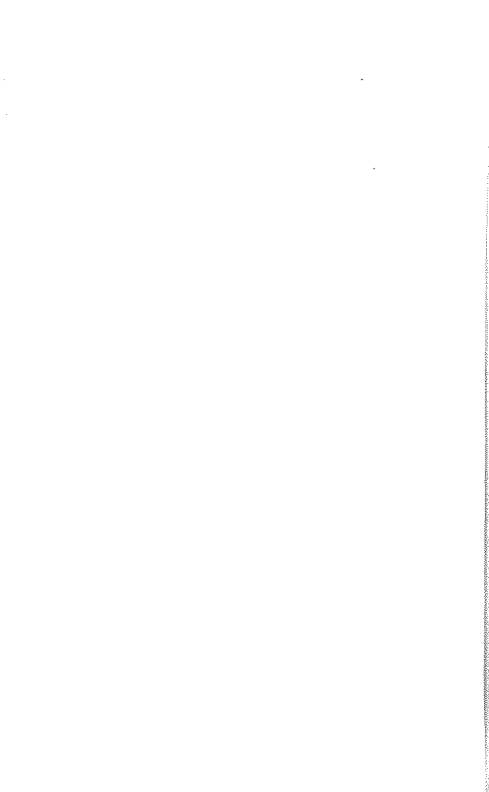


001-6

Malaysian
Literary Laureates

SELECTED WORKS



Malaysian Literary Laureates

SELECTED WORKS

Translated by
SOLEHAH ISHAK *et. al.*

Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
Kuala Lumpur
1998

This book *Malaysian Literary Laureates: Selected Works* is a compilation of works collected from the journal, *Malay Literature* published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, P.O. Box 10803, 50926 Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA.

First Printing 1998

© Translated Version, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Malaysia 1998

All Rights Reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Director-General, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, P.O. Box 10803, 50926 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Negotiation is subject to the calculation of royalty or honorarium.

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Malaysian literary laureates : selected works / translated by

Solehah Ishak *et al.*

ISBN 983-62-6325-X

1. Malay literature.

I. Solehah Ishak.

899.2309

ms
899.2309
D / E ✓

APB952357
NASKHAH PEMELIHARAAN
PERPUSTAKAAN NEGARA MALAYSIA
22 JUL 1999

Printed by

Percetakan Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka

Lot 1037, Mukim Perindustrian PKNS

Ampang/Hulu Kelang

Selangor Darul Ehsan

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>The National Literary Award: Concept and History</i>	xiii
<i>Keris Mas</i>	3
Literary Politics and Political Literature	7
Jungle of Hope (Part One)	16
<i>Shahnon Ahmad</i>	75
Love	82
A Merdeka Tale	87
<i>Usman Awang</i>	111
A Writer's Voice of Humanity	116
Father Utih, Poppies, White Dove, Explore the World, Ancient Sky and Mankind at War, Humanity, Voice from the Grave, Greetings	122

CONTENTS

to the Continent, Black Snow, Father Utih (2), A Ballad Mourning the Murder of an Old <i>Beringin</i> Tree, Letter from the Bird Community to the Mayor	
<i>A. Samad Said</i>	147
Writing is a Happy Malaise, a Beautiful Sadness	151
Salina (Chapter One)	161
<i>Arena Wati</i>	179
Literature: The Spokesperson of an Enlightened Heart	184
A Letter from the Mountain	190
<i>Muhammad Haji Salleh</i>	203
Our People Must Sail the Seas of the World	208
No More the World, For Kasturi, Distance, A Heap of Words, This is No Place for Telling the Truth, All Along the Way, Rain, Teller of Tales, Shadow Play i, The Forest's Last Day, Among Vegetables, Politician, The Slant of Ways, Chapter Fifteen, Chapter Sixteen, Chapter Thirty-Two (ii), No Eternity, Farmers, Nothing is Ever Ended, Firenze	215
<i>Noordin Hassan</i>	239
Earthly Trials ... Whereto Our Literature?	242
1400	248
<i>Abdullah Hussain</i>	297
Religion Can Help Strengthen One's Religious Belief	305
Surrender	317

Preface

THE *Anugerah Sastera Negara* (National Literary Award) was first incepted by the Government of Malaysia in the early 1980s. This Award, the highest for literature, is presented to established authors who have produced outstanding works in bahasa Malaysia/bahasa Melayu, the national language of the country. It confers upon the awardee the title of *Sasterawan Negara* (National Literary Laureate), the earliest being presented in 1981, and the latest in 1996. Up to the present time, eight authors have been honoured, and, in chronological order, they are:

Keris Mas (1981); Shahnnon Ahmad (1982); Usman Awang (1983); A. Samad Said (1986); Arena Wati (1988); Muhammad Haji Salleh (1991); Noordin Hassan (1993); and Abdullah Hussain (1996).

Each of these authors have devoted themselves to the development of the Malaysian literary tradition wholly, from the time of their youth into their advanced years. Within such time they have continuously experimented with contemporary techniques and ideas thus producing numerous works of outstanding merit, which have drawn large numbers of admirers and followers.

With regard to their works, all of these authors have distinguished themselves in more than one of the genres within modern Malaysian literature. Generally, however, they have been recognised and honoured as Malaysian Literary Laureates for their eminence in specific literary forms. Keris Mas, for instance, is better known as a master craftsman of short stories, although he has also produced fine novels. Usman Awang is first and foremost a poet, although he is also a skilful short story writer and playwright. Shahnun Ahmad, Arena Wati and Abdullah Hussain are renowned both as novelists as well as short story writers. A. Samad Said is an innovative and excellent novelist as well as a skilful poet, although his plays are no less impressive. In comparison, Muhammad Haji Salleh and Noordin Hassan are more specialised writers, each esteemed as a poet and a playwright respectively.

With the exception of the late Keris Mas, and Usman Awang who is now in failing health, each of the authors continues perseveringly to yield creative works up to now. As leading members of the Malaysian literary scene they also actively share their influence and support, guidance and leadership with the young generation and generally with other writers striving of artistic excellence.

The present volume attempts to provide the first anthology of selected works of all eight Malaysian Literary Laureates in English translations. It is not by any means comprehensive. Generally, each writer is represented here only by one of his creative works. This is preceded by an essay which is in fact his individual award acceptance speech. Nevertheless, the anthology reflects the styles and accomplishments of the writers, and hopefully, represents an adequate picture of meritorious Malaysian works in the national language.

Again and again, it has been concurred that in spite of its universal character, literature is basically the product of a particular race and a specific milieu. In this context it is hoped that the interested English reader will discern,

through the nearly impossible task of the translator to reproduce the original, a fuller appreciation of the essential identity and spirit of reputable Malaysian authors. What will be apparent is the authors' involvement with and commitment to tradition, community and self. Their humility and dignity, the deeply entrenched roots in their country, people, and ideals, and the courage of their conviction, form the hallmarks of the selection presented here. These also form the bases upon which their creative abilities rest.

The anthology opens with the writings of Keris Mas. The extract from his novel, *Rimba Harapan (Jungle of Hope)*, introduces the reader to the plight of the Malay community which suffers from capitalist exploitation during the British colonial period. Closely linked to his fiction, Keris' essay on literary endeavour calls for a commitment to society and a return to the Malay tradition rooted in the ideals of Islam. Shahnun Ahmad's short story, "Dongeng Merdeka" ("A Merdeka Tale"), further reflects the plight of the people as well as the contradiction of the elite, dwelling cynically as it were on the double theme of colonial servitude and independence. A professor in Malay literature, Shahnun, like Keris, also calls for a return to the Islamic ideals in his essay. In fact, within the contemporary setting Shahnun is well known in Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore and Indonesia as a strong advocate of the concept of literature which upholds the tenets of Islam.

Slightly different from both Shahnun and Keris, Usman Awang's concern for the plight of the destitute and down-trodden spans the continents, regardless of place, community or racial group. Both his poems and essay in this anthology reflect his empathy with the poor and the exploited, as well as his objection to suppression and war everywhere. Usman's "Pak Utih" ("Father Utih"), for example, is not only about a Malay peasant, but also about peasants in general who are normally neglected and exploited by the ruling elite. Usman, whose poetry is entrenched in the Malay poetic tradition, is indeed the Malaysian gentle

voice of humanity *par excellence*. Closely related to Usman is A. Samad Said's voice of humanity which is well reflected in the extract from his famous novel, *Salina*. The novel beautifully unfolds the story of Salina, a prostitute with the proverbial heart of gold who nevertheless suffers from the effect of social evils. Like his creative works, Samad's essay upholds his concern both for humanity and for the beauty of his craft.

Arena Wati's short story, "Surat dari Gunung" ("A Letter from the Mountain") basically focuses on love. But, as with his fiction in general, the preoccupation with the world beyond the national boundary is clear here. Unlike most of his fellow laureate, Arena has a penchant for narratives in which his overseas visits and travels are documented. Unlike them too, most of his works are based on his wide experience at sea, being himself a sailor when he was younger. However, like most of them, he too calls for a literature which leads to the truth ensuring peace for mankind, as may be seen in his essay. Like Arena, the poet Muhammad Haji Salleh too has a passion for travel. A professor of literature, Muhammad has a long standing Western orientation. For him, to travel beyond one's homeland is to enlarge one's horizon, to be international. But, in being international it is important not to loose one's moorings, lest one's become severed. The best is to strike a balance, i.e., to be international and yet rooted in one's culture and tradition. Some of Muhammad's poems represented in the anthology, such as "farmers" and "firenze", record his observations of places and events of his Western sojourn. Others reflect the poet's concern for tradition. The poems "chapter fifteen", "chapter sixteen" and "chapter thirty-two", for example, are inspired by events and themes contained in the traditional Malay text, *Sejarah Melayu (Malay Annals)*. Muhammad's concern for nature is reflected in his "the forest's last day" as is apparent in the following lines:

death comes at the end of the chain saw

...
 fallen is the *cengal*
 fallen is the *meranti*
 fallen is the *merbau*
 fallen is the *pulai*
 fallen is the *seraya*
 fallen is the *nyatuh*
 fallen is the *resak*
 fallen is the *halban*
 fallen is the *nibung*
 fallen is the rattan
 ...
 and abloated logger
 who stands on the red desiccated desert-
 the world of the future.

Another laureate with a genuine concern for tradition is Noordin Hassan, the playwright. Trained as a teacher in Britain, Noordin writes and mostly directs his own plays. In fact, aside from being an outstanding playwright, he is also a highly respected director. Noordin advocates what he calls *teater fitrah*, the theater which is true to the spiritual nature of man as God's servant and vicegerent on earth. To translate his ideals into reality, Noordin portrays man and his striving according to the teachings of Islam, and employs images and technical elements from traditional Malay theater. Noordin's play "1400" is an example of such an effort. Noordin's plays and theater performances are not of the realistic mold. But, they should not be mistaken for surrealistic or absurd works. For, in reality they conform to the structure of the Islamic work of art which is basically disjointed, episodic and modular.

Abdullah Hussain, the latest of the National Literary Laureates, is known for his technique in which fiction exists in harmony with facts. In the West, this technique or literary form was developed earlier in the century, and is referred to as "faction". Abdullah, however, arrived at the

technique, as seen in his work "Pasrah" ("Surrender"), without recourse to the Western model. His works assume the "factional" character simply because he writes from intimate, personal experience, and he writes them rather factually.

In the Malay language, the term for author, *pengarang*, is a derivative of the word *karang*. The latter usually refers to the act of composing a story or to the stringing together of flowers for a *kalungan* or garland. This anthology involving acts of both nature, could be likened to the *kalungan*. Indeed, the author's artistic act of composing a creative work, *mengarang*, and the stringing together of their works in this anthology reflect the idea of creating a *kalungan bunga*, a garland of flowers. It is our ardent hope that the reader will be enamoured in encountering this Malaysian garland of fragrant blossoms and colourful blooms.

Finally, it must be said that, along with the Award, this anthology celebrates the Malaysian Literary Laureates, remarkable authors whose contributions have been responsible for the enhancement of their own literary tradition as well as the enrichment of literature in general.

Professor Dr. Md. Salleh Yaapar

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Affairs)

Universiti Sains Malaysia

Penang.

November 14, 1998.

The National Literary Award: Concept and History

THE National Literary Award is the recognition awarded by the Malaysian Government to writers who write in the Malay language and who, through works of acclaimed quality, have contributed significantly to the nation's development in literature. This recognition is formulated by the government, and its selection and grant is made very distinct from the Literary Prize or the Malaysian Literary Prize which was initiated in 1971. During the presentation of the Literary Prize of 1976 at the Rumah Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur on 11 November 1977, the Malaysian Premier Dato' Hussein Onn indicated the government's intention to upgrade this prize to the nation's writers and thus the draft of the National Literary Award was accepted and approved. Simultaneously, the panels for the former two literary prizes were terminated.

On 5 July 1979, the aspiration was realised when the Prime Minister appointed 10 members of an appraisal panel chaired by the Minister of Education, Dato' Musa Hitam; the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka was given the task of its secretariat. The chairman, at the 'National Poets Night' at the Balai Budaya, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka on 6 Sep-

tember 1979, announced the formation of the panel to the National Literary Award and the names of its members. Meanwhile, nominations for the Award were opened on 21 April 1980 during the Literary Day celebration in Taiping and nominations were closed on 31 August 1980.

This coveted award included appreciations in the form of:

1. National Honorary Certificate.
2. Cash for the sum of RM30 000.
3. Facilities to create new works.
4. Facilities to publish the same.
5. Free medical treatment in a first class ward at any government hospital.

'Writer' here means the writer of works in the Malay language such as novels, short stories, dramas, poems, etc. or works of literary value which enhances the development and interest of literature in the nation.

