatan Sasterawan 50* published by the Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1962.

an article in the magazine *Medan Bahasa*, Jakarta, to convey to the Indonesian people our desire to work together on this issue. As a result, the Malay Language and Literature Congress was invited to send representatives to the Indonesian Language Congress to be held in Medan in October 1954. Consequently, ASAS 50 was asked by the Malay Language and Literature Congress to call a small meeting involving representatives of the Congress in order to select delegates for the Congress in Medan and to raise money for the trip. Those selected were Harun Aminurrashid (head of the delegation), Ramli Abd. Hadi, Mahmud Ahmad, Mohd. Asri Haji Muda and I (secretary). Publishers from Singapore too sent their representatives. Utusan Melayu was represented by A. Samad Ismail. A number of language and literary bodies too sent their representatives which included M. Noor Azam from Kedah, Bakhtiar Jamili from Penang, Yusuf Harun from Malacca and many others. In short, the Indonesian Language Congress in Medan was the starting point for bilateral relations and cooperation between the people of the two countries, on the issue of language and literature. The general policy paper of the Malay Language and Literature Congress read out by the head of our delegation, Harun Aminurrashid, which among other things proposed a joint effort between Malaya and Indonesia to achieve a common spelling system and draw up guidelines on language use, was well received and sparked off a lively debate on the definition of the Indonesian language. Most of the delegates agreed that the Indonesian language is a native language and one that was based on Malay. This definition paved the way for greater cooperation in efforts to standardize the use of both languages in all fields of life. Although there was a small group which insisted that Indonesian language had developed into a language quite different from Malay, their opinion was that of a very small group and in no way weakened the resolve of both countries to work together.

In addition to the above, there were a number of other language and literary activities which involved ASAS 50 and

its committee members. One of the activities which were quite important was the setting up of the Malay Education Council under which more than fifty Malay and Islamic organizations of Singapore were united for the purpose of raising the standard of Malay education on the island. At the end of 1953, ASAS 50 had sent a memorandum to the Singapore Constitution Commission, better known as the Rendel Commission, recommending that Malay be used as the language of general communication as well as the medium of instruction from primary to university level. And when the Commission failed to show any interest in the recommendation, all the Malay and Islamic organizations within the Malay Education Council got together to fight for the fate of Malay education in Singapore. ASAS 50 was in the forefront of the campaign. Arif Ahmad, the First Head of ASAS 50 at that time, became the Second Secretary of the Council.

Persekutuan Bahasa Melayu Universiti Malaya

When I first returned to Singapore from Penang, Friends of the Malay Language and Literature Congress in the southern part of Malaya had already formed a committee for the Third Malay Language and Literature Congress. ASAS 50 was of course involved and Arif Ahmad, its First Head, sat on the committee as its second secretary. The committee was based at the University of Malaya with the *Persekutuan Bahasa Melayu Universiti Malaya* (Malay Language Association of the University of Malaya) or PBMUM as its secretariat.

PBMUM had just been established in January 1955 with the support of Ungku Aziz, an economics lecturer at the university, as well as advice and guidance from Za'ba who was head of the Department of Malay Studies. The establishment of the Department of Malay Studies in 1953 at the university was the starting point for bridging the gap between well-educated Malays and the rest of the Malay society. Previous to this, most Malay undergraduates, except for a handful like Aminuddin Baki and a few others, took little interest in what

was going on in their own community. Most of them were not concerned about their own people; some had the same mentality as most of the English educated Malays who were highly westernized and tended to look down their noses at their own kind. I still find it difficult to talk about the attitude of the Malay students in the early days of the university. In the early fifties when I spent a lot of time at the Bukit Timah Campus, I had tried to get to know them through friends like Aminuddin Baki and one or two others. It was quite obvious to me at that time what they thought of me – a journalist and writer who spoke only Malay, and when I did speak English, it sounded unpolished. To them people like me – reporters, writers, Malay teachers or perhaps too Malay politicians – who preferred to speak Malay, wrote short stories, poems et cetera, and organized all kinds of activities, were the poorly educated who tried to appear otherwise. They did not believe that the Malays could achieve what the British were capable of achieving. Whenever we invited them to join in our activities, they would only do so if it made them appear important and intelligent. It was this attitude that alienated the rest of the Malay society. Matters came to a head when in a radio forum, some Malay undergraduates openly stated that Malay education was waste of time, that Malay schools should be closed down and replaced with English schools. This incurred the wrath of the Malays, particularly the Malay teachers.

I did not really agree with the attitude of some who had challenged these undergraduates to a debate on the Malay education system. I felt that the undergraduates had merely meant to suggest that the existent Malay education policy should be reviewed so that education in Malay could go beyond primary level. To my mind, the undergraduates were already imbued with nationalistic spirit but because they felt they had better brains and were better qualified, they dealt with the subject of Malay education in a high-handed fashion and cared little for the feelings of those who had struggled for years to raise the status of Malay education. In the Malay culture, the young must never be disrespectful of their elders. Unfortuna-

tely, when are young people ever are prudent? It is the elders who should show wisdom. Thus, the strained relation between the undergraduates and the Malay teachers was the topic of discussion in the papers for quite some time. If I am not mistaken, it was Pak Za'ba and Ungku Aziz who finally stepped in to defuse the situation. I was still in Penang at that time and so was not able to follow these developments closely.

With the setting up of the Malay Language Department at the University of Malaya (which had the support of Ungku Aziz) under the leadership of Pak Za'ba, the undergraduates gradually began to understand what the hue and cry of the Malay struggle was all about. The clamour for Malay to be made the national language, an issue which was hotly discussed at the Second Malay Language and Literature Congress in Seremban, grew even louder, and prepared the ground for the undergraduates to join in the struggle to elevate Malay to the status of national language. Consequently, the PBMUM was formed in 1955. And from that time onwards, in fact from the time the tension between the undergraduates and the Malay teachers had fizzled out and the call for the recognition of Malay as the country's national language reverberated at the Second Malay Language and Literature Congress in Seremban in early 1954, the Malay students of the University of Malaya, especially those from the Department of Malay Studies, began to take a greater interest in the Malay society in Singapore. Upon my return to Singapore, I frequently bumped into a number of Malay student leaders at Utusan Melayu. Some of them were in close contact with writers such as Tongkat Warrant, Asraf, Masuri S.N. and others. These writers were often called upon to give talks organized by the PBMUM. I viewed with great optimism the participation of these educated Malays in our struggle for the Malay language and literature. I immediately befriended them. It appeared to me then that what Aminuddin Baki had envisaged a couple of years earlier – that one day there would emerge from the university a group of educated Malay leaders – was already showing signs of materialising. As a matter of fact, I was confident that what I

myself had hoped to see, that is, literary luminaries emerging from among these highly educated Malays was also showing signs of doing the same. I noticed that a couple of the undergraduates were keenly keeping track of the literary developments at that time. My acquaintance with C. Skinner, a literature lecturer at the Department of Malay Studies and Dr. de Jong, also a lecturer at that Department, further convinced me of it. Both of them were hopeful that the university would one day be able to produce not only educated Malays but also Malay intellectuals with an interest in literature.

But it was not easy to reach out to these students. Many of them still could not understand the importance of having highly-educated intellectuals involved in the literary world, or the importance of improving the Malay intellect through literature besides inculcating the spirit of nationalism through slogans and the influential works of writers of that era. Most of these students had inherited the arrogance of the aristocrats, wanting always to be looked up to whereas they were young and lacked experience in interacting with the people whom they regarded of lowly status. Their misplaced snobbishness hindered interactions between them and the general public. However, these impediments were gradually reduced with the help of PBMUM. I was one of those who frequented the university campus and subjected myself to their snobbery. Be it through my own effort or through ASAS 50 or Utusan Melayu, I never tired of trying to bridge the gap between the two groups – on the one side the writers, journalists and literary luminaries and on the other, the undergraduates.

Nevertheless, my perseverance gave me so much satisfaction. Today, whenever I meet the leaders of PBMUM of the early Singapore days, I feel myself bursting with pride. They have now become officers, educationists, and politicians who are able to empathize with the people, high-ranking officers who are not arrogant, aristocratic or snobbish. Once in a while I would bump into Noh Abdullah and we would reminisce about the time he used me to force some freshmen to jump into the pond at the university. These freshmen had

thought I was a senior as I did not wear a tie which was compulsory for freshmen to put on during the ragging period. Some of these undergraduates had only recently realized that I was not a student of the university. Sometimes when Tongkat Warrant and I run into Datuk Lukman Musa, we would recall a shocking incident which had caused quite a stir at a talk we gave to some PBMUM members in a tutorial room at the University of Malaya. The talk, which was chaired by Datuk Lukman, was going on smoothly when suddenly Adnan Esa from Radio Malaya who was doing the recording passed a note to Datuk Lukman informing him that he had received word from his office about a riot which had broken out at the Chinese High School not far from the university. The rioters had in fact advanced to the main road and were approaching Bukit Timah Road and Dunean Road in front of the university.

There were innumerable incidents, some pleasant, some galling, when members of ASAS 50 in particular and writers in general were trying to forge greater interactions between the university fraternity and the public. When PBMUM finally became strong and ready to prove to the people that the interactions had paid off it became the organizing committee of the Third Malay Language and Literature Congress.

The Third Congress

Meanwhile, in April 1956, ASAS 50 held its annual general meeting. Its committee which had slogged non-stop for two consecutive years was beginning to feel the strain. They had had to weather the crisis brought about by Hamzah and his friends as well as to accomplish several tasks during the critical period when the entire Malay populace demanded that Malay be made the national language, a demand that was approved in May 1955 by the Legislative Assembly of the Federation of Malaya. Its annual general meeting this time had had to deal with the role of ASAS 50 in the Third Malay Language and Literature Congress.

The Third Congress, to my mind, can be said to be a

watershed in the fight to give Malay its pride of place and was instrumental in laying down the foundation for the pursuit of future causes. Political developments in Malaya had reached its climax. A self-governing Federation of Malaya was established following the elections of members of the Legislative Assembly of the Federation of Malaya on 27 July 1955. The self-government was formed by the Alliance which was made up of UMNO, the MCA and the MIC under the leadership of the Chief Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman. It succeeded in putting pressure on the British to fulfil its promise of granting full independence to Malaya. In March 1956, if I remember correctly, the Constitution of the Independent Federation of Malaya Commission was set up comprising legal experts from England, India, Pakistan and Australia, and chaired by Lord Reid. In the meantime, the Minister of Education of the autonomous Federation drew up an education policy which would later be implemented with the aim of uniting the different races in the country. In order to improve the teaching of Malay in schools the Language Institute was set up and plans were made for the establishment of Balai Pustaka. All these were the initiatives of the late Tun Abdul Razak bin Datuk Hussein (then Datuk Abdul Razak).

The country's politics was going through critical moments and this did not escape the attention of ASAS 50 or the majority of writers and groups who all this while had been championing the cause of the Malay language. I often discussed these political developments with my friends, particularly those at Utusan Melayu who were involved in ASAS 50 like Tongkat Warrant, Asraf and Awam-il-Sarkam. At that time, the committee which had been in operation for two years was eagerly awaiting an annual general meeting to spruce up the organization and outline its line of action and future activities. The First Head, Arif Ahmad, and the other members of the committee almost withdrew from their posts as they felt they had been left for too long to shoulder the varied and heavy responsibilities of running the organization. I clearly made my stand that if ASAS 50 was to be carefully revamped, we would have to take into

consideration the political climate then and all possible contingencies. ASAS 50 must take a position on the steps taken by the government in all aspects relating to language and literature and make this position known to the public. Actually I was worried that the acceptance of Malay as the national language was just a political compromise, an attempt by the Chinese, for example, to obtain *Jus Soli* citizenship. If this were true, then the national language would become a meaningless symbol. I discussed this with friends, emphasizing my belief that it was time for ASAS 50 to clarify its stand on the role of Malay as the national language. In fact, most of us who had been championing the Malay language and literature cause were clear about the significance of a national language – that it should be an effective tool of communication, a language of politics, of the economy, of social interaction, of knowledge and culture.

When the general meeting of ASAS 50 was held in April 1956, this issue was seriously discussed. To my mind it was imperative that ASAS 50 was clear what language politics was about, held on to it firmly and championed it as failing to do so would mean our future struggle would be uncertain, as it was evident that the language issue was not only a social and cultural issue but also a fundamental political one, an issue which would determine the nature of national unity in an independent multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious nation. Several voices were heard at the meeting cautioning that by making its stand on language politics ASAS 50 might be labelled a political body. However, it would be unrealistic to think that one could fight for the national language and yet choose to ignore the political factors operating at the time.

Hence, Tongkat Warrant's historic proposal at the meeting which sounded roughly like this: "That this general meeting of ASAS 50 resolves to uphold its aspiration to improve the Malay language and literature in particular, and Malay culture in general, so that they become the means to achieve peace, prosperity, social justice and harmony." With the help of Awam-il-Sarkam, the motion was unanimously accepted. It cannot be

denied that the phrase "a means to achieve peace, prosperity, social justice and harmony" in the proposal smacked of politics but it gave a clear message that the politics involved was not party politics, or the politics of race but that of the nation and humanity. If the political parties and the general public were to accept this concept, then Malay as a national language would not just be a meaningless symbol, a bargaining chip used by the other races which inevitably would act as a screen behind which the English language would continue to play a dominant role.

Swept by the tide of strong emotions at the meeting, I accepted the nomination to become First Head for the term 1956–57. However, once the emotions had abated several days later, I realised that I had taken on responsibilities that were exceptionally demanding; it was like carrying hot steaming *lemang*[2] on one's back – there was no way one could throw away the delicious content of the bamboo tube or grind it to a pulp so that the tubes do not burn as much against one's skin. In actual fact, I was confident that I would be able to carry out my responsibilities well as the committee which would be working with me comprised members who were committed and experienced as well as those who were young and full of verve. They were Arif Ahmad (Second Head, the life of ASAS 50 who never tired of contributing his services to the association), Usman Awang (First Secretary), Asraf (Second Secretary), Abu Zaki Fadhil, Masuri S.N., Awam-il-Sarkam, and dynamic new blood like A. Samad Said, Kadir Ahmad and Fatimah Murad. But what made me feel like a cat on hot bricks was that, for some time at least, I would have less time to devote to writing short stories, an activity I had planned to indulge since my sojourn in Penang, which I had in fact set in motion with "Kedai Sederet di Kampung Kami" and "Pemimpin Kecil dari Kuala Semantan" – short stories in which I employed the new techniques I had worked on during my days of soul searching in Penang.

2 Glutinous rice cooked in bamboo tubes.

Meeting after meeting was held to work out a course of action which would accord with the new concept to be broadcast to the public in line with the decision of the general meeting. Finally, it was agreed that a memorandum would be sent to the Minister of Education of the Federation of Malaya in regard to the Education Policy he had newly launched. In addition, we also officially confirmed to undertake the writing of several working papers; a task assigned us by the Third Malay Language and Literature Congress. However, we decided not to merely write the papers but to present it to the Congress in the form of a memorandum.

Most of our meetings were held in Asraf's house; coincidentally two of our committee members lived there – Asraf and Fatimah Murad who had become Mrs. Asraf. With Fatimah's presence in the committee, our discussions had the benefit of a woman's perspective on the issues at hand, and we were never short of drinks, porridge or fried snacks. Sometimes Fatimah would even serve us noodles or *gado-gado*. After putting our heads together, we eventually came up with a memorandum to be submitted to the Minister of Education in response to the Education Policy he had tabled.

When scrutinizing and analyzing the Education Policy, we did not any longer react like radical youths who were always full of righteous indignation, always hot under the collar as they say. In fact, we perused the Policy calmly, our intentions perfectly honourable, that is, to help the authorities achieve its goals which were also our goals and aspirations. We only touched on the section which concerned the national language. We did not question the time frame of ten years stated in the Policy for the implementation of Malay as the national language, rather we argued that given the education system and the teaching of Malay recommended in the Education Policy it would be impossible for the important goals of implementing the national language to be achieved in such a short period of time. Our arguments were based on our analysis of the Education Policy. Firstly, the Policy still retained English as the main medium of instruction in schools and this we felt

would surely kill any opportunity Malay would have to develop as a language of knowledge. Secondly, competency in English was still a prerequisite for getting employment and for furthering one's studies locally or abroad. This would definitely put a damper on any enthusiasm among students to learn Malay and to value the national language. And thirdly, the highest level for the study of Malay was the primary level. This convinced us that Malay was not planned to replace English and to become the national language which through the education system would unify the nation.

Based on these arguments, we proposed several amendments to the Education Policy regarding the school system and the teaching and use of Malay recommending that Malay be made the medium of instruction from primary school through college and university. Our recommendations were made with the hope that ten years from that date Malay would become a national language in the real sense of the word and play its role as a language of national unity. It was our hope that ten years from that date, all students who have gone through secondary education would have mastered the national language and would use it in all aspects of life. In addition, our recommendations were aimed at making these students learn to value the national language and deepen their interest to learn it. Other than that, our recommendations were also aimed at minimizing the influence of English which was preventing Malay from making deeper inroads in the education system, without denying students the opportunity to learn it as a tool for acquiring higher knowledge. We also underlined in the memorandum that our recommendations would not jeopardize the continued existence of Chinese and Tamil, but rather would stimulate nationalistic feelings through the development of the national language and a uniform national education system for all students.

The memorandum was completed and presented to the Government of the Federation of Malaya in June 1956. Following this, we began writing the seven working papers for the Third Malay Language and Literature Congress which

would be convened in September of the same year.

In the light of the developments that had taken place and were taking place, viz, the April 1956 general meeting of ASAS 50, the political developments which were clearly moving towards the promised full independence, the efforts undertaken by the Government of the Federation of Malaya, particularly the Ministry of Education which had come up with the Education Policy of 1956 to which ASAS 50 had given its reaction in the memorandum, as well as talk of the Ministry of Education setting up Balai Pustaka under the Education Department of the Federation of Malaya, my committee decided to write a memorandum to be presented at the Third Malay Language and Literature Congress in order to get its support for our efforts to put into effect the resolution it passed at the general meeting.

For someone who was not politically inclined like me, writing a memorandum that touched on national politics, in particular the issue of achieving national unity and integrity through the Malay language was not an easy task. It was a real struggle trying to think calmly, to keep our emotions in check and to sharpen our senses. We planned to convince the Congress which shared the aspirations of the Malay community and its love for the Malay language and literature, that the struggle to promote the language and literature involved national politics and thus should employ, in the process, political tactics and wisdom, which means relying not only on political fervour but also on clear thinking and good judgement. Thus we decided that we would put forward in the memorandum the following:

1. an introduction to our concept of language politics which we felt was part and parcel of the struggle to promote the Malay language and literature; this was included to persuade the entire Congress to share and support our concept;
2. our ideas about Balai Pustaka which was in the process of being set up by the government of the Federation of Malaya; these were included to convince the

Congress to accept our proposals and to put them forward to the authorities;

3. our views on the unification of Malay and Indonesian which we hoped the Congress would fully understand and subsequently take up with the authorities;
4. our ideas on the current and future developments of the Malay language from various perspectives – economic, social, cultural and political – as a basis upon which the Congress could forward their ideas to the authorities;
5. our observations on the role of Malay in primary and secondary schools in order to highlight the situation prevalent then in the education sector; the intention was to persuade the Congress to pass resolutions which were in accordance with the Education Policy memorandum we had submitted to the authorities.

These were amongst the important issues we knew would be discussed at the Congress through the presentation of numerous working papers, some of which *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* had been assigned to write.

Our committee came to the decision that ASAS 50 would try to avoid being involved in the actual organization of the Congress which would surely require the involvement of a lot of people in the various sub-committees. We resolved to concentrate our effort on writing the memorandum and the seven working papers assigned to us. We worked extremely hard so that this time our voices would be heard at the Congress, which we regarded as a very important Congress in the history of Malay language and literature. We wanted our ideas, which we had all this while made known through slogans to help fan nationalistic fervour, would be translated into something more concrete.

Personally, I felt that it was the first time I had undertaken such heavy and important responsibilities in all the years of struggling for our cause. When I was in politics, I was not a significant player who took on a central role in the movement,

but as First Head I was to be the source of ideas and the man behind ASAS 50 responsible for making a substantial contribution to the Congress that was soon to be held. This feeling of being burdened by heavy responsibilities and the important task of running the association was not obvious to the others who I might add, could have been feeling the same way too. However, perhaps because we devoted heart and soul into making the new concept work, everything went on smoothly. We were able to forget the bitter disputes we had with some of our friends who had eventually caused the split in ASAS 50 about two years earlier. We dismissed from our minds the grievances of the committee which had kept ASAS 50 going for two consecutive years. We were all united and happy once again, just like we were when ASAS 50 was newly formed six years ago – minus Hamzah and friends of course. I then began to delve deeper into the problems of language and literature in all aspects – political, social, economic, cultural and educational – as all these aspects had to be examined together and closely before we could begin writing any working paper or memorandum. Once a paper or memorandum had been written, we would re-examine it. I personally gained invaluable knowledge and experience from the feedback and guidance I had from friends particularly in aspects that I was not too familiar with.

When we submitted our memorandum to the Congress committee, a couple of our associates passed the comment that it was not a working paper ASAS 50 was submitting but a manuscript for a magnum opus. It was true that our memorandum was thick, with an attachment covering four separate topics in the form of an introduction, as well as seven working papers. If the comment was intended to imply that ASAS 50 was trying to show off how clever it was, the insinuation had missed its mark. At the Congress, the "manuscript" submitted by ASAS 50 was no longer thick rather it had become quite thin, as it had been divided into various sections to be discussed at the different sessions of the Congress. Once the sessions were over and their recommendations endorsed by the plenary

session, then the ideas and concepts put forward by ASAS 50 in its "manuscript" were once again brought together in the form of isolated but meaty recommendations which became the sum and substance of the opinion and resolutions of the Congress. ASAS 50 had once again disappeared into the background. The new concepts and ideas it had proposed had become one with the Congress mainstream. These concepts and ideas of ASAS 50 had blended with those of the hordes of paper presenters who represented all kinds of associations that make up the Congress and the hundreds of participants who attended the event. ASAS 50 does not claim that the Congress resolutions were the recommendations contained in ASAS 50's memorandum and working papers. However, we were very satisfied with the outcome. So were my friends who had slogged for several months to put together the working papers and memorandum, as well as the other friends of the Congress, in particular PBMUM who were its organizers.

One night, while waiting for friends who were at the sessions still in progress, a few of us, including Masuri S.N., sat on the green lawn of the campus. The whole place was bathed in moonlight. We were all silent. Perhaps, like what Professor Priono had said in his speech, when one is really happy, there is no need for words. We were indeed elated for having accomplished one of the activities we regarded as important and because we knew that our views were given the focus of attention at several of the mini sessions.

Seeing Masuri S. N. gazing intently at the moon, a friend asked, "What are you thinking of?" As usual he smiled before answering, "The Moon over the Campus." We each laughed because it made us recall Sitor Situmurang's poem, "Malam Lebaran" which had only one line: "The Moon over the Grave". Perhaps there was a connection between "The Moon over the Campus" which Masuri's mind was focused on and Sitor's line, "The Moon over the Grave". Nobody knew and nobody wanted to know. What we knew though was that Masuri sometimes had unusual ways of expressing his satisfaction.

When the Congress resolutions were presented to the

Minister of Education, the late Tun Abdul Razak, I felt that our ideas and views were one with the people's, which were clearly represented in the Congress, and that these ideas and views had at last reached the people we hoped would be able to implement them. When the *Pendeta* hat was placed on the head of Pak Za'ba (deceased), my heart pounded and I prayed that the Malay language had earned its pride of place. When one of the observers from Indonesia, Professor Dr. Priono (also deceased) recited his moving line, "When one is really happy, there is no need for words", I knew that everything had fallen into place. I did not know why, but all throughout the proceeding, my heart practically sang and my hopes soared. I once again became the romantic I was during the days I had just begun writing short stories.

A Stint at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka

In early November 1956, that is roughly a month after the Congress, Ungku Aziz asked me if I wanted to become an editor at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP). Although once or twice he had talked about the difficulties he faced in trying to solve the problem of finding suitable staff for the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, it never once occurred to me that he would ever ask me to join the organization. I was well aware of the problems faced by Ungku Aziz as regards staff recruitment. Firstly, he had to operate within a given budget and abide by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's financial administrative procedures. Secondly, he had to work within the constraints of the terms and conditions of government service. Thirdly, finding suitable candidates for posts such as writer and editor, and specifying the relevant qualifications which accord with the terms and conditions of government service was not an easy task. I never thought that Ungku Aziz would go to such length to enable him to employ individuals who did not have the required qualifications. The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka at that time was a government department under the Ministry of Education. When he broached the question of whether or not

I would like to join the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka as an editor, he must have first of all got the green light to engage someone like me whose qualifications did not match up with that required by the government.