The Award is determined by a panel appointed by the Prime Minister from a cross-section of intellectuals in the literary, cultural, social, religious and other sectors who keep abreast of the achievements made in the literary world.

A creation of high quality is a work which incorporates contents of aesthetic value, quality and technique acclaimed as a work of art which accommodates the human experience and intellect, the development of the national culture and civilisation.

In the process of selecting a literary figure to receive the esteemed National Literary Award, some strict nomination rules are complied by the secretariat before submission to the panel. Either a legal and registered corporation or institution or an individual competent in the field may forward a nomination. Among other conditions which apply are:

1. A nomination must be for a single name only;

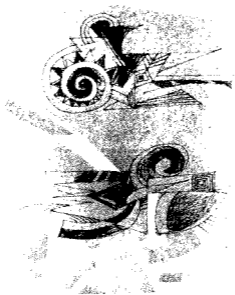
2. Only written nominations are accepted based on:
 - 2.1 Appraisal of the nominee's literary work;
 - 2.2 Appraisal of the nominee's viewpoint in line with global literature;
 - 2.3 A justified appraisal of the nominee's activities in the positive construction of national literature, if any.

The nominated figure must be a Malaysian citizen. In the event of a panel committee member being elected, he shall be relieved of his duties as a member of the panel for the year he is being nominated, unless he declines the nomination. When a selection of the appropriate candidate has been reached, the presentation of the National Literary Award shall be made during the year of nomination, and he shall be expected to deliver an Acceptance Speech. Candidates not selected for the Award may be considered for the following year.

In 1981, Kamaludin Muhammad (Keris Mas) was selected as the first recipient of this coveted award. To date other esteemed recipients are Shahnun Ahmad (1982), Usman Awang (1983), A. Samad Said (1985), Arena Wati (1987), Muhammad Haji Salleh (1991), Noordin Hassan (1993) and Abdullah Hussain (1996).

In 1985, a further complement was granted to recipients of the Award in the form of publication of a number of his prized works for not less than 50 000 copies, with guaranteed purchase by the government to be widely disseminated to schools, libraries, government agencies and departments. Another facility offered is a duration as the Guest Writer at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and considerations of his work for translation into foreign languages.

Translated by Rajuah Allapitchay





BIODATA

Keris Mas

KERIS MAS (1922–1992), writer and Malaysia's first *Sasterawan Negara* (1981). He was born Kamaludin Muhammad on 10 June 1922 in Bentong, Pahang.

Keris Mas received his early education at a Malay school in Bentong and studied there until he completed Standard Five. Following this, he enrolled at the *Tawalib* School in Sumatra, Indonesia, and at *Kolej Kulliahtul Muallimin Al-Islamiah* where he obtained a pass in General Knowledge in 1940. In 1941, he did his matriculations at the University of London, Singapore, but was prevented from completing his studies due to the outbreak of the Second World War.

After the Japanese Occupation, Keris Mas entered the national political arena by joining the Pahang branch of the *Parti Kebangsaan Melayu* or PKMM, and held the post of information officer. In his writings and speeches, he was radical in his opposition to British colonialism, feudalism and the narrow-mindedness of the Malays in their religious practices. After the PKMM Congress which was held in Singapore in 1947, he joined the editorial board of the Malay daily in Singapore, *Utusan Melayu*, which was pro-PKMM. He was responsible for reviving and expediting the publication of the magazine *Mastika*.

In 1953, Keris Mas resigned from *Utusan Melayu* and joined *Melayu Raya*, another newspaper. He then moved to

Penang to work for the newspaper *Warta Negara* until 1955. Later, in 1956, he joined *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* or DBP as general editor. On 31 October 1962, Keris Mas was made chief editor, a post he held until 10 June 1977.

While working in Singapore, Keris Mas helped found a literary movement known as *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* (or *ASAS 50*). However, his initiation into the literary fraternity really started in 1946 with the publication of his first novel and short story titled *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya* and "Wasiat Orang Bangsawan" (published in *Suluh Malaya*, on 1 June 1946). His short stories bring to the fore issues relating to humanity, society, politics and literature which are in line with the slogan of *ASAS 50*, 'Art for Society'.

Four short stories published by Keris Mas in 1956, "Pemimpin Kecil dari Kuala Semantan", "Kedai Sederet di Kampung Kami", "Mereka Tidak Mengerti", and "Runtuh", are said to mark the start of a new era in the development of Malay short stories. Most of his short stories are concerned with the plight of the Malays and their bitter experiences during the Japanese Occupation, the underground movement, *Bintang Tiga*, the struggle against colonization, as well as the Emergency and the post-independence period.

Several of his short stories too have been translated into Chinese, Korean, English and Russian. The ones translated into Chinese were among those published in *Mingguan Petir*, *Nanyang Evening*, *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *Pemuda Pemudi Universiti*, while, those translated into English appeared in *Tenggara* in 1967 and 1968.

Keris Mas too wrote many essays. His essays which appeared in newspapers and magazines were published in a book titled *Esei Pilihan Keris Mas* in 1981. While serving as Guest Writer between 1977 and 1978 at DBP, Keris Mas compiled his memoirs titled *Memoir Keris Mas: 30 Tahun Sekitar Sastera* (1979) and a book for general reading, *Perbincangan Gaya Bahasa Sastera* (1988).

Keris Mas was appointed secretary of the Panel for

the Literary Prize (1971-1976) and a member of the Panel for the National Literary Award when the committee was formed in 1979. From 1 July 1977 to 30 September 1978, he served as Guest Writer at DBP and *Karyawan Seni* (Literary Writer) at the University of Malaya (1979). During his tenure as *Karyawan Seni*, he contributed significantly to the Creative and Descriptive Writing Programme offered by the Faculty of Arts, University of Malaya.

Keris Mas was awarded the *Anugerah Pejuang Sastra* or Literary Exponent Award by the then Prime Minister, Dato' Hussein Onn in May 1976. Keris Mas too was the first to be conferred Malaysia's National Literary Award which carries the title *Sasterawan Negara*, by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in 1981. In addition to that, Keris Mas was bestowed the honours *Ahli Mangu Negara* (A.M.N.) in 1968, *Kesatria Mangu Negara* (K.M.N.) in 1982 and *Setia Mahkota Pahang* (S.M.P.) also in 1982. In 1987, he won the S.E.A Write Awards in Bangkok. In the academic field, Keris Mas was conferred the highest honorary degree, the Doctor of Letters, from the University of Science Malaysia in 1989.

Keris Mas died on 9 March 1992 in Kuala Lumpur. His name has been immortalized by DBP by naming the area where it holds its exhibition and literary activities *Galeri Keris Mas*.

Translated by Nor Azizah Abu Bakar

LIST OF WORKS

Novels

1. *Anak Titiwangsa*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1967.
2. *Korban Kesuciannya*. Singapore: Utusan Melayu Press Ltd., 1949.

3. *Pahlawan Rimba Malaya*. Kota Bharu: Pustaka Permai, 1946.
4. *Rimba Harapan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1986.
5. *Saudagar Besar dari Kuala Lumpur*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1982.
6. *Dua Zaman*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1963.
7. *Mekar dan Segar*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1959.
8. *Pertentangan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1968.
9. *Kumpulan Cerpen Sasterawan Negara*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1991.
10. *Patah Tumbuh*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1963.
11. *Memoir Keris Mas: 30 Tahun Sekitar Sastera*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979.

Literary Politics and Political Literature

ALLOW me to take this opportunity to offer some views on the situation of literature in the political arena. There are two important aspects in this sphere: firstly, there is Literary Politics and secondly there is Political Literature.

What I mean by Literary Politics is the political stance towards literature, namely, policies made regarding literature and its relationship with the national life. This differentiates it from what is called Political Literature which is a type of literature exploited by certain groups of political party.

The development of a democratic, parliamentary system in our country which has become more progressive daily has been accepted and practised by the people. This progressive development has given rise to different political groups with their own understanding, ideology, dissimilar and varied programmes which, although they are in conflict with one another, are all undertaken with the aim of advancing, enriching and ensuring a peaceful national life enforced by a strong, powerful government. Struggling for power in this direction has given rise to forums and all

sorts of political activities.

We are no longer surprised to see and experience how economic, labour, social, cultural, in fact even religious activities, have become the instrument of certain political groups or parties in their struggle for power and control of the government.

I am not questioning whether this is healthy or not as seen from the perspective of national life. But, as far as literature is concerned, I feel we must determine its situation for literature's position and all literary activities should be above and exempted from, the interests and importance of certain political groups or parties.

When literature becomes an important tool of certain political groups or parties, then literature ceases to fulfill its function as an upholder and advocator of the nation's aspirations geared as it is towards social justice, peace and prosperity. Political parties are organizations which champion something through political power and use that something to acquire power. Literature, under these conditions easily becomes a propaganda tool, and although it strives to uphold certain truths, yet somehow it does not serve the whole truth; literature under these conditions might uphold the political truth of certain groups, yet, this same truth might be regarded as falsehood by other groups.

These are the situations that I have in mind when I talk about Political Literature, namely, it is literature that is used and exploited to strengthen the political struggles of certain groups or parties.

Political Literature can only function effectively when national importance can overcome group or party importance. Thirty years ago our literature was used for political purposes. Politics at that time was the politics of independence loudly proclaimed by all groups from the party. Literature then took on the role of opening eyes, of making everybody become aware, be they the *rakyat* [masses] or the leader, whether they are involved or not in the political party's struggle, of the evils and baseness of colonialization

and all its attendant tools. Literature then was used not only to spur and awaken society to oppose the wicked colonialists but also to plant the seeds of courage and determination so that an independent nation could emerge. This was what later became the slogan of "Literature for Society", so loudly proclaimed then, which made literature a tool to achieve independence. And independence was seen as the bridge towards ensuring social justice, prosperity and peace for the people.

In this age and time, when the interests of a certain group or party sometimes supercede national interest and importance, Literary Politics no longer functions. Maybe, literature will become a tool more to defend the interest of a party or group rather than a tool projecting national and social aims and aspirations.

Under these conditions we must determine the political attitude of our people and of our nation towards literature. This political attitude towards literature is necessary, firstly, to safeguard and ensure that literature permanently becomes an instrument which will uphold the truth about the appropriate and essential values needed to achieve social justice, peace and prosperity for the people. Secondly, it is to instill and understanding of national unity, and to reduce national disharmony and disintegration provoked by different political parties or groups. Thirdly, it is to ensure freedom of thought and expression among literary figures. And fourthly it is to endow literature with a new, refreshing, invigorating atmosphere so that it can thrive, flourish and prosper.

Determining this attitude towards literature: this is what I called Literary Politics. The truth is, Malay literature, throughout its life, has always been involved with and has always given meaning to defend, awaken and ensure that truth and all the other attendant values thrive. Literature must ensure that all these values are upheld and sustained by society and the Malays as a whole and not by certain groups only. The ancient, mystical social values, which

were Hinduistic in nature, were helped and further encouraged by aged *manterias* and *hikayats*. Islamic, mystical values were introduced, promulgated and facilitated by the mystical *syair* [poems] and the philosophical *syairs* of Hamzah Fansuri, Nuruddin Al-Raniri and others. Moral values, customary laws, etiquette, and decorum were exemplified by the *syair*, *pantun*, *gurindam*, *kaba*, *tramba* [difference types of Malay poems], proverbs, maxims, and sayings of the Malay intellectuals whose names are not known. Western values were first introduced by Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi. And so it continued to this age such that the confrontation and intermingling of old and new values which have seeped into our lives, have never been freed from the influence of our literature.

For the past thirty-five years, the old values brought by Western civilization continued to involve our literature. Nevertheless Western values which came via political, economic, cultural and religious colonization for the past several decades never received total and complete acceptance by Malay literature. Although Abdullah Munsyi tried to impose what was called, Western democracy on Malay feudalism, still Malay etiquette, norms and values survived and continued to thrive. This is best exemplified during the time of the Islamic Reformation when Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi's group, although they amalgamated new values into their stories which were adapted from the Middle East and Turkey, did not totally eliminate Malay Islamic values which continued to flourish. This was further perpetuated during the period of Kajai and Ishak Haji Muhammad, where Malay nationalism grew side by side with Western values. Thus it was that Malay and Islamic values continued to prosper. For the past thirty-five year, although we ourselves continued to perpetuate these new values in our literature, still we never abandon Malay tradition, culture and Islamic religion.

In the 30's and 40's when the development of modern Indonesian literature greatly influenced the development of

our own literature, we still continued to defend and perpetuate our Malayness even though *Pujangga Baru* Indonesia stressed the importance of receiving Western civilization in a toto.

In the years of the struggle for independence, both in Indonesia and then Malaya, the Generation of 45 in Indonesia admitted that they were more progressive than the *Angkatan Pujangga Baru* for they fully accepted the new trends and thoughts of the West which were actually universal humanism in nature. Indonesian writers, some of whom were the heroes of universal humanism, not only fully admitted that they were the inheritors of the culture of the Malay world, in fact they stayed and wrote in Malaya at that time. These people also tried very hard to expand universal humanism among us. Yet, we were very cautious. We were of the opinion that the Malay race would become submerged in that so called universal identity so long as the Malays were will insignificant, small and weak and their national identity not fully formed. We rejected the offer to take part in the Pen Club movement, which at time was very popular. We did that only because we were aware that of the ten moral codes of the Pen Club, there was one particular code which specified that among writers of the world there were no national boundaries.

It was true that we agreed that human universal relationships were very important, but within that universal humanity and relationship, we must also create a meaningful component which would also make us contributors and not mere recipients such that we would completely submerge our own identity. What really was the meaning of that identity, relationship and universal humanity? Nothing else but pure Western identity. We were very careful about things which might sound the death knell of our own individuality. Because of that maybe, the West, until now, is not ready to accept us a meaningful component of world literature. But we never suffered any losses, because of our attitude. Sure, we would like to co-operate with the whole

world to develop and defend man's status through good, sacred values, but we still do not have the strength to impose our values on others. What is more likely to happen is that they might accept us and that we would accept Western elements although not all would be suitable for us.