As I had never contemplated leaving Utusan Melayu for the second time, I could not give him an answer right away. Thus, I asked him to give me some time to think it over. He might have been surprised by my request or perhaps thought that I was playing hard to get. In any case, he agreed and gave me two days to think about it as according to him, he would be leaving for a conference in Indonesia with Pendeta Za'ba the following week and that he would like to resolve the matter before he left.

As a matter of fact, at the time Ungku Aziz put the question to me, I was not sure whether I wanted to work as an editor at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. Even if I was interested to be one, I did not think that I was cut out for the job. And even if I was, I was not sure whether I could fit in as I had never worked in a government department before. And it occurred to me that leaving Utusan Melayu was not a very good idea as I owed Utusan Melayu a lot for being the first to offer me the opportunity to develop my talent in short-story writing and journalism. In addition, it was through Utusan Melayu that I had made many new friends and contacts. Furthermore, I was obligated to Yusuf Ishak and several others who had gone to a lot of trouble to get me back into Utusan Melayu after having left its employ for two years.

I asked my wife for her opinion. In the end she left it entirely to me to decide as we had no reason at all to leave Utusan Melayu at that time. I was earning close to $700 a month. In Singapore, we lived among family (my wife's family) and both our children were born there. Our future, unless it was fated to be otherwise, was secure if we both were to continue working at Utusan Melayu and living in Singapore.

I also sought the advice of my friends in Utusan Melayu and those in ASAS 50, as well as friends such as Mahmud Ahmad and a few others. Many were of the opinion, and this I took to

be the general opinion, that it was an honour to be offered a job as an editor at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, an offer that should be grabbed. The second opinion I sought which to me also reflected a general opinion, acknowledged the advantages of becoming an editor in the organization and at the same time stressed the importance of such a post in the struggle to advance the frontiers of the Malay language and literature. According to A. Samad Said, even if I was only partly prepared to bear with and abide by the rules and regulations of the government service, it was good enough. I should then accept the offer. I was aware that the freedom I had had working for the past ten years at the newspaper, particularly at Utusan Melayu, I would not be able to enjoy in the government service. The most thought-provoking advice came from the late Mahmud Ahmad who said that if I wanted to be a successful writer, I should not work for the government, even as an editor at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. The minute I showed promise, he said, I would be promoted. With each promotion, I would be given heavier responsibilities and my administrative duties would increase. Once I become an administrator, even one in the literature department, my writing talent would diminish and I would have fewer opportunities to think critically as a writer or a literary luminary, he added.

Two days later, I went to the University of Malaya to meet Ungku Aziz. I did not have a definite answer to give him. I was still not sure whether or not I should accept the offer. I told him that I was disinclined to leave Utusan Melayu as I felt obliged to the newspaper, and to Yusuf Ishak who had sincerely tried to patch things up and taken me back to work under him. It had seemed to me that it was only a short while ago all this had happened. Ungku Aziz responded by saying that my feeling of obligation was not an important issue at all. He himself would meet up with Yusuf Ishak to discuss the matter. When I arrived at the office at ten o'clock the next morning, I was asked to go directly to Yusuf Ishak's room. Inside his room, Yusuf, A. Samad Ismail and Ungku Aziz were all waiting. I was greeted with smiles all around and Yusuf Ishak offered

me his congratulations. He said that everything had been taken care of. He advised me to try to work with Ungku Aziz. If at any time I were to find the job unsuitable, Utusan Melayu would always welcome me back. Ungku Aziz explained that I would have to go through an interview. If I was successful at the interview and the panel of interviewers found me suitable for the post, I would be given a one-year or two-year contract, whichever I preferred, and be paid $900 a month. I was then asked to fill in an application form by Ungku Aziz. The whole thing happened as if in a dream. A dream that was to change my way of life, the way I worked, and the way I pursued the struggle to ensure Malay had its pride of place.

Bukit Timbalan

On 1 December 1956, I started working at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka as an editor. I only signed a one-year contract with the management. Prior to that, I had to attend an interview conducted by a panel of five interviewers, viz, the late Pendeta Za'ba as chairman, the late Tuan S.M. Zainal Abidin B.A, Tuan S.O.K. Ubaidullah, a Chinese man whom I did not know and Ungku Aziz, the Director of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Ungku Aziz did not ask me any questions throughout the interview. The other three were the ones who bombarded me with them. They all spoke English to me and I answered their questions in Malay. After some time, one of them asked me why I did this. Before I could reply, Pak Za'ba intervened saying "Never mind" and seemed unconcerned about the message behind the question. Thank God for that. Had Pak Za'ba not intervened, I would have given an answer that would have surely raised the hackles of that particular interviewer who appeared to be an Anglophile. Pak Za'ba in a joking manner said, "He writes Malay novels and short stories; the position we are offering him too is as editor of Malay texts; in any case, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka will be publishing Malay books. Thus, it is good that he speaks in Malay, we can then gauge his

ability to write and edit in that language." My Anglophile interviewer merely smiled. And Pak Za'ba then shot a question at me, "Why is it that some Malay writers today do not know how to use court language correctly? Everyone is said to *berangkat* and *tiba*; and some writers address themselves as *saya* when speaking or writing to members of the nobility."

I looked at Pak Za'ba first, then at Ungku Aziz. I suddenly realized that I was being interviewed; I was not having a discussion with them, as did usually happen. I replied that there were several reasons for this. Firstly, the Malays at that time were exposed to Western ways and had little understanding of their own tradition and culture, except perhaps of ceremonies and ceremonial occasions, which in most cases had become some kind of fiestas rather then events celebrating tradition. Secondly, Malay writers, editors and journalists, except for the graduates of the Sultan Idris Teachers' Training College in Tanjong Malim, were not familiar with works such as *Pelita Bahasa Melayu* or *Ilmu Mengarang Melayu* and had not, in most cases, read the *hikayat* or classical Malay literature which was full of stories of kings and queens. And thirdly, some of the young writers were afraid of sounding pretentious. This was because they had struck up relationships with many young members of the nobility who did not want to be pretentious either.

When I mentioned the second reason, I looked at Pak Za'ba because I wanted to see his reaction. The two books I had mentioned were his and they were the only books on Malay grammar and writing. However, I could not make out his immediate reaction. When I gave the third reason, I looked at Ungku Aziz as he was of royal descent. I saw his face light up into a smile. I felt relieved as I had never addressed myself as "*patik*" when talking to him and I knew that he was not overly concerned about such formalities. It was not important to him whether people used the term of address "*patik*" or "*saya*". I was prepared for Pak Za'ba to continue his line of questioning. Had he done so I would then remind him of the newspaper reports about a prince from Kelantan, the late Tengku Mahmud

Mahyuddin, who had announced publicly that the title "Tengku" which preceded his name should be omitted, and that if at all it was to be used, it was to serve as a name and not a title highlighting his social status. However, Pak Za'ba just smiled and did not press on. In fact he asked the others if they had any further questions.

Once I was officially offered the job and had signed a contract to work as an editor at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, I began to commute to Johor Bahru by bus from Singapore. In the beginning, it was quite a hassle for me as I was used to leaving for work at nine o'clock in the morning; with this new job I had to leave home at 6.30 in order to catch the seven o'clock bus from Rochor Road to Johor Bahru. The journey from Singapore to Johor Bahru took forty-five minutes. And I had to abide by government regulations – I had to be at the office by eight o'clock. The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka office was then located on the seventh floor of the Johor Government Office Building on Bukit Timbalan. It was quite a climb from the bus stop to the top of the hill and it took between ten to fifteen minutes to reach it. During the first few days trying to get used to the boring journey, I whiled away the time by recalling the interview I had attended. Actually, interviews were quite alien to me. I did not know the rules and procedures. I was quite amused when I recalled that I had stood in front of the panel of interviewers dressed only in casual clothes – meaning wearing a short-sleeved shirt and no tie. I saw Muhammad Haniff, a candidate interviewed to fill the post of lexicographer; he wore a shirt, tie and *songkok*. The interviewers themselves were in formal attire, except Ungku Aziz. Luckily, the way I dressed did not cost me the job.

What I kept turning over and over in my mind during the bus journey and while walking up the hill to my office was the attitude of a number of the interviewers – they were probably more English than the English themselves. I felt that Pak Za'ba and Ungku Aziz too were not too comfortable with their attitude. I then tried to imagine how incredibly difficult it must be for the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to forge ahead if there

were people in the country's upper echelon who were still greatly influenced by the English language and things English. These people, I felt, had nothing against the Malay language. They did want to see it develop and advance, and they did support the policies of the government. However, they were still shackled by the past, by the influence of colonialism. People such as these were probably not a great obstacle. But if these top notches who supported the government's policies could not free their mind and soul from the overpowering influence of their colonial past, what about the people who had never taken an interest in national issues or the country's political struggle, people who went about their lives working, toiling, and engaging in business? Surely they were worse then the western-oriented top brass in the government. This coupled with the racist attitude of some of the non-Malays was to me a big issue which would become a major hindrance for the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to achieve its goals.

So, what were the tasks to be undertaken by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka? This became one of the things I pondered over on the dreary bus journey during my first few days as an editor at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. My mind grappled with the broad guidelines which had emerged out of the Congress resolutions. Had these broad guidelines been studied by the government or had they been hastily passed on to Ungku Aziz to analyze and translate into an action plan for the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka? I did not know and had not been told about it by Ungku Aziz. He did not come regularly to the office as he was also busy as a lecturer at the University of Malaya.

Bureaucracy and Red Tape

After a week it became clear to me what my job specifications were. Apparently Ungku Aziz had been busy in Kuala Lumpur trying to get an allocation for office equipment. One night at his house, I learned quite a lot about bureaucracy and red tape. And I appreciated how difficult it was for him to

overcome the hurdles in his effort to realize the aspirations of the Malay Language and Literature Congress. Although the government had accepted the resolutions of the Congress and had agreed that they be implemented through the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and the schools, Ungku Aziz felt that his hands were tied because of the red tape and bureaucracy in the Education Department and the other departments he had to liaise with. Ungku Aziz was an intellectual, a lecturer at the University of Malaya. He was also a national activist who wished to see the swift and smooth implementation of projects of national interest. It was this swift and smooth implementation that he found difficult to achieve as Director of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and he attributed it to the red tape and bureaucracy. The government administrative system could only be changed through a political process and Ungku Aziz was not part of the political structure to be able to initiate this change. He was only a government servant seconded to the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka from the University of Malaya.

In the circumstances, he could only make short-term plans while waiting for changes that might take place that would enable the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to discharge its duties in a manner that was unencumbered by the shackles of bureaucracy and red tape. I did not know what steps Ungku Aziz took to reduce the red tape and bureaucracy but as a short-term measure he asked me to compile a *Risalah Ejaan Baru Menurut Keputusan Kongres* (Booklet on the new spelling system based on the resolutions of the congress) based on the papers presented by the PBMUM and ASAS 50. The second task given to me was to plan the publication of a monthly magazine which covered issues relating to language and literature. My third assignment was to publish Za'ba's *Anak Raja dan Anak Papa* which was a translation of Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*. Other than that, I was not given any important duties except to help Ungku Aziz once in a while in equipping the office. Apart from me, Ungku Aziz also had a lexicography officer, Muhammad Haniff to assist him. Muhammad Haniff was responsible for planning the

compilation of a *Kamus Kebangsaan Bahasa Melayu* (National dictionary of the Malay language) as well as handling one of the terminology committees. When Cikgu Sulaiman Hamzah, an officer from the Translation Bureau of the Ministry of Education died, Ungku Aziz got a finance officer on loan from the Johor government to manage all aspects of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's finances and administration. In the meantime, we had recruited several staff which included a clerk and an editor by the name of Wijaya Mala.

I could find nothing in the way it conducted its business then to convince me that the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka would be able to achieve its goals. Given its handicaps, the task entrusted to it by the Third Malay Language and Literature Congress was too great for it to undertake. And thus the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka was not able to effectively help the government achieve its objective to unite the various races through the national language. But I was confident that Ungku Aziz's determination would enable him to deal with the problems in hand. I was prepared to wait and see, at least until my contract expired at the year's end.