We were once influenced by new, Western philosophies like existentialism, the absolute and complete freedom of artists and other such ideas. But it was very obvious that although these were very dynamic concepts, they were only for the West. Still, until now, we are defending ourselves so that we would not become the disseminator and populariser of absurdism, or naturalism or whatever. We are not only defending man's status and position, but we continue to safeguard our own particular values in this life.

The latest development among our literary writers is to write literature that is Islamic in nature. This is but a new and sudden yearning, although it has been publicly discussed; still in spite of everything, Islamic literature, remains but an idea and a desire. Maybe, in the beginning this does not constitute rigid, pure ideas, but only an off shoot of the global Islamic revivalism which reached us through the *dakwah* [preaching] movements. For this reason, maybe, our literary figures suddenly realized the meaning of Islamic values in our society. It is true that our literary society has not been touched by any slogans or maxims. Besides that, for a long time now, we have been without a slogan, i.e. since we achieved independence and after we had stereotyped the slogan "Literature for Society". Thus it is that we take this opportunity to embrace a new slogan. The truth is, "Literature for Society" was a conviction and a progressive idea. In the beginning the slogan came about purely to get momentum, but finally it became a conviction and a belief to cling to.

Whatever happens to the feelings and thoughts of our literati, it must be stressed that to uphold and defend Islamic values is indeed a noble aim. These Islamic values are crucial to create a just, prosperous, peaceful society and to

guarantee man's well being. Whether Islamic literature continues to be a popular slogan or it has acquired legitimate status, understanding and conviction, the fact remains that it is surely a progressive and an illustrious awareness.

In my opinion, then and now, our writers who are Muslims, have also stressed Islamic values, for it would be unlikely that Muslim writers would promote and protect norms which would go against Islam. But, maybe, what happened was that the Islamic ideas thus promulgated did not maintain their pure, original intentions, and maybe too because our human nature is such that we were not overly serious with religion and this has indeed affected and influenced our literati too.

Malays for instance accept evil deeds and crimes as an offence not merely because the law says so, but because deep in the hearts of the Malays, is the belief that such acts are religiously forbidden and go against the tenets of Islam. In such instances he holds fast to Islamic values, but he does so in a state of unawareness and is therefore not serious. Maybe this is what happens when literary writers reject what is bad and evil in their works; maybe unconsciously they are swayed by their religious teachings, which they themselves abide by, although they are not consciously aware of it. In other words, these Islamic values form part and parcel of his life.

Now when that [Islamic] awareness comes, then it is necessary to absorb it into their system for to write purely based on Islamic teachings and not because of institutions requires deep and real understanding. If not, there will be several consequences. Firstly, the work will become superficial, cliché and weak. Secondly, the work will exemplify and analyse what will not be true, which then deviates from the real Islamic teachings regarding rational ideologies and principles as they are sanctioned or not sanctioned by Allah. Thirdly, it is possible that it will become a propaganda tool exploited by certain political groups.

The portrait of a man who lives and abides by Islamic

values is the portrait of a pious man. The most noble of men, in Allah's eyes, is he who is pious. In a pious man can be found all aspects and characteristics of a man who is completely and absolutely chaste, pious and afraid of God. Firstly, his belief is absolute and his faith firm. Secondly, he fulfills his belief correctly and in a disciplined manner. Thirdly, he practices good and noble moral values. Fourthly, he abides by virtuous deeds. It is based on these personal norms, called piety, that man is made God's vicegerent on earth so as to reconcile the world and bring about a just, prosperous and peaceful universe. He also will oppose and eliminate evil practices ranging from heathenism, polytheism and bribes and he will confront all situations, positions, space and time with intelligence and wisdom.

Really, the confrontation and intermingling together of pious and noble characters with the infidels and the sinful in a creative work, which at the same time exemplifies good language and technique, since it uses a suitable background, milieu, situation, space and time will actually make that work an aesthetically beautiful symbol, one that is also strong and energetic. Such a work will be able to affect, influence and improve man's feelings, thoughts and attitudes so that he will, in all reality, become God's vicegerent on earth.

All these would not happen, would not be possible, if literature, no matter how Islamic it is, had become but a mere tool for the political power or for the interests of an individual, a group or a community. Literature that serves but to highlight conflicting ideology of different groups will only yield to enmity, animosity and the destruction of society and mankind.

Works that yield destruction and confrontation on earth are the most despicable in God's eyes. If Islamic literature serves but to create all that God despises then its Islamic nature is but only a mask. And a mask must necessarily be false.

I suggest that we hold a concrete concept of political literature which will only be on the side of truth, upholding and defending that real truth. And I also suggest that we oppose all attempts to make literature a political literature which will become an instrument exploited by the interests of certain political parties or groups.

My experiences in the past thirty years, embracing the era of the struggle for independence until the post-independence era, have given me some kind of confidence to believe that we are among the world's literary writers who have been given a special, wide expanse of space to freely defend the truth when we managed to annihilate colonialism. The Malaysian government is among the governments of the world which patronize, understand and sympathize towards literary development and the freedom of literary writers. Based on these experiences and convictions, coupled with the belief and trust in me, especially by the people who nominated me and those who evaluated my work, in all sincerity, humility and deep gratitude to Allah, I have the courage to accept this most valuable and illustrious of awards. I pray that everybody concerned, including the government and writers themselves, will hold fast to a healthy concept of Literary Politics.

Translated by Solehah Ishak

SELECTED WORK

Jungle of Hope*

PART ONE

1

PAK KIA gazed idly at a few ducks feeding beside a swamp. Should the ducks waddle off seeking for shelter, it would be a sign that the drizzle would turn into a downpour. For days there had been rain and cloudy skies, when the air was still, there was the distant rumble of thunder. And when the wind came, it was a storm with lightning, thunderbolts and pouring rain.

There was nothing unusual about it. That was how it had always been. At the end of the hot season came the rains, then back again to the scorching heat. Pak Kia could only sigh and fret. He had tried to find new ways of battling the elements, but in vain. And life went on. Nature rolled on.

That was the ninth morning in a row that the sun had

* Excerpted from Keris Mas, *Jungle of Hope*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1990.

not appeared. Such a stretch of rainy days was rare. In wet seasons before this, the sun did peep through the clouds an hour or two each day. This time the showers did not let up even at night. It was as though the moon and the stars had moved to another galaxy. The days were gloomy and wet, the nights dark and chilly. The skies had lost their entrancing variety. Night and day they were covered with massive dark clouds.

6. Pak Kia and his wife and children lived on a little orchard-plot in the middle of a rice field. For them, the vagaries of rain and shine were just a part of life. All over the world, there was nothing anyone could do about it. The seasons would come and go, as always. But now Pak Kia's little plot had turned into an island. About an acre in area, it was now surrounded by water. His neighbour, Pak Abu's bit of land had also become an island. And the other little plots too had been transformed into islands, dotting the surface of the rice land that was an ocean.

7. Pak Kia stepped out of his house and gazed at the sky, trying to see through the veil of rain that was as fine as pre-dawn dew in the hot season. No clear patch in the sky promised a cessation of rain. Pak Kia had lived more than forty years and knew well the nuances of rain and shine. He could read the signs.

8. He could not wait any longer. He seized a *parang* from the rice store under the house. Swiftly but carefully he made his way to the back of the house and reached for the tip of a banana frond near the attap roof of his house. The frond yielded to his tug and he chipped it off. Using the leafy frond as an umbrella, Pak Kia went out into the rain.

9. He called in the direction of the veranda, "Rahimah!"

10. A young girl looked out of a window. "Where are you going, father?"

11. "To your Pak Alang's house."

12. Another head popped out of the window. Rahimah moved aside.

13. "Where are you off to?"

"Thought I'd drop in at Zaidi's house."

"Don't forget the rice."

"All right." Indeed, rice was Pak Kia's lifelong problem.

He turned and headed for the edge of his little plot, beyond which was rice land completely under water. On the plot too the ground was wet. The narrow path which normally looked like a dried-up waterway had now become a canal. Pak Kia walked on the edge of the grass; it was muddy, but not flooded. Rahimah and her mother watched from the window. The acrid smell of charbroiled tapioca was wafted from the kitchen. Mak Sinah moved away from the window, pulling her daughter along, for Pak Kia had gone some distance now, wading through the flooded rice fields.

In the kitchen, Karim was transferring the charbroiled tapioca from the hot ashes in the three-cornered stove to the screw-pine leaf mat that had been spread on the floor. Mak Sinah took a little plate of anchovy and chillies from the larder. If we don't get rice today, we'll be eating tapioca for another two days, she thought to herself. And if the rain doesn't let up, when can I even get the grain sunned? How long will it be before we get a bit of sunshine? The day before, she had voiced these questions to the father of the children who were now enjoying the meal of charbroiled tapioca and anchovy and chillies.

"After eating I'm going to scoop some fish from the rice field," said Mak Sinah to her children.

"I want to come along too," said Aman.

"Me too," said Aim.

The tapioca meal was disrupted.

"Eat your food," snapped Mak Sinah. "Stay home, all of you. Can't you see it's raining?"

It was drizzling. If the rain grew heavy, they would all be house bound. Mak Sinah hurriedly got ready to go and scoop fish from the rice field. In her imagination she saw *sepat* and *puyu* fish frolicking in the water.

"Karim, come with me. Rahimah, look after the little ones. All of you, don't make noise. You might wake up the

baby." Mak Sinah looked at her baby who lay fast asleep in the cradle.

"Play under the house, not in the rain," she told her children. How she wished the rain would stop. How she wished for a sunny day. There was a lot of grain in the rice store, but since it could no be sunned, it could not be pounded and made ready for cooking. Should her husband fail to find Zaidi, how were they to get some rice to cook for the next meal?

Before going to his younger brother's house, Pak Kia headed for Zaidi's shop nearby. The weather seemed to be holding up. The drizzle had not become a downpour; in fact, it was getting lighter. He threw his banana-frond umbrella into a drain. After crossing the rice fields, he saw many people along the path, mostly riding bicycles. All were heading for the shop at the three-way junction in the little rural town of Ketari.

Across the road, the houses had their doors and windows shut, like those amidst the rice fields. Not one window was open. The difference was that the houses amidst the rice fields were on lone little islands on an expanse of water. In the little town the land was higher, planted with coconut, durian, mangosteen, *langsat*, *jering* and other trees.

Behind the village were two verdant rubber estates, reaching up to the hills beyond. In the estate bordering the village, the rubber trees had grown tall and leafy, forming a lush, dark expanse. Each villager owned a few acres of that dark green stretch. In the one farther away, which extended halfway up the hills, the rubber trees were young, sparse and light green in hue; the estate belonged to Towkay Ban Lee and the trees were only about five years old.

Zaidi, whose full name was Zaidi bin Mat Saman, lived in the new village. He did not plant rice. There was a time when he planted rice together with his elder brother, Zakaria bin Mat Saman, generally called Pak Kia, and lived with him on the little plot in the middle of their rice field. The

little plot and the rice field, about four acres in all, was ancestral land which they had not yet divided.

When the village near the town was opened, Pak Kia's family and scores of others stayed behind in the old village. Only about 30 families joined the venture, opening the new village and planting rubber. It was now evident that the families in the new village had done better than those in the old one; they had money and some had property. Zaidi had opened another rubber plantation at the fifth milestone, twelve acres in all.

In the initial stages he faced hardship worse than his brother's. While waiting for his rubber trees and the fruit trees around his house to mature, he went on working in the rice field in the old village with his brother. Then, when his rubber trees were ready, he tapped them. As things stabilised and the price of rubber soared, he hired Chinese labourers to work on the plantation, splitting the produce. He ventured into wholesale supplying of jungle produce such as rattan, *bertam* and bamboo to contractors engaged in the construction or repair of government buildings. He was the first to use aboriginal labour in acquiring jungle produce. A sharp one, that Zaidi, people said. Aboriginal labour was cheap; sometimes all that the workers wanted in payment were basic necessities. And these were very modest – the vital items being salt and tobacco.

When his new plantation at the fifth mile was ready for tapping, Zaidi employed more Chinese labourers, getting the experienced ones around the earlier settlement to supervise them. Henceforth he was looked upon as a rich man. He had the money to open a retail shop that sold the villager's needs. The shop was also his office, from where he ran his business for supplying jungle produce.

The others who had stayed behind with Pak Kia on their little orchard-plots amidst the rice fields felt they had missed something good. A number whose land was near the town began to sell their little orchard-plots and rice fields and to open new settlements and grow rubber. But all

these were far away from Bentong town, in the jungle of Lebu and Asap. Pak Kia, however, was not bothered. He worked even harder in the rice field. Zaidi left the rice field work to his brother. But he said to Pak Kia, "It's true that if you work hard, the rice and the fruits from the ancestral land are enough to live on; but for the future, why not start a rubber plantation?" Pak Kia would not listen. He had no wish to plant rubber.

Then came the long drought. The rice field grew parched and cracked. The rivers, Bentong and Benus, went dry. The once-deep places were now shallow enough for buffaloes to wallow in. Pak Kia and the others who had worked in the rice fields faced hard times. Most of them had to depend on rubber-planting relatives for survival. Some earned a bit of money clearing weeds on rubber plantations, others worked as labourers tapping rubber. Pak Kia and his wife tapped rubber on Zaidi's plantation. To help out, Zaidi replaced his aboriginal labourers with people from the old village.