I completed compiling the *Risalah Ejaan Menurut Keputusan Kongres* and had it published in the form of a modest booklet as the allocation for its printing was insufficient. I also managed to complete the blueprint for the publication of a monthly magazine on language and literature. Planning this magazine required a lot of patience as at first I wanted it to be a purely literary magazine, something I had dreamt of since 1948 when I tried to change *Mastika* into a short-story magazine. At that time, I knew that such a magazine would not stand the test of time if its publication was motivated by a desire for commercial gains. Readers in general loved to read short stories, especially during an era when many young men were involved in the struggle for independence and were thus idealistic and romantic. Subsequently, stories bordering on romantic idealism were popular. However, literary critiques, literary theories and essays relating to literature in particular and culture in general, were not favoured and as a result, did

not appear on the publication list of publishers who were obsessed with increasing their sales. The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka was not a commercial concern and therefore should be willing to publish a magazine such as the one I envisaged. However, in the final analysis I agreed with Ungku Aziz that the language issues faced by the government and the people at that time were more critical. Literary development, on the other hand, was dependent on the solving of a number of these issues. The monthly magazine was to be one of the instruments that would lend support to the government's national language policy. Once again I had to put on hold my dream to publish a literary magazine and began to plan a publication that would give greater focus to language problems without neglecting literary issues for education purposes. The publication of Pak Za'ba's translation of *The Prince and the Pauper* too was under way after the manuscript that he had kept for years was found and re-edited.

I managed to do all this in four months, beginning January 1957. Quite unexpectedly, in May that year, Ungku Aziz announced that he would be resigning from his post as Director of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and would not be renewing his contract. I panicked as the minute the announcement was made many interested parties and individuals who were involved in the struggle to develop the Malay language immediately declared their disappointment. In fact, Pak Za'ba himself openly said that the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka was likely to face a bleak future as in his view no one was more qualified and able to lead the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka than Ungku Aziz. He could have made the statement to influence Ungku Aziz to reconsider his decision, but he could also have made it because he could not see anyone as energetic, determined, brave and educated to fill Ungku Aziz's shoes. And I panicked not because I could not do the same thing as Ungku Aziz, that is, decline to renew my contract. Rather, it was because I genuinely believed that Ungku Aziz was the most suitable person to lay the foundation for the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. He had only been at the helm for ten months, a

period too short to enable him to draft a long term plan together with implementation strategies for the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, which would undoubtedly be complicated and difficult.

Two months before Ungku Aziz made his announcement, I began to have a lot of confidence in the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. My confidence rose when I heard what the late Tun Abdul Razak said at Ungku Aziz's house after he visited the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and had a casual meeting with the staff. We adjourned for lunch at Ungku Aziz's house in Singapore. I was invited by Ungku Aziz to come along. It was during lunch that I heard the late Tun Abdul Razak say how very keen he was to see the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka achieve its goal to push back the frontiers of the Malay language and literature. He, I believe, was committed to uniting the people through the national language in line with the Education Policy of the Federation of Malaya. He was aware of the difficulties faced by Ungku Aziz, particularly in the area of administration and financial management, but he asked him to be patient. According to him, in a matter of months we would achieve our independence. Once this happened, we would likely be able to bring about important changes.

Since then I felt more confident and vowed in my heart to put all my effort into helping the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka achieve its goals. Then Ungku Aziz suddenly announced his plan not to renew his contract. My confidence was somewhat shattered. I was just beginning to understand how Ungku Aziz worked, his line of thinking and his attitude. However, when I thought long and hard, I was able to understand why he had made that decision. His unhappiness with bureaucracy and red tape, and his hectic schedule as a lecturer at the university aside, Ungku Aziz was a true Malay whose mind and soul were filled with the desire to raise the standard of living of the Malays. He aspired, dreamt and worked, and in fact studied hard to abolish poverty among the Malays. This was the impression I got every time we talked or discussed. Ramli Abdul Hadi and I, at one time, were often invited to his house at night. He

asked us to help correct the translation of his work "Kebuluran yang Tak Ketara". It was during these sessions that I began to understand what his real aspirations and thoughts were, and the cause he was fighting for. I think one of the reasons he did not want to renew his contract as Director of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka was he wanted to realize the ideals of his struggle to improve the lot of the Malays. My guess was that he did not want the pursuit of his dream to lose its momentum.

I had spent hours trying to analyze and understand the reasons behind Ungku Aziz's resignation. In the end I brought the focus back to myself. There was nothing much I could do but wait for the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to get a new Director who was of the same calibre as Ungku Aziz. Furthermore, since the lunch with the late Tun Abdul Razak at Ungku Aziz's house, I had promised myself to do all I could to support and help the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in its effort to achieve its goals. In any case, there was nothing I could do before my contract expired

When Tan Sri Syed Nasir bin Ismail came to replace Ungku Aziz, like any other officer at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, I waited to see what would happen. I gave him time to assess my position and to determine my role in the organization. I had heard that he was an UMNO activist, a nationalist and a champion of the teaching of Malay. However, I also knew him to be a government officer and a key figure in the *Pakatan Belajar Mengajar Pengetahuan Bahasa Diraja Johor* (*P.Bm.P.B. Diraja Johor*). We had struggled for the same cause but on different platforms. What I wanted to know was whether Tan Sri Syed Nasir (Tuan Syed Nasir at that time) considered me still relevant at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and whether that consideration was based on trust and mutual understanding. I would not be able to work under a superior who did not have faith in my ability and integrity, or who did not respect my objectives and aspirations. From the aspect of language and literature, what stood out was that I was from ASAS 50, an organization which had always been labelled "radical" whereas Syed Nasir was from the *P.Bm.P.B. Diraja*

Johor, a group which without a doubt was more conservative and were always at odds with the new groups when it came to concepts relating to language and literature. But as a politician, he was known to be a strong opponent of colonization, including cultural colonization. I was confident that if he stood firm on the issue of cultural politics, there was no reason why I could not work under him. As an officer in the Ministry of Education, I was sure that he had worked closely with the Minister of Education who was responsible for the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and for implementing the Education Policy, and that he fully understood the Minister's aspirations. The basis of cultural politics, particularly in relation to language and literature, was important to me as I could not function as a writer or an officer of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka outside this platform.

I did not know if Tan Sri Syed Nasir took the time to assess me but a week after taking over from Ungku Aziz, he asked for a report on the plans that we had drawn up, the work that had been achieved and that was in progress. During the week before that, he was busy making press statements and giving radio speeches. He seemed hurt by the many comments aired concerning the change in leadership at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. He wanted to convince the public that he was aware of the heavy and important responsibility he was shouldering, how great the obstacles were and that as the new captain of the ship; he was beginning to feel the heat. The way Syed Nasir expressed himself over the radio and in the papers convinced me that he was brave, sincere and smart. I hoped that I would be a competent and courageous sailor under the new captain.

It was in that frame of mind that we moved to Kuala Lumpur on 12 July 1957. A month and a half later, the Federation of Malaya was declared independent. The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka published its magazine, *Dewan Bahasa* with the motto "*Mendukung Cita-cita Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*" (We uphold the aspiration to make language the soul of the nation).

LITERARY DEVELOPMENTS IN KUALA LUMPUR

During the first few years after it moved to Kuala Lumpur, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka went all out to develop and promote the national language, concentrating on the publication of text books for both the primary and secondary schools, and organizing campaigns to uphold Article 152 of the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya. From the day it began its operations at its temporary office in the former ward of the Tanglin Hospital in Young Road until it moved to the building where it is now housed, it has metamorphosed from a department under the Ministry of Education to a statutory body, and its staff has grown from thirty (including those who were transferred from the Translation Bureau, Ministry of Education) to almost 300 strong. Throughout, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka had dedicated itself to the implementation of the two important tasks stated above.

Tan Sri Syed Nasir proved himself to be a capable, honest, brave and brilliant leader. During his tenure, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka became the headquarters from which the Malays in particular, and the people of Malaya and later Malaysia, in general, struggled to establish the national language as an instrument for national solidarity. The 300 employees of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka stood strong and united behind him in support of the campaign "*Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*". Be they office boys or senior officers, they were all dedicated and disciplined, and aspired to realize the objectives of Article 152 of the Federal Constitution. Syed Nasir did not advocate any particular modern management system or method; in fact he sometimes flouted the General Orders until it earned him a rather bad reputation as a government servant. He showed absolutely no diplomacy or tolerance towards those who opposed the national language policy such that he received threats on his life. But his method worked. The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka became a bastion of the national language. Primary school books on all subjects were then available in the national language. So also were secondary school textbooks.

Much can be written about the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka under the leadership of Tan Sri Syed Nasir, but it would need an extensive study for this, and a special investigation under a number of topics; it certainly would not do to record his achievements as mere reminiscences in a book such as this. What I shall touch on next is the development of Malay literature amid mounting fervour to realize the objectives of Article 152 of the Constitution.

As the campaign for Article 152 reached fever pitch, I as one of the spokes in the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka machinery wanted very much to contribute to the smooth running of the organization. Like all the other officers and editors, I not only handled the publication of textbooks but also gave talks and briefings all over the country, took part in discussions, and helped formulate strategies for the Director who had to deal with groups who were opposed to the national language policy or, shall I say, who championed and advocated a policy of multilingualism.

The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's priority at that time was to publish primary and secondary textbooks in an effort to realize the main goal of the Education Policy, that is, to develop a national educational system with Malay as the medium of instruction and a means to achieve national unity. As a quick way to do this was to translate existing English textbooks, writers and editors suddenly found themselves faced with the tricky problem of having to ensure that the translated versions were not stilted as translations usually were, easy to understand, suitable for school-going children who were the target users, and factually accurate as well as correct.

I renewed my contract. When the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka became a statutory body in 1959 under an Act of Parliament, I was appointed a permanent staff and later, Chief Editor. At the time the national language campaign was at its peak, I found myself "buried" in manuscripts with mountains of them sitting on my desk waiting to be filed. Each time one of my writer friends, particularly those involved in creative writing, came to enquire about the status of the manuscripts they had sent, I was usually not able to offer them any satisfactory explanation for the delay in processing them. I gave them all sorts of reasons to convince them that the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka was not deliberately causing these delays. Some of the manuscripts had been on the editors' tables for two years and no decision had been made whether or not to publish them. Those that had been approved for publication could not be processed as the publication of textbooks took priority over them. Outside the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, I was no longer respected; in fact some of my friends felt that I had deviated from my calling as a writer and that I no longer championed the literary cause. I heard some very scathing remarks like, "Don't go to see Keris. He's not the old Keris anymore. He hides in an air-conditioned room under a mountain of manuscripts which he does nothing about."

I did not blame them as it was true that the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka was not working as hard as it should to develop Malay literature. I cried in my heart not because I was

misunderstood by my fellow writers but because I could not do anything to fulfil my duties as a writer or realize my aspiration to help enrich and modernize Malay literature. I too could not blame the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka as I was myself involved in the struggle to ensure that the national language was given its pride of place through intensive campaigns and the publication of textbooks.

When the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka first moved to Kuala Lumpur, I could still find the time to write short stories, articles and editorials for the magazine *Dewan Bahasa*. Sadly, other than the short stories, the articles and editorials were mostly about language. And these articles on language were centred on two objectives, that is, to direct public attention to the national language struggle and to improve language comprehension through guidance and indirect instruction. Given the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's priorities at that time, the content of the magazine was appropriate and the magazine was thus well received by its target audience. However, from the point of view of literary development, it did very little to advance its cause.

When *Utusan Melayu* and *Berita Harian* moved to Kuala Lumpur, the literary community began to pulsate with life at this new political and cultural hub. Almost all the influential writers of Singapore had moved to Kuala Lumpur on the heels of the two newspapers. Literary discussions, especially on the new wave poems penned by several writers in Singapore in the past few years, picked up momentum. With the relocation of the University of Malaya to Kuala Lumpur, the PBMUM, under the leadership of undergraduates who were once active in Singapore, became bigger in strength and interacted more frequently with the language and literary fraternity outside the campus. Young officers who had just graduated from the university and who were once active in the PBMUM in Singapore acted as the catalysts for these interactions.

In my opinion, the literary climate, or more precisely the changes in literary thinking at that time (at the time Malaya achieved its independence and the centre of political and cultural

activities was moved to Kuala Lumpur), was reminiscent of that during the period before the birth of *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* and the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* in Singapore towards the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. However, the similarity ends at the intensity of feelings. The change in literary thinking was different as the background which helped shape them was also different. Literary thoughts in the 1950s were aimed at heightening the maturity of the political and social thinking of a once colonized nation which had fought for independence whereas literary thinking of the early 1960s revolved around creating a more matured newly independent nation to help shore up and sustain its newly-found independence.

I was of the opinion that the form and content of creative writing lagged behind the political and social developments that had been achieved as the thinking of both the people and the leaders had not developed or matured radically enough during the pre-independence years. I began to see that there was an imbalance between the effects of the mental revolution during the ten-year struggle for independence and the achievements of the political struggle for physical change. In many ways, I felt that the people as well as the leaders and the administrators were beginning to feel relieved that independence had been attained. They started to dream of beautiful things and material gains. To my mind, there were signs that the people who had power and money were beginning to think of higher positions and a more affluent life while the poor people were hopeful of assistance and eagerly awaited contributions to fall into their laps. That was what independence meant to most people. The influence of feudalistic thinking coupled with the influence of deviant teachings and superstitions which had been misconstrued as the teachings of Islam as well as the effects of the years of oppression by the colonialists had been too deeply etched to be completely erased at all levels of Malay society.

A number of my short stories which appeared at that time, for example "Menjelang Merdeka", "Runtuh" and "Salah

Pimpin" were written to influence a new way of thinking and to inculcate a sense of responsibility and commitment towards our newly-found independence. This immediately became a trend. Almost all writers then were aware of it and the more dynamic and knowledgeable ones like A. Samad Said, Anis Sabirin, Adibah Amin, and Kassim Ahmad, to name a few, came up with compelling and beautiful short stories and poems. It was the dawn of a new era in creative writing which saw the publication of works which were more advanced and suitable for the post-independence period.

When the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka gave me permission to assist *Berita Harian* select short stories for its weekly competition and publication, I used the opportunity to highlight this new trend among the participating writers. I wrote a critique once a month on the works that I had selected for publication in the newspaper. A number of people were not too happy with my comments because I frequently made the general observation that the achievements of our writers be it from the point of view of form or content, still left a lot to be desired. In point of fact, I was quite optimistic about some of the young writers who were dynamic in their thinking and whose style was more vivid and alive. They appeared to have moved a step forward from the works of writers of the 1950s. They fully understood the era they were in, that is the post-independence era, not the era of fighting for independence. However, most of them, whether they were the old or the young generation writers, were still very much influenced by the romantic idealism of the 1950s. They paid scant attention to the realities of life and the new way of thinking in post-independence Malaya. Nevertheless, this period witnessed the birth of new writers who displayed a higher level of maturity as well as a breed of old school writers who ever so carefully produced works which were in harmony with the times. Some had surfaced in the competition organized by *Berita Harian,* some in *Utusan Zaman* and *Utusan Pemuda*, while others in *Mastika* and *Dewan Bahasa*. However, many writers of the 1950s just disappeared into the background because they were

not dynamic enough to keep pace with the new techniques and the new way of thinking that were more in tune with the times. A. Samad Said who started writing in the mid-1950s, together with Shahnon Ahmad, Arena Wati, Usman Awang, Abdullah Hussain and several others emerged as the links in the nexus between old and new literature, just as Ishak Haji Muhammad and A. Samad Ismail were the links between modern Malay literature of the pre-war era and modern Malay literature of the independence-struggle era. From my experience selecting short stories for *Berita Harian*'s weekly competition and for the magazine *Dewan Bahasa*, I took note of several rising stars like Alias Ali, Anis Sabirin, Kassim Ahmad, Malungun, Nora and Rashid Muhammad.

In my opinion, A. Samad Said and Kassim Ahmad would eventually emerge as the *crème de la crème*. I formed this conclusion not only based on the fact that their work included short stories and poems which employed new techniques and a refreshing style, but also on the ideas which they expressed in the form of essays and critiques. Not long after that, A. Samad Said came out with the novel, *Salina*, which to my mind was the most important turning point for modern Malay novel after Ishak's era and the 1950s. From the versatility of its diction and the explicitness of its expressions, from the way the plot unfolds and the theme develops, *Salina* without a doubt brought innovations that were both invigorating and remarkable to the novel and in a nutshell, was a departure from the novels of the pre-war period and the 1950s. It transcends romantic idealism in form and content and evokes a new ambience of realism which was never before as strongly marked.

However, the publication of *Salina* was not as simple as most people think it was. Like the birth of Masuri S.N.'s new poems and the early short stories of *Angkatan Sasterawan 50*, the birth of *Salina* was only possible after an unusually intensive struggle. It would not be for me to describe how A. Samad Said created *Salina*. Perhaps a better option would be to read his book entitled *Dari Salina ke Langit Petang* (*Proses Mencipta Novel*). However, I feel qualified to give an account of how

Salina emerged as a successful novel after failing to win a novel writing competition organized by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. It so happened that I was the officer in charge of the competition.

Out of approximately forty manuscripts (I've forgotten the actual number) submitted for the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka novel-writing competition in 1958, "Gerhana" (literally translated as "Eclipse") which was unusually thick, caught my attention. It was kept in two thick files as it was not possible to cram it into one. The author was A. Samad Said, a writer who was beginning to make a name for himself in the Malay literary world at that time. I expected the novel to be selected by the panel of judges. For a few months after the deadline for submissions to the competition, I circulated "Gerhana" and the other manuscripts among the five judges. The judges did not know who the authors were as, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the competition, their names did not appear on the manuscripts. The names of the authors were only written on the forms which I carefully kept in a confidential file that was kept in a locked cabinet in the office. The judges had to recommend ten manuscripts each for the final reading before selecting the winning entry. When they each had named the ten selected entries, fifteen manuscripts qualified for the final round. This was because the judges had selected many similar titles. "Gerhana" was one of them. However, only two judges had selected it.

When the judges convened in a bungalow in Port Dickson to discuss the fifteen manuscripts submitted, the discussion on "Gerhana" was the longest compared to that on the other entries. As I had expected, the judges found the manuscript shocking but agreed that it was like a breath of fresh air despite its realism; it revolved around a social theme that had never before been analyzed in such a clear, precise, rational, and logical manner. However, although they agreed that it was refreshing, it was not enough to earn it a place among the winners, as it was full of sexual undertones and erotic scenes which shocked the judges. In fact, one of the judges commented that some

parts of the novel were close to pornography. The judges, in my observation, did not reject the novel solely because of its rather pornographic nature but because most of them had come to the meeting with their own set of criteria, their own preconceptions about what were considered suitable reading material for students. And "Gerhana" obviously flew in the face of these unwritten criteria. After taking a two-day break to unwind and to discuss the other novels, the judges finally came to an agreement that a consolation prize or a special prize be awarded to "Gerhana", with a cautionary statement that it was not recommended for young readers. Two of the five judges were not happy with the decision as they wanted to see "Gerhana" published in view of the innovations it brought to Malay literature in terms of concept and approach. The two judges submitted a special report to the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka urging the organization to have the novel published in the interest of literary development and thinking. They also suggested that certain explicitly erotic sections of the book be re-edited.

The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka organized novel and short story writing competitions every year to spur the creative writing industry which, as I had noted earlier, was somewhat sluggish because all attention and effort were focused on the campaign to support the implementation of Article 152 of the Constitution as well as the publication of textbooks for primary and secondary schools for all subjects in order to make the Education Policy a success. Unfortunately, the judges of these competitions, as were also most of the intellectuals at that time, were obsessed and completely preoccupied with the need to increase reading materials for school students. This consideration overrode all other considerations, in my opinion, and consequently overshadowed the development of literary writing.

When I discussed the judges' decision with Tuan Syed Nasir, he agreed that "Gerhana" should be published. However, the Publication Committee of the Board of Controllers of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka which had the final say in all matters

pertaining to the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's publications did not give its approval. Their reason was the same as that given by the three judges who were worried about the moral implications such a publication would have on students because they felt that the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's priority should be the publication of reading materials for this group of readers. Thus, a long and heated debate ensued. My feeling was that "Gerhana" was rejected not because of its erotic content but because of its modernity. It was a clear departure from the traditional Malay story telling and novel writing, be it in the writing and narrative style it employed, its themes as well as the issues it raised. It was during this "struggle" to have "Gerhana" published that I acquired a greater understanding of the development of modern Malay literature which began in the late 1940s and was later championed by writers of the 1950s. Amongst the administrators, the establishment and the traditional conservatives, there was still intense opposition to this new literary movement. To me if we succeed in getting "Gerhana" published, it would mean that the traditionalists have officially accepted the new movement. It was this that I had fought for since my early days with ASAS 50.

Finally, our Director, Tuan Syed Nasir managed to get the approval of the Publication Committee of the Board of Controllers of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to publish "Gerhana" after the novel "Musafir" which was placed second in the competition (the first prize was not awarded to any manuscript as the judges had felt that none deserved it). When I reread "Gerhana" as an editor, I discovered that the novel seemed to condone prostitution, or at least it did not disapprove of it as a profession (strange that the judges had overlooked this). It was inconceivable to me that A. Samad Said whom I knew, could have held this view. It must be that he wanted to show that Salina who is a victim of war is forced to prostitute herself, and in this big bad world she who has had a sound moral education has to struggle with her inner self and rise above her circumstances to remain righteous. I told this to A. Samad Said and as I had expected he was shocked and became

very worried that others who read it after it was published might get the same impression. Samad read his manuscript again and made only minimal corrections pointing out that Nahidah's mother does not approve of Salina cohabiting with Abdul Fakar and advises Salina to find a way out. Samad also took some of the pornographic elements out so that they are less explicit. Finally, he agreed to change the title "Gerhana" to *Salina*.

Until today I still hold the view that *Salina* is a great novel, modern and the first Malay novel to deal with a universal theme. This, however, does not mean that Salina has no flaws, but that no matter which way one looks at them the flaws appear to be very much a natural part of something that is new, something that is conceived by the human mind. Why do I spend great lengths discussing the publication of *Salina* whereas there are many more novels, poems and short stories of quality that I have not even touched on? The answer is that I think the novel is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it confirms the existence of a group of traditionalists who had not only a strong voice but also influence and power in evaluating and assessing literary works. The subsequent publication of *Salina* by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka was to me an "official" victory for the modernist group who succeeded in overcoming the hurdles set up by the traditionalists who wanted to block the new developments that had begun to surface in the early 1950s. Secondly, *Salina* completed and consummated what many writers had striven to achieve since the post-war days. *Salina*, in other words, is the culmination of the struggle of the post-war modernists to cut a niche in the literary world and the beginning of new developments in creative writing.

Persatuan Penulis Nasional

As I had mentioned earlier, the early years during which writers, publishers, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and the University of Malaya moved to Kuala Lumpur, that is, in 1957 and the years that followed, were years filled with the feverish excitement of ushering in the country's independence. The socio-political

climate was similar to that on the eve of the birth of *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* and the *Lembaga Bahasa Melayu* in Singapore in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. Writers sprouted up here and there, their work covering the desks of the editors at *Utusan Melayu*, *Berita Harian* and the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. The editors and literary activists who had been active in Singapore, the leaders of the PBMUM who were continuing their studies at the university's new campus in Lembah Pantai and the young officers who had once been active in the PBMUM incessantly discussed the literary activities taking place then. They would meet at *Utusan Melayu*, *Berita Harian,* the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and the University of Malaya, and sometimes at the house of some young lecturer of the Malay Language Department, University of Malaya. In the newspapers and magazines they would write or read about the new thinking concerning the relationship between literature and the times they lived in.

Malayan nationalism, in actual fact, was not yet in existence. Independence was not the product of nationalism but of racial unity which for a time worked to suppress the interests of the various different races in order to achieve independence. Malay, Chinese and Indian political thinkers who were united under the Alliance of UMNO, the MCA and the MIC were undoubtedly confident that step by step racial unity could be sustained and improved in the struggle to build a prosperous and peaceful nation. The Communists were still the common enemy, likewise poverty and social as well as economic backwardness which needed to be extirpated. The fundamentals of unity had been agreed upon and incorporated in the Constitution and the National Education Policy. However, the hope of seeing a stronger Malayan nationalism evolve out of cultural values as well as common everyday values remained a cherished dream. The national language, for example, had been accepted as one of the fundamentals of national culture and had been incorporated in the Constitution and the National Education Policy as a tool for national unity. However, the acceptance of Malay as the national language was largely

founded on compromise and there was a lot of give and take between the Malays and the non-Malays for the sake of political unity. At least that was how it was for the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians at that time. The writers who had once fought to give Malay its pride of place felt motivated to not only partake in the Malay language campaigns organized mainly by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka but also to broaden their cause out to include Malay literature. As in the 1950s when literature played an important role in influencing the people to fight for independence, it was felt that literature in that post-independence era could play the role of guiding public thinking and sentiment towards striving for national unity.