Pak Kia was unhappy, but still he would not think of planting rubber. And so Zaidi supported his brother's family. Pak Kia was ill at ease. Never before had he depended totally on someone else. Though he helped tap his brother's rubber trees, he did not feel any better. He was impatient for the drought to end. Tapping rubber, for Pak Kia, was sheer hell. He yearned to return to his heaven, his rice field.

Now he was gripped by anxiety. There was plenty of grain, but they could not make it ready for cooking till the rains ceased. He would have to turn to Zaidi for help, as he had done at the start of the dry season. Zaidi would certainly help out, but how long, how long could Pak Kia bear to live on charity? Three days before, the water had reached the steps of the house on his little plot of land. When the water receded, it was sure to leave a thick layer of silt over the land and the rice field. He could see it all over his little acre. The rice field was still under water, but he knew

the silt was there too. Could the rice field ever be cleared of all that silt?

Since the last drought, more and more of his friends had sold their little orchard-plots and rice fields and moved deep into the jungle at Lebu, Asap and Janda Baik, joining people from Benus. Now the new settlers from Lebu and Janda Baik filled the weekly market, selling bananas, pumpkin, wax-gourd, *maman* and all sorts of other produce from their land. In Lebu, it was said, crops flourished; there was enough to eat and a lot more. It was the same in Janda Baik. 'Wet' rice would take time, but dry rice was plentiful, the soil being new. Every week people from Lebu sold fish pickle at the weekly market. The story went that at Bilut River, you just had to cast your net two or three times and you got enough fish to eat for a week. Fish from the swamps was no longer needed.

Pak Kia arrived at the shop.

"Where's your father?" Pak Kia asked Udin.

"It's good that you've come, Pak Ngah."

"Why?"

"Just a while ago father asked me to go to the river area, to your place, with some things."

"What things?"

"Then he went off to Bentong. I had to stay a while and look after the shop."

"What things?"

"All sorts."

Pak Kia looked at the packages along the wall. There was rice, salted fish, and two bottles of oil -- one kerosene, the other coconut. And many other packages, the contents of which he could not make out. That was what tormented him. Zaidi was too kind. He loved his brother's children like his own.

"Let's go, Pak Ngah."

Pak Kia was started out of his thoughts about Zaidi.

"Where to?"

"To the river area, to your place."

"In this rain?"

"It's only a drizzle. Good weather for scooping fish. What's Abang Karim doing, Pak Ngah?"

"No, I want to see your father first. And if you want to go over there, don't fool around scooping fish in this weather. You'll run a fever."

"Even heavy rain doesn't give me fever, Pak Ngah."

"Don't. Don't do what Karim does. He's different."

"How are we different?"

Pak Kia fell silent. This nephew of his, he knew, was just like his sons, like Karim, Raman, Rahim. When Karim did not go to school the rest followed suit, running wild. Rice fields, rivers, orchards were equally their domain. He feared that when they got together they might go to the Bentong tributary. In rainy weather one could get catfish there. But with the waters rising, heaven forbid, even adults could be swept away.

Leaving word for his father with Mat, the young shop assistant, Udin was all set to go with his uncle.

"Wait. I want to go to Jalil's for a while," said Pak Kia, stepping out. "How's your mother?"

"Fine."

"Your little brother's fever?"

"Gone. He's already playing in the rain."

Pak Kia went into Jalil's coffee-shop. There was quite a crowd there.

"Is Zaidi back yet?" One man asked.

"Not yet." Pak Kia saw a vacant chair at a table where only three people were sitting. He made his way there.

"I hear Zaidi has brought back a religious teacher of the new school, *kaum muda*," another man said, greeting Pak Kia.

"A *kaum muda* teacher? Where from?"

"I've no idea. I only heard about it. I thought you would know."

"In this rainy weather, how am I to know about anything? This is the first time I've stepped out of the house

since the rains came. I thought I'd go crazy cooped up at home."

"The other night there was a Quran reading at Cikgu Nasir's mosque. The teacher said reading the *talkin* at a burial was *bidaah*, not part of Islam," someone chimed in.

"What do you mean?"

"The Prophet never did it."

"So?"

"The teacher asked us not to read the *talkin*. Whoever dies, we must not read the *talkin*."

The coffee Pak Kia had ordered, came.

"Besides, the *talkin* teaches how to answer the question asked by the angels Munkar and Nakir. Let's use our heads, how could someone who's dead and buried hear these things?"

"You must have got this from that teacher. You've always liked the new-fangled teachings. You follow a path that's different from others."

"This is about religion. Our religion has schools. Each of us should follow the school that makes sense to him. I don't want to follow blindly when I feel something does not make sense. To follow blindly is wrong."

"So the rest of us here are all wrong?"

"Listen. I want to say something," another man cut in. His countenance was fierce. His moustache bristled. He was tall and big. His name was Atan, and people called him Pendekar (Champion) Atan. All eyes were on him.

"We are not just talking about this and that school in religion. Don't you know? The *kaum muda* are different from us not only in their school of religion. They are different in every way. Look at Zaidi. When people wanted to sell their rice fields, he said they were fools. But he himself bought up those people's land, because he had the money. Didn't you know he bought Tutung's and Tapa's land? If we had plantations, if we were rich, we too could do as he has done. Why does he tell us to hang on to our little orchard-plots and rice fields that don't bring us money?"

"He says, if we all sell our lands, this village will become a Chinese village. We will all run away into the jungle, and other people will live in the towns our ancestors opened," said a man who sat near Pendekar Atan.

"The Chinese are different. They are good traders. What are we good at?"

"Zaidi is influenced by Cikgu Brahim. Didn't we hear Cikgu Brahim speak at the school gardening and weaving show? Cikgu Brahim too belongs to the *kaum muda*."

"How do you know he belongs to the *kaum muda*? He may not even do his daily prayers. That day the headmaster didn't wear a tie but he did, acting big," said one who had been on the pilgrimage to Mecca and wore a turban.

The conversation grew more spirited. Everyone in the coffee-shop wanted to have his say.

"Pak Ngah, father is back." Udin appeared on the five-foot path outside the shop and called to Pak Kia.

The talk that had just livened up came to a stop. Pak Kia rose to his feet. A number of others got up too. They paid for their drinks.

"Why did Zaidi take so long? I've been waiting ages to get some things. Mat dare not give anything on credit. And I can't take things from Panjang's shop, he won't give anything on credit either."

"That's the trouble, when you want something on credit, you go to a Malay shop."

"If we delay, the rain will get heavier," someone cut in. He too wished to go to Zaidi's shop.

"Have you made up your mind? Are you going to sell your land?"

"I don't know. It would be hard for me. My wife, as you know, feels often poorly. The children are very young. How's the land to be cleared?"

"That's true. You sell your land, and the money may run out while you're still struggling in the new village. Boars trample you dry-rice plants. Monkeys destroy your rubber seedlings. What's to become of you? Your little

orchard-plot and rice field are gone."

"But if you want to do it, do it now. When you're old, you won't be able to do a thing," Pak Kia chipped in, giving his honest opinion, though he himself never thought of leaving his little orchard-plot and rice field.

The drizzle grew heavier. By ten, nearly everyone had gone home. Zaidi left the shop in the care of Mamat and Udin. He went home, taking his brother with him. The Ketari junction where three roads met was becoming deserted. The shops were getting empty. Three rickshaws in front of Ah Chaw's bicycle shop were left in a crouching position, like Javanese of old doing obeisance. Dense clouds circled low overhead. Ketari seemed sunken in a valleys between two hills, Raka and Kutu.

Sitting in the veranda of Zaidi's house, they heard a rustling, swishing sound from the direction of the two hills. The hills looked bluish, covered by thick clouds. It began to rain. Everything was calm and quiet. Outside, nothing stirred. There was no wind. There was only the drizzle, which grew heavier. Ducks and fowls huddled in silence under the house. Pak Kia and his brother Zaidi rose from the rattan chairs on the veranda of the spacious wooden house. Pak Kia popped his head out of the front window and looked at Raka Hill. Zaidi looked out of a side window at Kutu Hill; his view was partly blocked by a *jering* and a *rambai* tree. There was a rumble like the sound of thunder, far on the edge of the sky. It grew steadily louder, culminating in a roar like the sound of a *tualang* tree crashing down in the heart of the jungle. Pak Kia looked at Zaidi. The large, hard wooden house seemed to tremble.

"Kutu Hill," said Zaidi, certain that the sound came from the back of the house.

"Landslide?" Pak Kia seemed to be asking himself the question. His tough physique seemed to have lost all strength. His complexion, usually ruddy, had suddenly grown pale.

"Flood," said Zaidi. His pallid face had turned white as

a sheet. His tall, thin figure seemed languid as he walked back to his chair. "You'd better go home at once, *abang*. Bring *kakak* and the children here as soon as possible."

"Big flood?" Pak Kia looked tense. He hurried down the steps and rushed off in a panic.

The rain that had begun as a drizzle threatened to become a downpour. The atmosphere grew darker. From upstream and downstream people were hurrying home across the rice fields. What was Sinah doing? Let it not be that any of them had gone fishing at Bentong River or the mouth of Luar River. The Gementi tributary which flowed into Luar River and the Bentong tributary looked muddy but not swollen. He saw children fishing in the drizzle, near a wooden bridge. *Kemahang* shoots quivered as the current hit them, but were not yet submerged. Let not the water rise suddenly.

Pak Kia looked back at Kutu Hill. He could see only the summit, bluish and misty through the clouds and the rain. The foot of the hill fell steeply to Benus River. Across was Benus Village -- Upper Benus and Lower Benus. If that thunderous roar had indeed come from Kutu Hill, it must be land near the foot of the hill that had come crashing down. Pak Kia strode on. If Kutu Hill had crashed down, it must have done so into Benus River. Pak Kia hurried on. The whole of Benus Village and the rice fields and little plots of Ketari would certainly be submerged. "May we be saved from disaster," he muttered. He turned again to look at Kutu Hill. He stumbled against something and fell off the bund on which he was walking. The bund was underwater, anyway, and no one could see clearly enough to avoid the holes and the bumps.

Pak Kia arrived home drenched to the skin. He found his house drenched too, the rain trickling down its thatched roof. The little house looked forlorn, standing still and weeping all alone. All the doors and windows were closed. He could not hear children's voices. His wife was hanging up an old sarong to dry under the house.

"You went scooping fish?" he asked.

Mak Sinah was startled. "Why are you so late? The rain's going to get heavy again. Didn't you bring any rice?"

"You didn't hear any noise?" Pak Kia did not answer his wife's questions.

"What noise?"

"Hurry. Let's carry all the grain into the house. Ask Rahimah to pack up. We are moving."

"What? What noise?" Mak Sinah looked closely at her husband. "Why are you wet to your skin? The rain's not that heavy."

"Kutu Hill has crashed down. Soon the waters will rise."

Mak Sinah paid no heed. She went on hanging her old sarong to dry. Nonsense, how could Kutu Hill crash down.

"Hurry." Pak Kia opened the door of the rice store; went inside and filled a container there with grain. "Here you are. Take this up to the house," he handed the container to his wife. "Call the children. Get them to help carry the grain into the house, quick."

2

For the first time in ten days the rain really stopped. At dawn, the dew and the mist were dense but the rain had ceased. In the morning, there was a clear patch beyond Raka Hill. By seven, many had gone out to the shops. The morning sky was not as dull as it had been in days past. There was brightness, and a promise of sunshine.

Tuk Mukim Mat Zain stepped out of Tuk Penghulu's house together with Tuk Empat Manap, head of Ketari Village, and Tuk Empat Nong, head of Benus Village. Near the mosque they came across Udin and Karim who had just had a bath at the mosque well.

"Has your father gone to the shop?" Tuk Empat Manap asked.

"No, *pak cik*, pa is at home. My Pak Ngah is there too."

"Tell them Tuk Penghulu wants them to come to his court at nine."

After giving the message to his father and his uncle, Udin hurriedly changed, gulped down some coffee in the kitchen, and ran down the steps of his house to go to the shop. Since the school holidays began, he had been asked to help Manat at the shop. From his house he saw a crowd at the junction. What was happening? Had Manat opened the shop? Karim followed behind Udin. Then Aman dan Aim followed too.

It was nearly eight. Pak Kia hurried out. He wanted to check on his little plot of land. Perhaps the waters had indeed risen the night before. What had happened to his house? To his grain, buffaloes and poultry?

Zaidi had breakfast calmly. He knew his brother was worrying about his house and stock of grain. He hoped that nothing bad had happened. He was anxious to save the rice fields and little orchard-plots of Ketari from being sold. Cikgu Brahim's word had seeped deep into him. Let Ketari folks remain Ketari folks forever. If land was the Ketari folks capital. If today they fled to the jungle, Ketari would become a Chinese town like Bentong. When Loke Yew opened the mines and the rubber plantations, Bentong had become a town almost overnight. Suddenly the Chinese population grew. The Malays of Bentong gradually moved away. Some went to open new village, clearing the jungle.

Zaidi left the house. Years ago, his dress was comprised of a sarong, a loose Malay jacket or a khaki jacket with five buttons, and a *songkok*, a black velvet cap. Today it was still the same except that in place of a watch with a white chrome chain, he now wore a 14-carat gold watch with a 14-carat gold chain. The chain hung out of a top pocket through a buttonhole in the centre of the breast. Years ago he wore *capal*, traditional leather sandals. He still wore *capal*. He still rode his old bicycle, Hudson Axe Brand, with a large carrier.

Zaidi leaned his bicycle against the front of the shop.

There was a huge crowd at Jalil's coffee-shop, as if for the annual fiesta or horticulture show. But the crowd seemed uneasy. Anxiety was reflected on every face. On a long bench outside Zaidi's shop, some people sat listening to a story told by Aki Lebar, from Benus.

"I don't believe it. Dragons belong to old tales," one of the group protested.