This provided the impetus which spurred writers and literary activists to unite under one association. The other factor which drove them to do so was their yearning for public recognition. If during the early years of ASAS 50 they had fought for the right to be paid honorarium for their published works, now they felt the need to be recognized in their field and to have their work protected. There were publishers who had made material gains out of the publication of short stories for example, but sadly the writers were not protected by any copyright agreement. An association would be better equipped to fight for issues such as these as there were still writers who were oblivious of the possibility that unless something was done about it, in the future, their integrity and worth as writers might be disregarded and the relevant parties might ride roughshod over them. In addition, the writers were filled with the desire to increase and expand their knowledge of literature, and to hone their talent as writers through exposure to new theories. This too would be better handled by an association.

Most of the writers who congregated in Kuala Lumpur at that time were those who had been involved in the Malay language cause for the past ten years and many among them were graduates in literature. It was unlike the situation in Singapore in the late 1940s and the early 1950s when the writers and literary activists who gathered there could be said to be comprised of two groups only, that is, journalists and

teachers. The proposed formation of the writers' association became the topic of many heated and lively discussions. Some of the writers who had played an active role in Singapore came forward with the suggestion that ASAS 50 be registered in Kuala Lumpur. However, the political situation in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore were not comparable as the writers and literary activists who converged in the former came from diverse backgrounds; they were not merely journalists and teachers. Among them were those who were actively involved in politics and many of these well-educated writers and activists were government officers, lecturers and undergraduates.

In the end, a number of them were named by the majority of those who spoke unceasingly of the establishment of a writers' association as the people who would be responsible for putting together their ideas into a working paper. They included the late Ali Haji Ahmad and Syed Hussein Ali (detained under the Internal Security Act) who represented the educated group. Among the journalists selected were A. Samad Ismail (detained under the Internal Security Act) and Said Zahari (detained in Singapore). Asraf (from the Oxford University Press) and I (from the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka) represented the publishers.

After several discussions, we came up with a short working paper. We submitted it to the committee responsible for the formation of the association which, if I am not mistaken, was chaired by Yusuf Hitam (a graduate of the University of Malaya who presently works at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and serves as Malaysia's ambassador to a neighbouring country). A special session was held at one of the lecture theatres of the University of Malaya in February 1961 to discuss the paper and ultimately to set up the association. The meeting had the blessings of the then Minister of Education, the late Hon. Abdul Rahman Talib. As the working paper reflected the literary thinking at that time and embodied the desire of the writers to unite under one association, it seems only right for me to share with the readers my recollection of some of the issues discussed in writing the paper.

If I recall correctly, many of the discussions prior to the writing of the paper centred on the ability of the writer to freely state his opinions and thoughts once he was a member of the association. There were constant reminders that writers should not become the tool of any particular political parties and consequently that the association should not get involved in party politics but instead be in the forefront of national politics which transcended the interests of any particular political party. The term "writer" was also discussed as there was concern that if it were defined too liberally the association might become one of literary enthusiasts who had not contributed anything significant or of quality to the field of writing. On the other hand, there was also the fear that if it were defined too narrowly, the association might become an association of a handful of well-known writers, and eventually an association of elitists who have their heads in the clouds and no inkling of the things that were happening on the ground. All these, I feel, were some of the ideas that were put together, apart from the issue of the need to protect the interests and integrity of writers, and their desire to enhance their knowledge, writing skill and experience.

I can still remember clearly that the association was formed at the University of Malaya with almost a hundred members comprising writers who were politicians, journalists, intellectuals, teachers, editors and publishers; well-known personalities like Hon. Datuk Wan Kadir Ismail (deceased), Hon. Datuk Ali Haji Ahmad (deceased), Hon. Datin Paduka Aishah Ghani, Hon. Datuk Embong Yahya, and Hon. Tan Sri Ibu Hajah Zain were also present and contributed ideas. Those who attended also included, Syed Hussein Ali, Kassim Ahmad and A. Samad Ismail who, at the time of writing this memoir, are under political detention. I still remember how lively the whole affair was; various personalities who later became national figures in the field of politics, social welfare and education, high-ranking government officers, diplomats, academics, writers and literary activists who are still active today, took turns to air their views.

In truth, the establishment of the association was a national

event and it saw the birth of a national writers' association which was to be named the *Persatuan Penulis Nasional* (National Writers' Association) or PENA.

PENA's activities from the start reflected its role as a national organization. Its defence of the writers of *Mekar and Segar* who demanded royalty payments and copyright from the Oxford University Press not only benefited these writers but also had wider implications – it started the tradition of recognizing writers as the copyright owners of their work. What GAPENA is fighting for today is a continuation of what PENA had fought for in those days. At the end of 1962, PENA organized a writing course on the radio that attracted 550 participants from all over the country. A national event proposed by PENA (but which did not take off) was some kind of a Literary Prize which was to be awarded to the best writer of the year. However, due to a number of reasons, the plan fell through. One of the reasons, I suppose, was it required the involvement of the other organizations to make it a truly national prize. The other organizations, however, were not able to give their cooperation. And when the late Tun Abdul Razak, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, launched the National Literary Prize in 1971, it was felt that PENA's efforts in pushing for some kind of award for writers had finally gained government support. And in my opinion, the literary prize PENA had in mind was more representative in nature. PENA wanted the involvement of the Ministry of Education, the University of Malaya, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the Language Institute and the *Lembaga Tetap Kongres Bahasa dan Persuratan Melayu* (Permanent Board of the Malay Language and Literature Congress) in the project. These organizations were to administer the project and to select the panel of judges.

Gabungan Persatuan Penulis Nasional

It is not my intention to write at length about PENA's activities because the leaders and members of PENA, and writers in general, are still working to achieve the goals of the

organization. However, several issues had arisen which made it difficult for a number of proposals mooted by PENA to be launched nationwide. PENA's proposal to establish links abroad, that is, links with individuals and associations involved in the field of literature, faced innumerable problems due to insufficient funds. Government grants and sponsorship were hard to come by because it was apparent that the government did not fully recognized PENA as a national body. Partly, this was because the writers' associations in existence in the various states since the 1950s were once again playing an active role. As these associations were constantly in need of government funds, the government was reluctant to recognize PENA as a national body until it proved itself to be able to exercise authority and influence over these associations.

In fact, from what I observed and understood through my close association with those who formed the leadership of PENA at that time, government assistance was not the key issue. What was critical to them was the need to unite the country's writers under one body. Most of PENA's activities were targeted at and involved all writers in the country. However, the writers' associations in the individual states too were also trying to do the same. As a result, the relevant parties who were needed to support PENA's activities and aspirations were disinclined to recognize the latter's authority over these writers' associations. This was one of the many reasons which made PENA begin to think of other ways of consolidating the activities and endeavours of writers throughout the country. As PENA did not have the mechanism to draw the state-level associations into its fold, it therefore came up with the initiative of establishing some kind of a union of writers' associations whereby the writers associations in the various states could continue to carry out their activities independently but at the same time be part of a larger organization at national level.

In 1969 PENA formed a sub-committee with Baharuddin Zainal, Hassan Ibrahim and Sulaiman Alias as its members and A. Bakar Hamid as its Chairman, to study the possibility of forming such a union.

On 20 September 1969, PENA invited the writers' associations of the individual states to discuss the proposal. The thirteen associations that attended the historic gathering agreed to form a union in order to coordinate their activities at national level. They also agreed that PENA be given the responsibility of forming the union. When the decision was brought to PENA's general meeting the next day, which is on 21 September 1969, a heated debate ensued. Although most of the leaders and other important members of PENA agreed with the decision, quite a number considered it an admission of weakness which was tantamount to PENA lowering its status to a state-level association. This they felt was unwise as PENA had all this while operated at the national level and writers throughout the country were well aware of this. In the end, however, all its members agreed how important it was for PENA to make that small compromise for the sake of writers throughout the country. And in order to fulfil the responsibility entrusted to it by the thirteen state writers' associations on the previous day, PENA set up an ad hoc committee to draft the constitution of the proposed union. According to my notes, the committee comprised Hassan Ibrahim (Chairman), A. Bakar Hamid, Baharuddin Zainal, Professor Mohd. Taib Osman, A. Samad Ismail, Mustafa Kamil Yasin, Ismail Dahaman and the writer itself.

I still remember that while drafting the constitution for the proposed union, we frequently invited the state bodies and private individuals who showed a lot of interest in the endeavour to give their ideas. However, we could not come up with a proposed constitution which was a clear departure from PENA's own constitution. In fact, the union which we had all agreed to form was not much different from PENA in terms of objectives and goals. Both organizations were to take care of the interests of writers throughout the country. Both were national in status. What distinguished the proposed union from PENA, however, was its membership, which also encompassed the rights of each member association and the responsibilities as well as the status of the representatives of member

associations who sat on the committee and its working committee. We were bent on drafting a constitution which would facilitate the realization of PENA's dream to set up a union of writers' associations which would not interfere with the autonomy of the individual state associations as it coordinated their activities and undertakings at national level.

GAPENA or its full form *Gabungan Persatuan Penulis Nasional* (Federation of National Writers' Association) was established in October 1970. Most of the members of its working committee were from PENA. Professor Ismail Hussein and I represented PENA at the meeting which saw the launching of GAPENA and were elected First Head and Second Head respectively. My experience as Second Head during the early days of GAPENA gave me the impression that PENA's noticeable presence in the new organization had inadvertently caused a certain degree of resentment among member associations. I thus resigned from my post as Second Head and later as member of the full committee. I did not give the real reasons for this. By way of explanation, I informed the annual general meeting that I was reluctant to be re-elected to the main committee because I had too much work to do.

As I expected, there was dissension within the leadership of GAPENA which to some extent was attributable to PENA's overwhelming presence in the organization. Although no criticism was openly levelled at PENA, there were attempts to lessen PENA's dominance. These were not carried out with great tact, and as a result relations became strained and several people were offended. However, thanks to their maturity, the whole issue was resolved to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

Until the time of writing, I feel that PENA has contributed a lot and has achieved its objective to consolidate the activities of writers nationwide by establishing GAPENA although it had to make many sacrifices in the process. GAPENA itself has become more and more established, matured and perceptive. To date it has not only realized many of the ideas mooted by PENA which was responsible for its birth, but also has the

support of PENA's leaders. At the same time, it is able to keep the many writers' associations which have their own separate agenda, united. Most important of all to my mind, GAPENA has succeeded in getting official and unofficial bodies within and outside the country to acknowledge it as a national organization representing Malaysian writers. Through GAPENA, the writers associations in the various states are getting assistance and incentives from both the state and federal governments. This has paved the way for greater cooperation between Malaysian writers and writers as well as other relevant parties abroad, especially in ASEAN countries.

Planned Literary Development

The national language campaign reached its climax when the *Dewan Rakyat* (House of Representatives) was pressured to pass a resolution to make the national language the only official language within a period of ten years. English was to cease to be an official language. At that time, the campaign was taken over by a group of radical youth who called themselves the National Language Action Front (*Barisan Bertindak Bahasa Kebangsaan*). The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka which had for the preceding ten years organized the campaign with great care and fanfare could not rein back the National Language Action Front who had taken matters into their own hands. They splashed paint on signboards, road signs and other notices in the English language. A number of them were detained on charges of vandalism. The group too sent its key members to all parts of the country to incite the people to demand that the Government take a firmer stand on the national language issue. In the end the people's nationalistic fervour reached fever pitch and there was talk of demonstrations and such like. I think Syed Nasir was in a dilemma. These radical young men were his staff, and their leaders were largely Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's officers and employees. In his heart of hearts I feel he was proud that he had supporters who were passionate and zealous about their cause. But he was in an awkward position

as his reasoning told him that he had to employ good judgement especially because there were UMNO and government leaders who were already accusing him of being responsible for the volatile situation and blaming him for failing to contain the waves of unrest. Coincidentally, Indonesia at that time had just declared its intention to embark on a military campaign to "wipe out" Malaysia. The Malaysian government consequently wanted its people to focus their attention on the impending confrontation. However, the people were more concerned about issues surrounding the national language.

When the weekly, *The Sunday Times*, reported the Yang di-Pertuan Agong's royal address at the closing ceremony of the national language campaign and relegated it to the bottom of an inside page, it caused a considerable furore. The National Language Action Front which had been monitoring the pro-English language newspaper was completely outraged. The newspaper incidentally was, at that time, still under the control of its London office. The National Language Action Front immediately made the decision to hold a demonstration to demand that the newspaper apologized to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (the King) and the people. Unfortunately (or was it fortunately?) that day, a state of emergency was declared as Indonesian troops were reported to have landed in Labis, Johor. As such, plans to hold the demonstration had to be shelved. However, a delegation comprising five leaders of the Action Front called at the *Straits Times* office to meet the Editor-in-Chief. The next day, the newspaper published an apology in its editorial and the following week, devoted a column for the learning of the national language.

Tension began to mount when the National Language Action Front held a massive rally at the Balai Budaya Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka which literally brimmed over with supporters. I sat in the room of the Special Assistant to Tan Sri Syed Nasir waiting for the latter to appear as he was needed by the leaders of the Action Front to address the crowd that had gathered. I became restless when voices from the crowd below which kept calling out his name grew louder and louder. I

went into his room to inform him about it. It was quite clear that he was waiting for a call, either from the Prime Minister's residence or the UMNO headquarters where the UMNO Supreme Council was reported to be having a meeting. When Tan Sri Syed Nasir finally came out of his office and I escorted him to the Balai Budaya, only he could get into the auditorium and onto the stage. I was blocked by the crush of people who were jostling and cheering. Some people in the crowd appeared to be burning something in front of the foyer below the Balai Budaya. The rally ended in a march to the Prime Minister's residence with some demonstrators carrying a symbolic "Coffin 152", in an attempt to get the attention of the UMNO supreme council which was said to be having a meeting.

Not long after that, Parliament declared Malay as the sole official language; nine years after Malaya achieved its independence as stated in Article 152 of the Constitution.

Thus the national language campaign which had taken up so much time and effort came to a successful end. I was then allowed to take leave for three weeks. For the past ten years, especially since the launch of the national language campaign, I did not take more than two or three days leave at any one time. I thus used the opportunity to take a break in Penang with my wife and children. However, I brought my typewriter with me hoping to start on a new novel that had been in my mind for quite sometime. My children, Noorhayati and Amir were still very young and were looking forward to the holiday. It was the first time they were able to enjoy a family outing by the sea, up in Bukit Bendera and so on with both their parents. It was also the first time my wife and I had the opportunity to go on holiday together. We rented a government chalet on a hill slope on Jesselton Road, near the racecourse. It was so peaceful there, shady, calm and tranquil. I wrote day and night, whenever I had free time. And when I returned to Kuala Lumpur, I brought back with me a manuscript entitled "Anak Titiwangsa". That was the last time I wrote a creative piece of work. When I retired ten years later, I almost cried in

front of my friends and colleagues at a farewell party they held for me. I told them that I had failed to preserve my talent as a creative writer. As they took turns to pay tribute to me at the farewell party, praising me for my ability as their head and administrator, my heart sank as being a successful manager and administrator was not what I had aspired to be. At that moment I could not help but recall Cikgu Mahmud Ahmad's advice twenty years ago when I asked him whether it was a good idea for me to join the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

In fact, in the last few years before my retirement, I was quite agitated thinking of my diminishing talent as a writer. For ten years, I did not write a single line which could be called creative writing. Adibah Amin, Yahaya Ismail and a few others once asked me why I did not write anymore. I am sure they meant well and were concerned that I should not be too immersed in office work that I ended up destroying my creative talent. My answer, I am certain, could not have convinced them as I cited a tight schedule and heavy responsibilities at the office as the reasons for it. I knew it was a lame excuse. However, I was aware of my weakness, that is, my inability to concentrate on two things at a time – my creative work as a writer and my work at the office with its attendant responsibilities. For me, creative writing required me to dedicate every ounce of energy, thought and imagination that I had to it. Likewise, my work at the office; it too required me to put my heart and soul into it. The truth is, I was not able to handle two things at one time. Only I was aware of this shortcoming. The others did not realize it and even if they did, they would find it quite illogical as there were many examples of people whose responsibilities were as heavy as mine, or rather even heavier, and yet were able to continue producing creative writing. Sometimes I would console myself by saying that everyone had his or her shortcomings, and mine happened to be that.

Today, fear still grips my heart that I have lost whatever creative talent I have, although I try to console myself by saying that I shall relearn how to write short stories. I certainly shall try to acquire the skills once again. It has been ten years since

I wrote a literary piece and this is not a small thing at all. But can I recover what I have lost in just a matter of one or two years? Only God knows. At the time that I wrote *Anak Titiwangsa* in Penang in 1966, I did not realize that I had already initiated the processes to snuff out my own creativity. At that time, I was not only writing *Anak Titiwangsa* but also mulling over an idea which I planned to put forward to the Director, Tan Sri Syed Nasir, upon my return to work. I was thinking about telling the Director that since the national language campaign which had taken up a lot of time, planning and effort was over, there was no longer any excuse for the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka not to turn its attention to the development of literature.

My idea was to set up a separate section in the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka called the Literary Development Department (*Bahagian Perkembangan Sastera*) which was responsible for the advancement and development of Malay literature. The Department would be divided into three sections – a section responsible for the publication of literary books and magazines, a section responsible for research on classical and modern Malay literature and one responsible for literary activities. I planned to ask for a transfer to the new Department and to vacate my post as Chief Editor.

When I mooted the idea to the Director, Tan Sri Syed Nasir, he was quite excited by it. Incidentally, he had been thinking of something quite similar but on a larger scale. His idea was to divide the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka into several departments with each department being free to plan its own developments and activities, and to prepare its budget requirements. In that way, according to Tan Sri Syed Nasir, the implementation of projects at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka would be smoother and more efficient, manpower training would be more effective, and the workload would be more evenly shared and not burdened on one or two people only. He said that he felt sorry for the Chief Editor (someone like me) who was responsible for scrutinizing all manner of manuscripts. Laughing, I told him that I was tired of being "superman".

I was happy that my views coincided with his and began formulating a more comprehensive and detailed plan. However, for sometime the idea did not pick up enough momentum to be implemented. Too many other matters demanded the attention of the Director and the Board of Control. Finally, the time came for Tan Sri Syed Nasir to retire. He was certainly in poor health. He had blacked out a number of times at his office. There was one time when he had to be sent to the hospital for emergency treatment. I think he was suffering from high blood pressure. Tan Sri Syed Nasir later stood for election for a parliamentary seat in 1969.

The late Ali Haji Ahmad who replaced Tan Sri Syed Nasir as Director also resigned to enter politics. Hassan Ahmad (now Datuk Hassan Ahmad), one of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's research officers who was appointed as acting Director, had for a long time been following Tan Sri Syed Nasir's thoughts on the restructuring of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. However, when he first took over as acting Director, he was bogged down with many new problems which had arisen. The biggest and the most complex was the translation of books for the universities.

I will not enlarge upon the predicament and difficulties faced by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka during the transitional period when one director after another took over the helm. However, what I want to explain is that my aspiration to implement the development of literature in a well-planned way could not be successfully achieved until Tuan Haji Sujak Rahiman (now Datuk Haji Sujak Rahiman) became the Director of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. He was the first Director-General of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. Before that, the Chief Executive of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka was referred to as the Director. Under Datuk Haji Sujak changes in the administration were carried out and similar efforts were continued by Tuan Haji Hassan when he was appointed Director. When Datuk Sujak first took over the helm, he spent a full three weeks, twenty-one days that is, having discussions with senior officers. At first he called us one by one. Then he

held a meeting and brought together all the senior officers he had met and had discussions with. Datuk Haji Sujak emphasised the need to enhance communication among the departments and among the officers and employees. He referred to this as *silaturahim* ("close friendship"). Datuk Sujak's idea of an effective communication system seemed rather outdated but there is no denying that the essence of all human communication is *silaturahim*. In order to nurture sound human relationships, modern communication systems should in fact be rooted in what Datuk Sujak termed as *silaturahim*.

I put forward my ideas about the need to have a well-planned programme for literary development to Datuk Haji Sujak and submitted a working paper showing how they could be implemented through the setting up of a department called the Literary Development Department. However, it appeared that from the start it had been noted that my big plans for literary development would not be able to solve the problems faced by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka as a whole. As was the case with Tan Sri Syed Nasir, Datuk Haji Sujak agreed that the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's administrative system should be decentralized. Departments should be set up and wider powers be given to those departments that were concerned with the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's core activities. However, Datuk Haji Sujak went one step further by agreeing to my idea that departments that were ready should be set up immediately without having to wait for the whole restructuring exercise to take place. On those grounds, he allowed me to vacate my position as Chief Editor and take up my new post as Head of the Literary Development Department which I was to immediately set up.

Some of my associates whose sole aim in life was to climb the administrative ladder remarked that I had been demoted from the post of Chief Editor to the head of a small department. I did not bother about such talk as I felt that everyone was entitled to his own opinion. I merely wanted to realize my dreams through the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka that is to strive to enhance and widen the influence of modern Malay literature,

to develop and discover new literary talents whose way of thinking was more advanced and writing techniques more contemporary. I wanted to see national literature develop in a healthy and progressive way. I wanted it to be of use to society and continue to preserve its link with the Malay literature which had been in existence for centuries. My guiding principle was that we should modernize our way of thinking without losing our Malay identity. If we were to become a new nation called the Malaysian nation and be part of the new world of science and technology, we must retain our Malay identity: we would then be modern and dynamic, yet polite, pious and devoted to God.

This kind of philosophical talk might sound high-falutin. But I have been in the literary world for too long, in the company of thinkers and literature buffs for too many years. I am confident, and my early experiences as a young man had taught me so, that the progress and well-being of a society does not depend on its political and economic systems alone; there must also be strong cultural and spiritual underpinnings which support these systems. Would the Literary Development Department set up by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 1971 be able to develop national literature which would help strengthen spiritual values, social ethics, rational thinking, and nurture a life that is full of purpose and dynamism. Everything depended on our willingness to face challenges. I myself had not thought seriously about whether I was up to facing them. What I was determined to do was to get as many literary and cultural enthusiasts as possible to be aware of this philosophy and to make it part of their life. To my colleagues who had organized the farewell party for me recently, I would like to stress that the commitment of those involved in the field of literature, be it at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka or elsewhere, is a life-long commitment. They will always have to work hard and forge ahead despite all odds.

The Literary Development Department began its operations when the Editorial Department was split into two departments, viz, the Textbook Department (*Bahagian*

Buku Pelajaran) which was to be responsible for the publication of textbooks and the Literary Development Department. Majority of the editorial staff chose to join the latter while the rest joined the former. Two years after it was set up, the Literary Development Department was further divided into two sections, Literary Section and General Publishing Section (*Bahagian Penerbitan Umum*) which handles children's books and books for general reading, according to the plan, would later be split to form a new department which will be assigned the responsibility of publishing children's books. This restructuring process continued and gained momentum when Hassan Ibrahim was appointed the new Deputy Director-General of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. Not long after I retired, Hassan Ibrahim was transferred to another government department and was succeeded by Haji Jumaat bin Haji Mohd. Noor. Throughout, Haji Hassan Ahmad remained as the Director-General.

The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka will always be a part of my life. I am truly hopeful that it would not become merely an arm of the government which publishes primary and secondary school books. What is important is that it should not lose sight of the original resolution passed by the Third Malay Language and Literature Congress and the vision of the late Tun Abdul Razak which established the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka as a catalyst for the development and advancement of Malay language and literature. From my own experience, I realize that it is difficult not to have the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka involved in textbook publication and because of this; it will always be under the aegis of the Ministry of Education. And I understand that the role of the educationist is as important as that of the language and literary activist.

Some have asked me – after being in operation for almost seven years, how much has the Literary Development Department contributed to the literary community in Malaysia. I am not able to answer such a question. What we should try to find out now is how much support has the Department so far got from within the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and without.

For me, there is still some question whether the functions of the Department and the philosophy behind its setting up are fully understood. This was my message to my colleagues at the farewell party – that our job is a lifetime job. We must always work hard and be resolute in our purpose.

The National Literary Prize

When I first held the post of Head of the Literary Development Department, I recalled a plan by PENA in the early years of its formation, to propose an award called the *Hadiah Sastera Kebangsaan* (National Literary Prize) which would give recognition to the writer who has produced the most commendable literary work. The prize was to be awarded once a year, once every few years or whenever there is a deserving candidate. The plan fell through due to lack of cooperation among the relevant institutions and government departments.

I thought long and hard about it and sought the opinion of many whom I felt would give their support should the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka one day be able to realize its ambition to give some form of recognition to writers. The Literary Development Department would of course be the secretariat or coordinating body. While I was busy deliberating over this, one day I was invited to a grand picnic at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized by Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie for his staff just before he joined politics. I was a little reluctant to go to the picnic as firstly, I was not King Guz's (that was his nickname at the Ministry) staff, meaning I was not a staff or officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, not only was Tan Sri Ghazali a leader and a diplomat, he was also an intellectual who had a wide-range of literary and artistic preferences and interests. It was probably for this reason that I and one or two others ended up at the picnic at his retreat on the edge of Sungai Gombak. To my surprise and delight, he mooted the idea of a Literary Academy (*Akademi Sastera*). When I told him what I was doing and what I thought Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka ought to do to realize our goals for

literature, he stressed that the Literary Academy should ideally be an independent body supported by literary luminaries and intellectuals. From that brief discussion, I gathered that he was all for awarding the highest literary prize to deserving writers, and that the evaluation to decide who should receive the award must be done by an independent body, not by any government department although the government was to provide the funds for it. However, it would be quite a task to bring together intellectuals, writers and others to run an academy on a voluntary basis with dedication. Would such an establishment get public recognition? In reply, Tan Sri Ghazali quoted the example of the Academie Francaise that started as a small group of French literary luminaries.