Aki Lebar was about to continue his tale when Zaidi arrived.

"Dragons?" Zaidi asked.

"Aki Lebar says, yesterday a dragon came down from Kutu Hill. The noise like thunder was the sound of the dragon diving down, so he says," someone explained. Zaidi studied Aki Lebar's face. The old man was clearly in earnest.

"I got the story from Batin Anjang. The aboriginal chieftain who works for you," Aki Lebar said.

"What did Batin Anjang say?"

"He says on Kutu Hill there are two hermit dragons. One has seven heads, the other three. If it rains seven days and nights, and the sun and the moon and the stars don't come out, it's a sign the three-headed dragon will come down. If it rains two times seven days and nights, and the sun and the moon and the star don't come out, then it's a sign that the seven-headed dragon will come down."

"So yesterday it was the three-headed dragon that came down?" Zaidi remembered a similar dragon tale during the first big flood he had experienced.

"Batin Anjang says he saw the dragon with his own eyes, thrashing around amid huge rocks and trees and crashing with a thunderous roar into Benus River."

"Why wait for a long rainy spell before coming down?"

"If Benus River didn't swell, how would he swim downstream? He's no puny dragon. Have you seen a steamroller? That's how huge he is. His head is like the smoke funnel of the steamroller, except there are three of them." Aki Lebar held up three fingers, thrusting his hand forward.

His listeners' eyes widened, fascinated by those fingers. "His scales are the size of trays. His tail is enormously long." Aki Lebar stretched his arms sideways. "If we fell a coconut tree, the whole length of the fallen tree is his tail. One swish of that tail and a tree as big as an arecanut palm will go flying in the air. How would such a huge creature swim downstream if the waters weren't high? This is the time. Benus River is rising."

The crowd listened open-mouthed to Aki Lebar's tale.

"The moment the dragon dived into the river, he sank. But his three heads remained above water. Behind him the waters wiled as he swished his tail. In a twinkling the water rose and flooded the banks, upstream and downstream. Lebai Sahid's house was swept away. Go to the steel bridge at the third mile. You'll see the house hanging there, with three buffalo carcasses."

"How's Lebai Sahid?"

"Allah be praised, he and his wife and children are safe. Two or three days before, he had moved to his brother's house in Sembah, far from the river."

"Was anyone else affected?"

"Affected? All the people of Benus are affected in one way or another. Maize plants, ducks and fowls and goats have all been swept away. Luckily the rice has been harvested."

Pak Kia appeared. He walked leaning slightly forward. His feet turned inwards a little. *Sepak ragu* feet, the youngsters called them. He walked slowly but with a strong, steady gait. All eyes were on him. Zaidi studied his brother's face.

"How are things in the river area?" he asked.

"Seems all right. The water rose up to the *pelantar* floor. Left a mark. It's gone down now. On the land there's only a bit of water in the lower parts."

"The grain?"

"We moved it up to the house yesterday. Luckily. Else we'd have to buy rice this year."

"The buffaloes?"

"They're there. Just roaming around the edges of the land. I don't know what they can graze on. The grass, the wild grass, are coated with silt."

"Did the water enter the rice store?"

"Surely! The water reached the *pelantar* floor, surely the rice store would be submerged. Luckily it wasn't swept away."

The crowd began to disperse. Everyone headed for the Penghulu's Court. Most went on foot; those with bicycles did not ride them. No one from Benus or Ketari remained behind.

The Penghulu's Court was just a short distance from the little town centre at the junction of three roads. After a few houses in the shade of coconut palms and fruit trees, there was a wooden bridge. It was just a small bridge across the little Gementi tributary which flowed through Ketari Village to Luar River and on to Bentong River. Beyond the bridge was the Penghulu's Court. Behind the court lay rice fields and plots of land where the Penghulu's Court. Behind the court lay rice fields and plots of land where people lived, now flooded. In front, across the road that was tarmacked only a few years ago, stood a large house belonging to the Penghulu, the headman of the village in the inland area. On the flank of the house was the mosque, with the caretaker's hut beside it. The mosque premises were quite extensive.

Pak Kia, Zaidi and some of the people who had gathered at Zaidi's shop reached the bridge, still discussing the tale of the three-headed dragon. Seeing the group, some youngsters who had been playing in the water and fishing by the river scuttled under the bridge. But Udin dan Karim, and Nazri the Penghulu's son, had no time to hide. Zaidi had already caught sight of them.

"Udin, Karim, go home. Don't play there."

Udin, Karim, Nazri, Raman, Rahim and a number of other boys slowly came up to the bank, looking

very disappointed.

"Don't play by the river. Don't play around the swamps. A dragon has come down from Kutu Hill, do you hear?" Aki Lebar said, to scare the youngsters.

Zaidi and the rest of the group turned into the premises of the Penghulu's Court. There the water was ankle high. Udin and his friends followed behind.

"Is it true there's a dragon?" Nazri asked.

"Yes."

"Huh, how can that be?"

"It's true. Didn't you hear Aki Lebar tell us at the shop?"

"That old man, how would he know?"

"Batin Anjang."

"Batin Anjang is even stupider. He only knows about *bertam*, rattan, and monkeys."

"Hey, Nazri. Don't talk that way. Batin Anjang knows magic. If he puts a spell on you, that'll be the end of you."

"Let's play inland. If we make noise here we'll be scolded," Nazri suggested.

"Let's play at your house."

"No, let's play at your house," Karim opposed Udin's suggestion that they play at Nazri's house. Youngsters never liked to play at the Penghulu's house. They did not feel at ease there.

At Zaidi's house, Rahimah and Mak Alang Jemaah had just returned from the well. Mak Alang Jemaah was hanging clothes out to dry. Rahimah was carrying her cousin Atiah, who was four years old and much pampered.

"Put her down, Rahimah. Help Mak Alang hang out these clothes. Look, what a lot of clothes. Hope the day will be sunny."

Mak Alang looked at the sky. Rahimah followed her glance. It was clear and bright but there was still no sun.

"Put Tiah down. She's being pampered too much."

Rahimah was reluctant to put her little cousin down. Atiah too did not want to be put down. She threw her arms

around Rahimah's neck and clung to her. Rahimah kissed her cheek.

"Look, Mak Alang. Udin and Karim are climbing the *langsat* tree."

"Hey, come down! You want to get hurt? The tree's wet. Slippery. What are you looking for, anyway? It hasn't any fruit."

Rahimah went to the *langsat* tree by the side of the house. Atiah was still in her arms. Seeing Rahimah approach, Nazri ran to the tree. He wanted to climb. The others hung around, looking up the tree.

"Hey, Nazri. Why do you want to climb now? Didn't you hear Mak Alang tell Udin and Karim to come down?"

Nazri changed his mind. He looked sheepish. "There's a bird's nest up there," he said.

"Climb, Nazri. You don't dare, ha?" Udin called from up the tree. He himself was about to come down.

Nazri resented being called a coward in front of Rahimah. He started climbing.

"Get down, Nazri! I'm sliding down now," said Karim, who had reached the base of an old branch, just a foot above Nazri's head.

"Karim!" Rahimah screamed. But it was no use. Karim had slid down and landed on Nazri. The two fell, one on top of the other, to the ground beside the tree.

In a panic, Rahimah put Atiah down and rushed to the *langsat* tree. But Karim and Nazri had got to their feet. Both grinned, rubbing their bodies, arms and knees. Karim looked at Nazri, and Nazri looked at Karim. Both burst out laughing.

"So happy, both of you! If you had broken some bones, it would have served your right," Rahimah grumbled. She went near. "You are not hurt?" she asked Nazri.

Udin slid down. "What's the matter?" He asked. Then he too burst out laughing. The younger children jumped in delight.

"You're making a fuss over nothing," said Nazri to

Rahimah, who had returned to Atiah. "I'm not like you, crying at the slightest fall."

"As if you're too tough." Rahimah pouted at Nazri and lifted Atiah into her arms.

"Hey. Would you like to join us?" Nazri called out to Rahimah.

Rahimah looked at him. How she would love to join that group in their games. What fun it would be to play with Nazri. Wherever she went, inland or to the riverine area, she never had friends of her own age. There were only Melah and Atiah; they could not play any games as yet. Her siblings were boys, except for the youngest, who was still in the cradle.

"Is Oyah at home?" Rahimah asked.

"Yes. Why don't you go over there? Kiah's there too."

Rahimah would have liked to go to Nazri's house and play with Oyah. But she did not like Kiah, who kept showing off her new clothes. Oyah liked to show Rahimah her school books. How Rahimah longed to go to school like Oyah and Kiah. But who would look after the baby and help her mother in the kitchen. In Ketari only three girls went to school. The third was Pe'ah, Cikgu Nasir's daughter.

Nazri, Udin and the rest had run off to the back of the house; they were making a lot of noise, playing some game or other. Rahimah carried Atiah up the kitchen steps and into the house, behind Mak Alang Jemaah. Seeing Rahimah with Atiah in her arms, Melah rushed to Atiah and demanded to be carried too. Rahimah bent down, trying to carry both the children, but lacked the strength. She heard her mother call, telling her to look after the baby. Her mother wanted to help her aunt cook. So Rahimah played with Atiah and Melah while keeping an eye on her baby sister who was simpering in the cradle.

"Rahimah! Some water, please." Udin appeared at the door. The others lined the steps behind him.

How Rahimah yearned to play with those youngsters.

They were the same age as she was. But they were all boys. She went to get water from an earthenware container, using a cup. She found some pleasure in giving the boys water and seeing them scramble for it. She took another cup and handed it to Nazri. She felt a special joy as Nazri took the cup from her hand.

3

A number of people were gathered in Cikgu Nazri's mosque, listening as a religious teacher interpreted and explained a saying of the Prophet. "We must not keep on studying the twenty traits of Allah, over and over again, learning by rote *Wujud*, *Kidam*, *Baqa*. Learning this way is a waste of time. We can live on to a ripe old age and still not know ourselves, let alone God. What *Wujud* means, what *Kidam* means, what *Baqa* means, we've never understood properly."

Zaidi and his friends, about ten in all, listened entranced. They found the religious teacher different from the pious elders from Terengganu and Kelantan who often came to preach to them. When those elders taught the twenty traits of Allah, they just enumerated the twenty traits. They did not teach the meaning of the Arabic words, nor did they explain the full significance. When they taught the ritual prayers, they just taught the ritual. The same with supplicatory and supplementary prayers, they just taught the words. Everything was to be learned by heart, and that was all. But this teacher was different. Sometimes, like tonight, he would read out a saying of the Prophet and its meaning, then speak on various matters of this world and the next.

"That saying of the Prophet," he said, returning to the saying he had read out at the beginning, "tells us to strive for the hereafter as if we would die tomorrow, and to strive for this world as if we would live forever. This means, we must do our religious duties earnestly, with rapt attention

and humility, surrendering our outer and inner selves totally to Allah. How can we do this if we don't even do all the five daily prayers regularly, if every day we skip the *Zuhur* prayers and pay it back when we do the *Asar* prayers, just to finish a bit of hoeing."

The teacher tried to see the response to his preaching. But his listeners sat with heads bowed and he could not read their faces.

"Perhaps we think we are striving for the world as if we would live forever, and that is why we cannot do the *Zuhur* prayers in its allotted time. Is this true? If it is true, why is the result of our striving so meagre compared with that of non-Muslim? It's because we are not striving earnestly to get abundant yields, we only work half-heartedly, living from hand to mouth. If we thought of living a long time, surely we would need an abundance of the necessities of life; we wouldn't be living from hand to mouth. This hand-to-mouth business is not part of the teachings of Islam," the teacher smiled slightly. "We work without rules, without schedules, perhaps even without looking after our agricultural tools properly. We use up so much energy that we have no more strength left for prayers. We take up so much time that we cannot pray at the proper times. Yet the result of our slogging is so puny." The teacher studied each face before him.

"All these spring from our ignorance of the inner wisdom of the teachings of Islam. Think, study. Is there a single one of our religious duties that is without conditions and principles? In these conditions and principles lie the wisdom concerning the importance of rules and time. Ritual prayers have their time, conditions and principles. Fasting, tithes, pilgrimage, all have their conditions, times and rules. Daily work is also a religious duty, for we are commanded to do it for our life in this world. As a religious duty, it must have conditions and principles too; it must have proper rules and schedules. This inner wisdom brings good results."

There were footsteps outside, and flashing torches. The teacher was unruffled. He went on:

"In Indonesia, some conservative religious teachers teach the conditions and principles of rituals for the hereafter so zealously that there are people who mutter prayers while working, saying 'Allah' with every swing of the hoe, every movement at work. Their minds are hardly ever on their work. And so the people have remained poor throughout the ages, for their work lacks quality. They do not see the wisdom and benefit of rules and schedules. Such a way of life is a boon to the Dutch infidels. The colonial powers want us to be weak in facing life. When we are weak, we cannot progress, and are easily oppressed."

The sound of voices grew more distinct, coming from the front of the mosque. The teacher remained unruffled.

"I am sure you know that the people of Indonesia have now begun to realise the truth about such conservative teaching, and have set up radical religious schools which teach the value of schedules and rules, and oppose the rigid teachings of the conservative teachers. The Dutch government does not approve this development and are suppressing the people's religious schools with harsh laws."

Suddenly there was a knock on the door. A voice asked Cikgu Nasir to open the door.

Three men came in, led by police Sergeant Mat Diah. Behind him came a mosque official, Khatib Seman, and Tuk Empat Manap.

"I am directed to tell you to disperse this gathering," Sergeant Mat Diah said to Cikgu Nasir. He spoke loudly so that all could hear.

"Why?"

"I am also directed to ask you and the religious teacher to see the kadi at his office at nine tomorrow morning. There you can ask why. I am only obeying orders."

Those present exchanged glances.