Tan Sri Ghazali brought up the idea of a Literary Academy in the speech he gave at the ceremony at which he was conferred an honorary Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Malaya. I had never discussed what we talked about that day with anyone. But I wrote a note to the Director-General of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka about this idea in relation to my plan for the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to be the coordinator of literary activities including the National Literary Prize. I finally wrote in the journal, *Dewan Sastera*, about the proposed *Akademi Sastera* but what was picked up by the papers was slightly different from that proposed by Tan Sri Ghazali. I was still of the opinion that the Academy should be funded fully by the government although it should be administered and run independently by the Academy's Council or Board. There were various reactions to my article. Some supported it and some advised us to exercise caution. Finally, the idea of establishing an Academy came up again when a demand for a National Theatre and Cultural Complex was made.

One day, I received word that the Prime Minister, the late Tun Abdul Razak was going to launch a national literary prize. Instead of convening a meeting with writers, the Prime Minister invited several people to his residence, Sri Taman, and announced his intention. He asked the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to be the secretariat responsible for managing the prize

and raising funds for it. He sought the approval of the Minister of Education, Datuk Hussein Onn and the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, which was represented by the Director, Datuk Hassan Ahmad. The Director-General, Haji Sujak was not present. Subsequently, he appointed Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie as Chairman of the Panel and me as the Secretary. I was appointed Secretary as I was the Head of the Literary Development Department which would act as the Secretariat. The Prime Minister also appointed a Panel of Literary Advisors (*Panel Penasihat Sastera*) which was entrusted with the duty of advising him on the development of literature as a whole. He asked for the names of the candidates to be shown to him so that he could personally select the members of the Panel. At that meeting, many names were suggested, including those of critics, literature lecturers from universities as well as writers. Soon, several of the people suggested were offered to become members of the Panel and were later officially appointed by the Prime Minister himself. The Prime Minister stressed that in the beginning, apart from giving recognition for literary achievements, the Literary Prize would also be a catalyst for literary development. Thus, the first meeting of the Panel agreed that every piece of literary work written in the national language by a Malaysian citizen and published in a particular year in any form in this country was to be read, considered and evaluated.

That was the beginning of the historic National Literary Prize. According to the Prime Minister, the time had not come yet for conferring the highest award to the best writer in the land – the *Anugerah Sastera* (Literary Award). The nation was in the process of developing in every aspect, even in the field of literature and the arts. Therefore, as was with other fields, the development of literature should also take place in stages.

Unfortunately, the work of the Panel was made even more difficult when the Panel became the target of numerous criticisms. It was accused of selecting works that revolved only around development; members of the Panel were said to be not really competent or qualified; the selection of the members

was also claimed to be undemocratic. However, basically, almost everyone agreed that it was a step in the right direction for the Prime Minister to have taken the initiative. Some of the criticisms were accurate but many were based on emotion and were wide off the mark. The Panel continued to work with great care and dedication. As the Secretary, I was subject to a lot of stress as a result of these criticisms that came from within and without. But thinking that this was a golden opportunity to attract the public and the government's attention to literature and its role in nation building, I did not let it affect my work. It was an added bonus that in carrying out our duties, we succeeded in compiling a well-arranged and comprehensive documentation of writers and their works. For the first time in our history, the life and works of all local writers which appeared in the various publications were systematically documented.

The emotional pressure on the members of the Panel reached its climax when one of them was arrested under the Internal Security Act. Each and everyone of the Panel members felt humiliated when they were accused of being influenced by A. Samad Ismail in making their evaluation and selection. Although the Chairman of the Panel who was also the Home Minister gave an explanation of how the evaluation and selection was done and emphasized that the system was such that none of the Panel members was able to impose his or her ideas on the others, the damage done by these wild accusations had left a deep mark on the minds of the Panel members. Not one of them wanted to continue serving on the Panel. They unanimously applied to tender their resignation. However, the Chairman, with his wisdom, forthrightness and diplomacy was able to persuade them to complete the last year of their term (their appointment was for five years only). The Literary Prize was up for review by the Prime Minister that year to enable him to consider carefully his promise that one day the government would confer a Literary Award to the writer with the highest literary achievement. As we all know, the Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, passed away before that could be

carried out. I guess the new Prime Minister, Datuk Hussein Onn, must have given this matter some thought because he agreed to the *Hadiah Pejuang Sastera* (Literary Advocate Prize) which was awarded to a number of writers before he made the decision to launch the Literary Award. It was the end of the road for the National Literary Prize which had only enjoyed a six-year existence. Until today, I am still waiting and I suppose so also is everyone else, particularly writers, for the government to take a step in the direction of creating the much waited for award. GAPENA had tried to start the ball rolling by holding a discussion in Teluk Kemang, Negeri Sembilan on 7 February 1978 and submitted their findings to the Prime Minister's Department to nudge the government into considering some course of action.

Personally, and taking as neutral a stand as possible on the harsh criticisms hurled at the Panel of the National Literary Prize for six years, I still cling to the hope which I had cherished since before the Literary Prize was created, that some kind of a Literary Prize or Award be given to the writers of the land as part of our literary tradition.

Anti-Establishment Sentiments

Here I would like to bring my memoirs to a close. At first I had wanted to include some jottings on my participation and experience in language-related activities such as my involvement in terminology work which had enriched my world view and given me the opportunity to work alongside experts in language and linguistics, and specialists in the fields of science, technology and the humanities from both Malaysia and Indonesia. However, it is too complicated and complex. I thus decided against it. At some other opportunity perhaps.

I do not have any regrets if any part of my memoirs (which mainly touches on the development of literature in the country) does not correspond with the experience or knowledge some other people might have. I do not expect anything out writing of it; all I want to do is to reminisce about some of the events

we had witnessed or partaken in which, who knows, could be of some use to us when planning for our future. Personal and shared experiences are equally important and can be used as the basis of comparison in our effort to put right what we had done wrong.

I would like to conclude by making this observation. In the thirty years that have passed, Malay youth like all other youth in the world in general and in the developing countries in particular, had this overpowering desire to reject whatever was considered old and out-of-date. The political, economic, cultural and social systems all bore the brunt of their rejection. Students in particular marched in all the streets of the world demanding for democratic justice and finding fault with everything proposed by the Establishment. It was not enough for these young people that the establishment operated on the axis of democracy. For them there was nothing new or satisfactory. Everything smacked of the old ways. Our youth too were embroiled in this dilemma. Rationalism became purely theoretical and most of the actions taken showed that they stemmed from minds that were not completely rational. It was the same in the literary world. Indiscriminate criticisms came fast and furious from all corners against particular individuals or groups. Writers were perceived as too far ahead of their times or too far behind. Writers of the old school were considered useless. One line penned by a new generation writer could wipe out the works of scores of writers of the past who had toiled for years and years. Young writers were either too green or introverted. In addition, writers themselves turned into critics, either critics of other writers or of critics. There was an inclination among writers to write short stories or poems that lampooned other short story writers and poets.

It came to a point that every critic was regarded as a literary surgeon who was adept at tearing creative works to pieces until they became unrecognizable. Every writer was considered a dreamer or a toady; every editor partial to his friends; every panel a team of imbeciles. And so on. I was full of misgivings about being a part of the literary world at the time when our

youths were afflicted by this anti-establishment syndrome. But as did happen in other parts of the world and in Malaysia, the time came when the fever seemed to subside. And when the Panel for the National Literary Prize was dissolved, many were greatly saddened by it. These were the ones who had claimed that the literary prize was a government-sponsored project to promote development.

During the period of anti-establishment hysteria, I was attacked from all quarters as I was among the remnants of ASAS 50, an editor at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka who was in charge of literary books and magazines, the Secretary and a member of the National Literary Prize Panel, and a literary activist. I was labelled anti-intellectual and anti-young generation writers; I was accused of oppressing young writers, hatching a plot to destroy young talents, of buttering up the government, and arrogantly maintaining ASAS 50's dominance.

I did not let any of that bother me. I understood what the young people were going through then. This hysteria not only affected the literary world, but politics as well. Even marriages were not spared. However, this does not mean that I did not feel any emotional pain. Someone whose work I admired and whom I tried to help become well known by publishing his writings, including those that belittled me, sent me a curious *Hari Raya* (Eid) greetings card which read: "Once a person does something bad to someone, throughout his life he will not be trusted." Everyone who calls himself Malay will definitely be deeply hurt if he were accused of being *lancung keujian* especially when he does not know why such an accusation has been levelled at him. My Eid that year was spoiled by the strange greetings card. What was the bad deed that I was supposed to have done? I do not think that there is anyone in this world who could sincerely prove that I had done anything malicious as I have not cheated anyone, never had evil intentions, never oppressed or humiliated anyone for my own gain.

Why am I disclosing this, especially as the incident seems to be very personal? This personal attack, in actual fact, had a devastating effect on me. Perhaps the experience was even more

painful than that which Tan Sri Syed Nasir underwent when we were in the midst of fighting off the onslaught of the group which championed multilingualism. However, apparently many people had had similar experiences. My conclusion is that all of us have to go through two stages in life – youth and old age. The young are easily worked up. This is a fact of life, whether or not there is some truth in it from the point of view of human psychology, I do not know. When the young get angry care must be taken to ensure that the old do not get irrational. If nobody becomes irrational, God willing the matter will end there; there will not be any deep-seated ill feeling. Recounting the story about the strange Eid greetings card which contained the words *lancung keujian* is not a sign that I have become irrational; God willing I do not harbour any vengeful thoughts. The incident to me is very strange, and is contradictory to the spirit of Eid. That is all there is to it. Such strange behaviour can only be the result of some kind of hysteria. In this case it was the anti-establishment hysteria.

This was just one of the strange occurrences in the early years of literary criticism (the early 1970s) that saddens me. However, with time, literary criticism became more matured and rational. We have critics like A. Bakar Hamid, Hashim Awang, Baharuddin Zainal, Dr. Ali Ahmad (Alis Murni), Ilias Zaidi, Yahaya Ismail, Mohd. Affandi Hassan, to name a few, who are young, but not angry.

Since several years ago, that is since the end of the 1960s and right into the beginning of the 1970s, literary talents have sprouted up by the hundreds. This was the period during which the old and the new co-existed with such compatibility. The maturity of the old writers harmonized well with the clear intellect of the young. Usman Awang, A. Samad Said, Shahnon Ahmad, Arena Wati, S. Othman, Abdullah Hussain, Suhaimi Haji Muhammad, Adibah Amin worked hand in hand with Kemala, Baha Zain, Muhammad Haji Salleh, Latif Mohidin, Abdul Talib Hassan, Zaid Ahmad, Anwar Ridhwan, Johan Jaaffar, Fatimah Busu, Zurinah Hassan, Norhisham Mustaffa, Abdullah Tahir, Darmala N.S., Dharmawijaya, Ali Majod, Azizi

Abdullah, Mana Sikana, Dinsman were just some of those who had blossomed in the field of local literature. What we have today is what was too ideal to hope for twenty years ago. I remember the late Aminuddin Baki's prayer that I said amen to and his aspiration which he gave voice to at Orchard Road, Singapore in 1949. His prayer and aspiration which had driven me to crawl to the campus at that time and in the years that followed in order to spend time with friends had resulted in a healthy interaction between the highly-educated and the literary community. Scholars and literary activists such as Professor Ismail Hussein, A. Bakar Hamid, Professor Mohd. Taib Osman, Wahab Ali and many more will forever be remembered for their role in developing literature in the country. They have managed to fill the vacuum that had been there for decades. I do not have any regrets although at the age of fifty-five I leave the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka with a writing talent that is much faded. For thirty years I have struggled with the others to realize a dream which had become a reality today.

The country's literary activists and enthusiasts will forge ahead given the better facilities available. We are now entering a new era, the era of Malay literature with an Islamic message. I pray that Allah will always protect our literary fraternity from attacks of hysteria such as the ones I had witnessed. I pray that we will succeed in developing literature that reflects and upholds the truth in Islam. It will be yet another feather in the cap of Malay literature.

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