"Who gave the orders?" the religious teacher asked.

"The OCPD."

Cikgu Nasir looked at the religious teacher. Then he looked at the congregation. Nobody wished to ask any questions.

"If so, let's disperse," he said, looking again at the religious teacher.

"Yes, just break it up," the teacher replied calmly.

Sergeant Mat Diah and the other two men went out. But they did not go away till all those in the mosque had come out and gone home. Torches flashed in the now starlit night.

At Zaidi's house the youngsters were having dinner, served by Mak Ngah Sinah and Mak Alang Jemaah. Mak Alang Jemaah was surprised to see her husband come home early. Usually he did not return until after the *Isyuk* prayers. She did not ask any questions. Leaving Mak Sinah to serve the youngsters, she began to get dinner ready for her husband and her brother-in-law, Pak Kia.

Pak Kia was lying near a prayer mat at one end of the middle portion of the house. Hearing Zaidi come in, he went out to the veranda. He was anxious to know his brother's views on the Penghulu's suggestion that morning.

"We'll be going home tomorrow," Pak Kia said.

Zaidi said nothing. His thoughts seemed far away.

"There's a lot to be done there. If the weather's fine tomorrow, Sinah will be able to dry the grain. The buffaloes must be put in the pen, lest they roam around when the water recedes."

"Tomorrow I have to see the kadi," finally Zaidi found his voice.

"See the kadi? Why?"

"OCPD's orders." Zaidi related what had happened at the mosque.

"I told you long ago, you're too much involved with the *kaum muda*. This is the outcome. OCPD's orders. That's no small matter."

"Don't worry. It's nothing serious. It's just that the religious teacher has no letter of authority to preach."

"But if it's just the authority to preach, why the orders from the OCPD?"

"Maybe they want to scare us. Or maybe the kadi dare not debate with the religious teacher, so he asked the OCPD's help."

"If it's just the authority to preach, why didn't they call the religious teacher only?"

"Actually they called only the religious teacher and Cikgu Nasir. Cikgu Nasir was probably called because he allowed his mosque to be used. But I must go along, because I was the one who brought the religious teacher here."

"Who is he? Where is he from?"

"We don't know his real name. But people call him Tuan Sheikh Rasul. He's from Sumatra. He stays with a student of his in Kuala Pilah. Just for a while. Soon he'll return to Sumatra."

"The religious men from Sumatra all seem to belong to the *kaum muda*. Once before, it was Sheikh Murshid. They say he went preaching all over the country. Is he still around?"

"Sheikh Murshid has gone back. Now Sheikh Rasul has taken his place."

"Why do they all join the *kaum muda*?"

"There you see, *abang*, I asked you to study these things with me, but you wouldn't. The *kaum muda* don't just study the twenty traits of Allah. Nor just religious duties. Studying the twenty traits goes beyond memorising *Wujud, Kidam, Baqa*. Studying religious duties goes further than learning verses by heart. Look at us Ketari folks, some of us have grown old, reached our fifties or sixties, without knowing how to cleanse ourselves properly. Each time a religious teacher comes, he has to start with the chapter on cleansing. Just think, all our lives we have to keep learning how to wash after easing ourselves! How could we do our religious duties properly?"

"Enough. I just go by the usual practice. Cleansing,

praying, *tahlil*, fasting, I know how to do. And I know a few prayers by heart."

"Islam is not just preparation for death and beyond. It also has teachings for life in this world. Our people refuse to learn. That's why so many lead chaotic lives; the poor remain poor to the grave. And those who take up the learning of the white people, ape the white people's ways, drinking liquor and all."

"Would you like to have dinner now?" Mak Alang Jemaah appeared at the door.

"A little later. We'll do the *Isyak* prayers first," Zaidi said.

The atmosphere grew tranquil for a while. In the inner part of the house the children were reading the Quran under Mak Sinah's supervision. The cacophony of their voices did not disturb the tranquillity. It merged with the other night sounds, the song of the cicadas and the worms out there in the darkness.

"What do you think of the Penghulu's word this morning?" Pak Kia voiced out what he had been wanting to ask.

"He was speaking to the Benus folks. Looks like the Benus folks have to leave their land."

"You haven't seen our rice field. I have a feeling the rice fields of Ketari will go the way of the rice fields of Benus. Our land is covered with silt. The rice field must be worse. You think it's easy to clear the rice field of silt?"

"It'll be hard just for a season. When the grass has grown and the buffaloes trample on it everyday, the land will be good again."

"But Tuan Pekok doesn't want to buy just the Benus folks' land. He wants to mine with a dredge. He needs a vast stretch of land."

"That's the truth of the matter. The Ketari folks must sell their land, not because their rice fields are damaged beyond hope, but because Tuan Pekok wants to open a huge mine stretching from Perting right up to Benus Cegar Medang. Soon the entire Bentong area will be ravaged by

the white man's dredge. Camang up-stream, Perting behind the town, Marung River, Nilam River, Ketari, Benas right up to Cegar Medang will be a stretch of sand and rock. Our people will flee to the jungle."

"That's true. What can we do? If everybody else sells, we can't very well remain, an island amidst the expanse of sand and rock."

"You ask what we can do. Don't sell. If we all refuse to sell, Tuan Pekok or anyone else cannot force us to."

"But if we don't do something now, how are we to live tomorrow? Already I've been living from hand to mouth. Luckily we can always gather *paku* and *kemahang* shoots and scoop little fish from the swamps. If we had to buy vegetables and fish at the market, we wouldn't survive."

"Now you see, *abang*, when I cleared land to plant rubber, you scolded me. For you the rice field was the world. Now it has come to this. Wherever you move, it will be the same."

Pak Kia took his younger brother's reproach in silence. It was true that he had never listened to Zaidi's advice. But how was he to listen? Zaidi was always different from everyone else. When he wanted to clear land to plant rubber, the whole village was in an uproar. The District Officer had to intervene. Even then, only thirty people joined Zaidi. While clearing the land, several went back to the old village. The work was too hard for them. It was different for the Chinese. They had money to pay people to do the clearing.

"Let's not sell the rice land," Zaidi said to his elder brother. "Let's ask all the Ketari folks not to sell. Then we ask for a piece of land somewhere and open a plantation."

"I certainly won't sell our little plot and rice field. Whatever is to happen, let it happen. But our rice field is too small, we can't survive on it."

Zaidi fell silent, rapt in thought. He understood his brother very well. His one wish had always been to extend his little orchard-plot and rice land. He absolutely refused to plant rubber. But he did not realise that the area around

Bentong, along the way to Kuala Lumpur, to Terengganu and to Karak, ten to fifteen miles around, had all become rubber plantations. There were Bentong Estate, Shanghai Estate, Karak Estate, Bukit Dinding Estate and numerous little plantations opened by the Chinese. Those who had come as Loke Yew's labourers now had their own plantations. Land was hard to find now, even to plant rubber let alone rice.... It was time for the *Isyak* prayers. The two brothers still could not resolve their problem.

"Don't you wish to pray now?" Mak Alang Jemaah reminded them, appearing at the door to the middle part of the house. The youngsters' voices were no longer heard.

They must leave it at that for a while. Zaidi wondered whether his brother would go into the jungle to open new land for planting rice. Pak Kia rose and went down to the well to cleanse himself for prayers.

Eight years I slogged before this plantation began producing, Zaidi thought to himself. But the village people pamper themselves. They don't want to work hard. Picking *paku* shoots is work for them. The Chinese tap rubber or mine tin, then in the afternoon they plant vegetables. Enough to eat and to sell in the market. Panjang, the Chinese shopkeeper, began by renting an acre of licensed land. The whole family planted vegetables. Now he even owns the brick building where his shop is. The Chinese are not interested in planting rice. They know that planting rice would give them barely enough to eat.

Pak Kia returned from the well. Zaidi cut short his musing and went down to cleanse himself for prayers. It was getting late. The youngsters were asleep. Only the cicadas and the worms made music in the stillness of the night. Zaidi looked up at the sky. It was clear and starry.

Returning from the well, Zaidi saw the light of a torch approaching from the direction of the mosque. He waited near the steps. The man greeted him with a *salam*. Zaidi recognised the voice.

"Tuk Empat, what brings you here so late at night?"

"I've just come from the kadi's house. I saw your house still lit up, so I thought I'd drop by. There's something I'd like to say to you. Of course it could keep till tomorrow, but since you're still up, I'd better say it now."

"Please come in."

"No, it won't take long. The kadi said he knew the religious teacher had been here more than a week. And he also knew the teacher was preaching without a letter of authority. But he just let it be. He doesn't care whether people are modernists or conservatives, so long as they obey God. But the District Officer (DO) himself directed the police to chase out the religious teacher."

"How did the DO come into this?"

"I hear the religious teacher is involved in politics. He fled from his country because the Dutch are after him."

"So it's not because he hasn't got a letter of authority?"

"That's right. I feel you should tell Cikgu Nasir about this, so that he'll just obey the kadi's directive tomorrow. Not that we bother about Sumatran politics, but we don't want to make things difficult for the kadi."

"Yes. I understand."

"I hear it was Cikgu Brahim who suggested that you bring Tuan Sheikh over from Negeri Sembilan."

"Yes. Why?"

"Well, I hear Cikgu Brahim is being investigated too. I've no idea why."

4

Pendekar Atan stood on a bund. Though his trousers were rolled up to his knees, the mud had still got to it. Some distance away, Pak Abu was shovelling silt from the rice field on to a bund. The grass had grown knee-high. Here and there buffaloes were grazing. One or two egrets were perched on the buffaloes' back. It was quiet and peaceful. The little plots of land where the people lived were isolated dots on a vast grassland.

Pendekar Atan watched the rhythmic swing of Pak Abu's shovel. He noticed the energy Pak Abu put into shovelling up the silt and throwing it on to the bund. For several minutes Pendekar Atan followed the steady regular movement of the shovel. He knew that though Pak Abu was not the smart type, he was no fool. He would not fall easily for sweet words or money. Sometimes it was hard to persuade the simple folk. Pak Abu was a plain and simple man. But if Pak Kia could be persuaded, it would be possible to influence simple old Pak Abu. Scores of men had been persuaded. All were convinced now that their rice fields were damaged beyond hope. All felt their palms itching to hold the large amounts of money offered. Only Pak Kia held out. Pak Kia was still unconvinced. Pak Kia was still bent on reviving his rice field. Pak Abu and two others, both simpletons, were inspired by Pak Kia's resolve. Not that Pak Kia was too shrewd either, but he was steadfast, patient and hardy as a *merbau* tree in the jungle.

Pendekar Atan turned and went on his way. His last visit to Pak Kia's house was as fruitless as the ones before. Perhaps it was time to get tough. Perhaps Pak Kia and his followers, like Pak Abu, would give in if they were taught a lesson. But the Pendekar could not be sure of the Penghulu's protection if he did something that landed him in court. It was best to leave the stubborn ones alone. Let them suffer and see for themselves how impossible it was to plant rice when their little plots had become tiny islands in a vast expanse of sand and rock. Where would they get water from? The damnable thing was, Tuan Pekok too was stupid. Why did he want everyone out, the whole stretch of land made vacant? He was arrogant. He thought all the villagers could be bought.

The Penghulu was not at the court. Pendekar Atan went to his house.

"I need your help, Datuk," he said, sitting on a plush chair on the veranda of the big house.

"What sort of help? Tell me. If it's in my power, I will

certainly help."

"You know I've promised Tuan Pekok's lawyer to get all the people in the river area to sell their land."

"I know."

"That's what it's about, Datuk. I have spoken to the people. At first many were unwilling. But I got them to listen to me."

"So?"

"Except Pak Kia and his friends."

"Pak Kia won't sell his land?"

"That's right."

"Who else?"

"Pak Abu, Mat Tutung and Mat Tapa."

"Only three?"

"Four including Pak Kia."

"So it's Pak Kia, Pak Abu, Mat Tutung and Mat Tapa."

"That's right, Datuk."

"Their pieces of land are far apart, right?"

"Right, Datuk. As you know, Pak Kia's land is up-stream. Pak Abu's land is next to it. Mat Tutung's and Mat Tapa's plots are downstream, near Benus."

"Aren't Mat Tutung and Mat Tapa brothers?"

"Yes, Datuk."

"So they share a piece of land?"

"No, Datuk. Each has a piece of land to himself. Actually, both pieces of land have been sold to Encik Zaidi."

"Hmmm." The Penghulu fell silent, thinking.

Pendekar Atan did not know what to say next. He wanted to ask the Penghulu if he should try to play rough. But he could not guess the Penghulu's feelings on the matter. Perhaps he too did not relish the thought of Ketari folks moving into the jungle. During the meeting at the court the other day, his instructions and advice were more for the people of Benus.

"All right," said the Penghulu. "Try your best, Pendekar. Let's hope you'll succeed. Meanwhile I'll look again

into the matter. Come and see me in a week or two."

Pendekar Atan stroked his moustache. He rose and steered his mighty physique to Zaidi's shop. Inside that enormous bulk his heart beat fast. Seeing Zaidi's calm, clear countenance, his heart beat even faster. When Zaidi's soft, cool hand took his in greeting, he felt his heart deflate. "You wrong me, Pendekar," Zaidi said before Pendekar Atan could broach the subject he had come to discuss. His heart shrank.

"It's a year since I opened this shop, and this is the first time you've come. Praise be to Allah, I thank Him," Zaidi continued. "It is about an important matter, perhaps?"

Pendekar Atan searched his mind. He remembered clearly why he had come, but suddenly could not find words to express it. He felt his huge, powerful arm. Through his sleeve he could feel the amulet he had tied there. His spirits revived a little.

"I've wanted to see you for a long time, Encik Zaidi."

"It must be something important."

"I feel it's very important for me. Yes, I believe it's also important for you."

"What is it?"

"It's about your land downstream, the piece being worked by Tutung and Tapa."

"Oh." Zaidi showed no sign that he thought the matter important. Of course, what else would this man have come for? Tutung and Tapa had told Zaidi several times about the Pendekar's approaches, offering them money if the two pieces of land were sold to Tuan Pekok.

"How much is Tuan Pekok offering the two brothers?" Zaidi suddenly asked. Pendekar Atan was startled. He never expected Zaidi to ask that. He was embarrassed and did not know what to do. It was to undermine Zaidi that he had tried to bribe Tutung and Tapa. Without the help of the two simpletons, Zaidi would not be able to revive his rice field.

"It's right that the two should be given money," Zaidi added.

"Well, a little."

"How much is a little? Tuan Pekok represents a very rich mining company. His company's wealth is capable, not only of ravaging the land in Ketari, but also ruining hundreds of poor families, like those of Tutung, Tapa, Pak Abu and others, including us."

Pendekar Atan felt as if his tongue was shackled. His blood boiled. There was a lot he longed to say, but he could not find the words. Usually, in such a situation, it was his huge hands that flew into action, not his tongue. He was furious, but strangely he could not act.

"Pendekar," Zaidi went on in a soft voice. "I have no wish to block your efforts to get the villagers land for Tuan Pekok. You have your own way of earning a living. And it is not against the law."

Pendekar Atan looked at Zaidi's face, his spirits reviving a little.

"But," Zaidi continued, "I have promised Tutung and Tapa, they can stay on those pieces of land and work the rice fields for as long as they wish, as if it were theirs. I don't want them to move into the jungle. As for the money I paid them for the land, I asked them to invest it in rubber plots at the fifth mile. Though they have only two acres each under rubber, the trees are big now. Maybe next year they can be tapped."

Pendekar Atan listened in silence to Zaidi's story. He never knew Tutung and Tapa owned rubber plots at the fifth mile. He thought Zaidi hired them to open plantations for him.

"That's why I asked you how much Tuan Pekok is offering Tutung and Tapa."

Pendekar Atan tried to think. He could not yet grasp what Zaidi was getting at.

"It's like this, Pendekar," Zaidi said. "If once before,

Tutung and Tapa were saved from moving to the jungle, this time they must be saved again from the same fate. They must be given enough capital to open three or four acres of land to plant rubber, somewhere near by. So must the others. If Ban Lee could have an estate all to himself along the whole length of that hill, why can't the people of Ketari open little plantations, five or six acres each, at the fifth and sixth miles? There's some land there yet to be opened."

"All the others want to move to Janda Baik, Lebu or **Asap**," Pendekar Atan suddenly got his courage back.

Zaidi fell silent. He did not wish to argue with a man who had something to gain from the sale of the Ketari people's land. Zaidi could fathom the Pendekar's thinking. He was not a rustic who believed that the only safe livelihood was rice planting, who believed in the saying, *padi berbudi, getah melatah*, (rice is steady, rubber moody), i.e. rubber prices soared and plunged. The Pendekar did not own a scrap of land of rice field. Nor did he have a rubber plot. His livelihood depended on other people's profits and losses. Never in the history of Bentong had there been a man like the Pendekar. Had he been honest, he could have been the first Malay broker in the area.

Pendekar Atan was not born there. He had come eight years before, when the Benus people sold their land to move to Janda Baik, one family after another. His sole occupation was that of middleman, arranging the sale of Malay land to Chinese towkays, or getting permanent grants for Chinese vegetable farmers who occupied licensed land. He stayed with a Chinese family in a shop-house in Bentong town. In the shophouse Towkay Chan a contractor, lived with his wife and children, and also had his office. Behind Towkay Chan's office was Pendekar Atan's room. The Pendekar first came to Bentong with Towkay Chan, passing himself off as his secretary, but actually he was the towkay's bodyguard. Once Pendekar Atan defeated four gangsters who tried to beat up Towkay

Chan, and chased them into the police lockup. Hence he was called Pendekar, Champion.

"Have you ever met Tuan Pekok?" Zaidi suddenly asked.

"No," was the laconic answer.

"But you tell the people Tuan Pekok promises them this and that."

"I get it from Tuan Pekok's lawyer."

"The lawyer who often comes from Kuala Lumpur?"

"Yes."

Pendekar Atan tried to think of a way of persuading this wealthy Malay to part with the piece of land being worked by Tutung and Tapa. But Zaidi's mind worked faster.

"Why don't you ask the lawyer how much money Tuan Pekok is willing to give Tutung and Tapa?"

"But the land's yours, Encik Zaidi."

"Don't forget, Pendekar. I told you what I promised Tutung and Tapa when I bought those pieces of land."

Tutung and Tapa were not the kind that could clear the jungle and open new land. The two brothers were weak in every way. They were so poor that they thankfully accepted old clothes given in charity for their wives and children to wear. Their father had been diligent and tough. When their father died, they were left without guidance. The two pieces of land and rice fields were neglected. Zaidi tried to help, for they were his second cousins. Their father and his had been first cousins. Also, they had been Zaidi's friends since childhood. But Tutung and Tapa never went to school. They belonged to the group of Ketari men who spent most of their time playing cards and hanging around the coffee-shop. After the rice season, they just waited around to be offered odd jobs cutting grass or the like. Household matters were left entirely to their wives and children. Besides the yield from their rice fields, which was barely enough to eat, they picked *paku* and *kemahang* shoots, and occasionally caught small fish, using tiny nets

or scoop. Tutung and Tapa were among those who did not own fishing-nets of the usual size.

Now the two brothers needed help more than ever. The two pieces of land downstream were beyond their power to revive. That area was as badly hit by the flood as Benus. The only way out for them was to add to their two acres of rubber at the fifth mile. And only Zaidi could help them in this.

"Tell Tuan Pekok's lawyer, I'll sell my two pieces of land downstream, on the condition Tutung and Tapa are given money equal to the price of the land that is paid to me."

Pendekar Atan was startled to hear that Zaidi was willing to sell his land.

"But don't get me wrong, Pendekar. I will not sell the land if Tutung and Tapa are not helped. I'm prepared to let the two pieces of land remain like desert islands amidst Tuan Pekok's mining ravages."

The rice fields downstream were hopelessly damaged. But Tutung and Tapa must be helped, must be saved. They would not use their heads. They just followed the majority. What came easily to them was chatting and playing cards in the coffee-shop. Once in a while they went to the mosque on a Friday and listened to a sermon about everything being predestined through God's *qada* and *qadar*; that if the *rezeki* you were allocated was meagre, you could never make yourself more prosperous; that money and property were the world's dirt; and that the world was a carcass. Tutung and Tapa did perform the ritual prayers sometimes. But that was the only religious duty they did. About the rest they were ignorant. Thus each day and all day they sat chatting and playing cards in the coffee-shop. So long as there was rice to cook, *paku* and *kemuhang* shoots to pick and small fish to scoop, they were content. No need to bother with any other work. It was ordained that they were to have only that much *rezeki*. That was that. Such people were easy prey for Pendekar Atan. Such people must be

helped. Besides, they were Zaidi's kith and kin. Moving to the jungle, doing pioneer work, felling trees and clearing undergrowth to open a new village, were not for people like Tutung and Tapa.

"These two pieces of land are priced at four to five thousand dollars under Tuan Pekok's offer. The usual price may be less than a thousand. Surely you would not let them become desert island," Pendekar Atan tried his luck.

"Allah willing, I will not let Tuan Pekok down if he does not let me down." Zaidi looked Pendekar Atan direct in the face, smiling with a trace of mockery. Tutung and Tapa were still in his mind, "Convey my message to his lawyer, Pendekar. We'll see how they'll respond."

5

Zaidi bought three buffaloes from a Benus man who was preparing to move to Janda Baik. The other buffalo, with cubit-long horns, walked in front, led by the man from Benus. Two young buffaloes, with horns just a span in length, followed behind. Zaidi brought up the rear, urging the buffaloes on with a *senduduk* switch.

"Cut across the swamp!" Zaidi called out. He did not want the three buffaloes to damage the bund his brother had just heaped with silt. Pak Kia would want grass to grow fast over it, so that it would not fall back into the rice field.

Zaidi was not in his usual attire of sarong and jacket with five buttons. He was wearing old trousers, a faded khaki shirt, and a khaki cap that covered his ears. Udin and Nazri ran to and fro, now in front and now behind the buffalo escort.

Zaidi had gone to Benus after the *Subuh* prayers to get the buffalo. Now the sun was rising behind Raka Hill. The doors and windows of Pak Kia's house were still shut. The nearer they came, the more clearly they could see this. Strange; Zaidi had never know his brother open the win-

dows late. From the days when they stayed together on that little plot, his brother had always opened the windows after the *Subuh* prayers.

Udin ran across grass that reached up to his waist. He wanted to surprise his cousins with the three buffaloes. From the edge of the land he called Karim at the top of his voice. But there was no answer. He called and called again. Finally a window opened near the veranda and Rahimah looked out.

"Where is everybody?" Udin called out, wondering.

Seeing Udin and Nazri, Rahimah looked flustered. She hurriedly opened the door.

"Nazri?" The name escaped her lips, with emotion. Nazri, coming so early in the morning! She did not even glance at Udin. Her attention was focussed on the Penghulu's son. And she did not even notice the three buffaloes being led near the rice field.

"Where's Pak Ngah? Where's Abang Karim? Where's everybody?" Udin sounded angry. Nazri looked triumphantly at Rahimah. He seemed to be saying: 'See, you don't want to come to my house, now I have come to you.'

Mak Ngah Sinah came from the back and took Rahimah's place in the doorway. Before she could open her mouth, Udin said, "Mak Ngah look, three buffaloes." He pointed in the direction of the rice field. His father was a little way behind, escorting the buffaloes. "*Ayah* has just bought them."

Rahimah slipped past her mother and went down the steps. Aman and Aim followed behind their elder sister. Rahimah seemed unaware of the steps. Her eye were on Nazri. At the bottom of the steps she groped for her two young brothers and let them hold her hands, as if she was drawing strength from them. Then she stood in front of the steps, motionless, gazing in wonder at Nazri, as if Nazri was something magical she had set eyes on for the first time.

Mak Sinah looked in the direction of the rice field in the distance. Zaidi bought buffaloes? As the thought struck

her, she remembered her husband's decision to move to Janda Baik. Early that morning he had gone to Pak Abu's house to discuss the matter. For a long time Pak Abu too had wondered whether the two of them would have the energy to revive their rice fields.

"Karim and his father have gone to Pak Abu's house," she told Udin. "Go and call them."

Udin ran to the side of the house, to go across the rice field to Pak Abu's land. Nazri looked at Rahimah. Then ran after Udin.

At the southern end of the little plot was a buffalo pen. Zaidi headed for it, asking the man from Benus to shoo the buffaloes into it. Then Zaidi went up to the house.

"Your brother has gone to Pak Abu's place," Mak Sinah said, greeting him from the doorway. "You bought buffaloes?"

"Yes, *kakak*. Has *abang* gone long?"

"Since early in the morning."

"On what business?"

Mak Sinah hesitated. She did not know whether she should tell him about her husband's decision. "I don't know. Maybe about work in the rice field. Come in. Ask him in. Who is he?" Mak Sinah invited Zaidi and the man from Benus into the house. "Udin has gone to call his uncle," she added, going back inside. Her voice was heard calling Rahimah inside.

Rahimah was still standing in front of the steps, oblivious of her uncle's arrival, oblivious of her two young brothers who had run off to watch the three buffaloes grazing in the pen. She was still gazing in the direction of the rice field, watching Udin and Nazri making their way through the grass to Pak Abu's place.

Zaidi did not come into the house. The man from Benus asked leave to go and went off, leaving Zaidi by himself. He walked around the little plot. Then he headed for the buffalo pen to look at the buffaloes he has just bought.

His thoughts wandered. He changed his mind about going to the buffalo pen and stood under a shady *rumbai* tree. The base of the tree was now bigger than a coconut trunk. As a child he had often climbed that *rumbai* tree. At that time its trunk was only the size of an arecanut palm. He went to a rice mortar in a hut near the *rumbai* tree. He perched on the bent pestle. How serene everything was. How different the present was from the past. In the past, where the new inland village was today, there had been only jungle. Zaidi gazed at the green expanse of the village and the rubber plantations beyond it. He looked at the houses dotting the green. Was he right to preserve this rice field? His brother and the other rice planters faced increasing hardship, for the rice fields could yield only so much, and their families were growing. The people in the inland village were getting more prosperous. The price of rubber was high. They could buy rice and whatever else they needed.

Udin, Nazri and Karim returned. They looked around in search of something, then rushed to the buffalo pen.

Zaidi watched his brother approach from the side of the house; he still looked strong and sturdy, leaning forward slightly as he walked. How much longer would he remain strong and sturdy? If he did not begin to acquire a bit more property now, when was he ever to do it? When Karim and the other children grew up, would they have to fend for themselves? Karim, perhaps, would get an education. The others? Should their father lose that strength and sturdiness, would they be able to go to school?

"Udin said you bought buffaloes?" Pak Kia asked as soon as he came close.

"Yes, *abang*. Three of them."

They went to the pen. After a few moments, Pak Kia turned back to the house. He had looked at the three plump buffaloes without expression. Zaidi wondered about this, but said nothing. Slowly he followed his brother back to the house.

"No use you buying those buffaloes, Zaidi. Your *kakak*

and I have decided to move to Janda Baik," Pak Kia could no longer keep it a secret. He sat on a long bench under a guava tree in front of the house.

Zaidi sat at the edge of the bench, keeping a wide space between himself and his brother. He sat at an angle, so as not to face him. He felt frustrated, disappointed and a little angry. He said nothing, striving to control himself. He had always felt that his brother should change his way of life and not go on living from hand to mouth. That time when Zaidi wanted to start a plantation and a new village inland, he realised how adamant his brother could be. He seemed rooted forever in the mud of his rice field. Indeed, for generation after generation of Malays, their little orchard-plots and rice fields had been their only livelihood.

"Some people do get rich planting rice and fruit trees," his brother had replied to his statement that Malays should grow rubber to get rich like the Chinese. True, there already were some wealthy Malays, but these had got their riches through slogging or cheating or grabbing other people's property. His brother had always been diligent and steadfast in working the rice field and tending his fruit trees. But it was clear that the rubber-growing people in the inland village had a far higher standard of living than his brother, the most steadfast and diligent of the rice planters. It was clear too that his brother had not taken the easy way to riches, he had remained good and honourable and would not cheat or grab other people's property.

"The buffaloes don't matter, *abang*. If you don't need them, we can always sell them, or have them slaughtered to welcome the fasting month."

"Whatever it is you are thinking of, I have made up my mind to move to Janda Baik."

Zaidi sensed his brother's inflexible resolve. Whatever he might say, his brother would have an answer ready.

"I can't very well remain behind by myself, or with Pak Abu, trying to plant rice. Where will we get water for the rice field when the dredge has ravaged the land and turned

it into a wilderness of sand and rock?"

Zaidi admitted the truth of that. But he had a plan for raising his brother's standard of living. He would try to get him at least ten acres at the fifth mile, for planting rubber. While waiting for the rubber trees to mature, his brother could still work the rice field for some time; it would be three or four years before Tuan Pekok's dredge came to Ketari. If his brother went to Janda Baik, Lebu or Asap, the most his brother could achieve in the new settlement in ten years would be a little orchard-plot and rice field the size of his present one. Even if he added to it two or three acres of rubber, it would be another seven years before the trees could be tapped. A farmer would face numerous foes in the jungle. Not only must he defeat the trees and the undergrowth; he must vanquish the inhabitants of the jungle, wild beasts and other creatures. This would need three or four times the energy, steadfastness and courage his brother had.

"Let's say we sell our land to Tuan Pekok and get a large sum for it. With the money we open a plantation at the fifth mile, ten or fifteen acres. While waiting for the rubber trees to mature, you can still work the rice field. It will be three or four years before Pekok's dredge comes here. Camang and Perting, upstream of Bentong, will take years to dredge. You don't have to move, don't have to slog; don't have to fight tigers, elephants, wild boar, snakes and centipedes and monkeys. Besides, we are not as young as we used to be. How much longer can you take the hard life?"

"I can't be like you, Di. You went to school, I did not. You are smart, I am not. You studied under newfangled religious teachers, I did not. You read the newspapers, I do not. But I am strong. I am hard working. I am sturdy, and I am at home with a spade, a chopper, an axe. Let me go to Janda Baik. I'll plant dry rice first. Then I'll start another rice field, maybe better than the present one. I have no faith in rubber planting."

As on that earlier occasion, Zaidi could not sway his

brother's stand. In his brother he saw the unchanging tradition of the Malays. How was he to explain the changing times to a man whose heart and soul were one with the earth, mud, buffaloes, *paku* shoots, *kemahang* shoots, and swamp fish? Money did not come first in the lives of these people. Money was just for buying kerosene oil and salt. For them cars, roads, brick houses, tap water, electric light had no meaning; they had not even seen these. English schools and hospitals too were of no use to them. Zaidi was sure that without urging, Karim would not be sent to English school. Rahimah was not sent to school at all. However high a girl's schooling, she would end up in the kitchen. And too much schooling would bring a myriad of vices. It was enough just to be able to read write.

"*Abang*, don't you see how many Chinese are living in Bentong now? Once, there were only Malay shops at the Ketari junction. They were just thatch huts, but they were Malay shops. Now there are three Chinese shops, all brick. Surely you remember, Panjang first came with one red blanket; he and his family planted vegetables on licensed land. Now we call him towkay big businessman. One day not only Bentong, but Ketari too will become a Chinese town. Not just the town, but the entire area, tens of miles around, will belong to foreigners. This country will become richer because many people open plantations, mines and business houses. This country will have bigger schools, tarmacked road, bigger hospitals and government offices. And where will we be? In the jungle?"

Pak Kia turned to look at his brother's face. It was clear that Pak Kia resented the lecture. Perhaps he did not understand. Perhaps he was weary of hearing his brother praise the Chinese.

"Won't you come in?" Mak Sinah said from a window near the veranda. Without waiting for the men's response, she called Karim. In a moment Karim, Udin, Nazri, Aman and Aim appeared from the side of the house. Karim, Udin and Nazri hastily hid their catapults and emptied their

pockets of little stones. Aman gingerly carried a dead bird, a *merbah*.

"Playing with catapults again. Look. Why shoot that *merbah*? Sheer cruelty. Go and bury it," Mak Sinah scolded them.

Pak Kia and Zaidi rose slowly from the decrepit and roughly made wooden bench. They headed for the house. Karim and his group made for the bench.

"Come in! Through the back door!" Mak Sinah ordered.

"We must bury the bird first," Karim replied. The group did not sit on the bench but headed for the edge of the land. Karim took a spade to bury the bird Aman had been carrying all the while.

Rahimah laid before her father and her uncle some boiled sweet potato with grated coconut and palm sugar, and a pot of coffee with two cups. Zaidi took a packet of Ardath cigarette from his pocket. Pak Kia took out a *nipah* palm cigarette. He was about to put tobacco into it and roll it but he changed his mind. Instead he reached for an Ardath cigarette from the packet that Zaidi had placed near him.

From the kitchen came the voices of the youngsters as they trooped in. Rahimah ran to the kitchen, eager to eat sweet potato with U'din, Karim, Aman, Aim dan Nazri. But the noise had awakened the baby in the cradle. Hearing the baby cry, Rahimah did not wait to be told to tend to her but ran to the cradle to lift and comfort her.

"Don't lift her. Just rock the cradle. She'll go back to sleep," Rahimah's mother instructed. Rahimah obeyed. She sat by the cradle and rocked it gently. She wanted to sing a lullaby so that her little sister would go back to sleep quickly. Restlessly she watched U'din, Karim, her younger brothers and Nazri playfully scrambling for the sweet potato. She never had a chance to frolic with youngsters other than her brothers. What would it be like to scramble playfully with Nazri? But she dared not sing. She felt shy because Nazri was there.

In a newspaper story, a representative of the Chinese community in the Federal Council demands that Chinese interests be safeguarded. In another story, Raja Chulan demands that Malay rights be preserved and protected.

"This," said Cikgu Brahim, "shows that in this country the Chinese have grown numerous and strong. It also shows that the Malays are beginning to feel threatened.

"The people of Ketari dan Benus want to move to Janda Baik, Lebu or Asap. This has a bearing on the position of the Chinese and other foreigners, like the whites in this country. Just demanding protection will get us nowhere. We must not run away. We must stay put and work the way the Chinese, the whites and the Indians work. Our children must go to school. We ourselves must gain knowledge, to be better at our work, our business ventures and all our endeavours. No longer can we live like our ancestors, relying solely on our rice fields. The white people came bringing a myriad of changes, seeking wealth. Ever since they came, the white people governed us in such a way that our land can be worked to bring them profit.

"Don't you realise how much land in our country has been cleared to start tin mines and rubber plantations? Each tin mine takes up a whole district. Each rubber plantation wipes out a huge area of hills, jungles, ravines and valleys. To rake up the riches fast, they brought in tens of thousands of coolies from other countries. Look around you, the Chinese and the Indians have matched us in numbers. Like the white people, the Chinese and the Indians came to make a living, it get rich. Gradually they began to open their own mines and rubber plantations. And we? First, we refuse to work as coolies, it would lower our dignity. Second, we still believe that 'rice is steady, rubber moody,' that we can't rely on rubber to survive hard times. And so we live as our ancestors lived. Others take all the wealth of our land, and we don't realise it. In the end we

flee into the jungle to go on living the old life. Think how far behind we'll be, when we have to start that old life all over again as our ancestors did, clearing jungle to start a settlement and rice fields.

"I'll resign from teaching," Cikgu Brahim ended his long lecture to Cikgu Nasir, Zaidi and friends.

"What will you do then, Cikgu?"

"I want to try to unite the Malays in facing the challenge of the times. The Malays must be given awareness, and they must unite."

"You want to form an association?"

Cikgu Brahim did not elaborate, but he had certainly begun to create awareness. Zaidi, Cikgu Nasir and friends were greatly drawn to the young teacher's views.

Though Cikgu Nasir was elderly, and did not have Cikgu Brahim's professional training, and had long stopped teaching, he was open to new ideas because he read newspapers and magazines a great deal. He read magazines like *al-Ikhwān*, *Majalah Guru*, even *Seruan Azhar* from Egypt. He also read all sorts of magazines and religious books from Indonesia. Contact with *kaum muda* teachers from Sumatra opened the way and led him to certain insights. Zaidi and his friends joined the old teacher in these insights; the people of Ketari called them *kaum muda* and looked on them as misfits.

"I don't know. Looks like Ketari is beyond saving. As it happens, the big flood does force the Benus and Ketari fills to earn a living somewhere else. But if there were not Tuan Pekok, the land wouldn't be sold all at the same time. Some of the folks might think twice before leaving the land their family had lived on for generations. A pity." Zaidi was filled with regret. Surely nobody could be blamed in such a situation. There are times when regret and blame can only be heaped on the situation itself. This weighs heavily on the spirits, as was reflected on Zaidi's countenance.

"But why must we flee to the jungle?" It was Cikgu Nasir's turn to express regret.

Such questions, voiced with regret, were beyond Zaidi's power to answer. He could not persuade Tutung, Tapa, Pak Abu and even his own brother not to flee to the jungle. How could he persuade others?

"Maybe we should work together with Cikgu Brahim to create awareness among the Malays."

"For the future, maybe. But what about now? What about the Ketari folks today?" Cikgu Nasir was deeply disappointed.

Cikgu Nasir and a number of others in the village had tried in their own ways to stop their relatives in the riverine area from moving away. They could not, of course, ask those relatives not to sell their land, for the floods were too much for them to fight. But they could still stay on in Ketari. They could start rubber plots or business ventures, or get salaried jobs in Tuan Pekok's mining company. If they had the will, they could try all these. But like Pak Kia, Pak Abu, Tutung and Tapa, they had all reached the end of the road and felt they had to begin afresh as their ancestors had done.

"Now," said Zaidi, "it's clear that they'll move to Lebu or Aspa or Janda Baik. Where else?" He sank into thought. The words were like a heavy sentence passed by a judge on his helpless self. How oppressive it was to the mind and spirit to be forced to accept an unjust sentence.

Zaidi looked at Cikgu Nasir's face. The disappointment on it seemed to spill over into his own breast. In his mind he saw his brother's face. He saw Pak Abu's face, and the faces of all the Ketari folks. He studied those faces. They clearly showed a rigid, frozen resolve. They were all the same. Their attitude had never changed. The changes the British brought shocked them into clinging even more firmly to their old way of life. Some were descendants of people who had been shrewd in seeking wealth, tough in panning ore, brave in opening plantations and canny in starting shops in Bentong and Ketari. Today that breed was extinct. All had gone back to the old way of life, to the rice

fields, even when it meant moving to the jungles of Lebu and Asap. Suddenly the Chinese were there in great numbers, their population growing at tremendous speed. Everything around the Ketari people was overrun by the newcomers, except their original rice fields and village. These, they felt, were their last bastion. Then that last bastion too was stormed, even more violently, by Tuan Pekok's dredge. Where else could they feel safe except deeper inland.

6. Like Cikgu Brahim, Zaidi sensed and knew very well that the rural folks like his brother and the others were simple people, who had toiled all their lives in the belief that their way of life suited them best. They were never made to understand, nor given a chance to consciously face up to the changes, and the reasons for the changes, brought by the British rulers. They did not know that they were isolated from those changes, and that the opportunities were being grabbed by others. They were never in touch with agents of change and progress. Their children went to English schools only to become tools of the administration. Pak Kia had said several times that Karim would not be sent to continue his studies at an English school. He did not want his children to be like plants that float in the water, no shoots above and no roots below. His children must be strongly rooted in the way of life of their father of their ancestors.

qi How was a fair decision to be made for these honest and simple people? They would never realise that they were being driven into the jungle to face gradual extinction. Zaidi could only express his dismay by gazing sadly into Cikgu Nasir's face.

xi

xi

The atmosphere in Ketari had changed. The little town at the junction of three roads was bustling with activity. Jalil's coffee shop was always crowded. Rows of bicycles were

parked on the five foot path. From the shop, people went to the Penghulu's Court and back again. In the court there were four long benches, arranged two in a row. Between the benches on the right and those on the left there was a space of about one yard. About six feet in front of the benches was a stage three feet high. On the same level as the stage and about six feet behind it were the Penghulu's office and the Assistant Penghulu's office. On the stage was a table, where the Penghulu conducted hearings and chaired meetings with the people of the village. On the left of the stage, two steps led up to it and the offices. The stage had a lattice fence three feet high, with a wooden door at the steps to keep out intruders, human or animal. The area where the benches were, also had a three foot lattice fence. Unlike the offices, this area had no walls. The wind blew in freely; the air was cool and pleasant. In the middle of the front part of the court, there was a four foot break in the lattice fence. That was the entrance to the court -- an open doorway. People came in through the entrance; fowls and ducks and goats wandered in which ever way they could.

The long benches were now occupied by people who looked confused and lost. Goats that were wont to roam in the court went elsewhere. But one Bengalese billy-goat with floppy ears and a long beard trotted across the court forgetting the presence of human beings who sat vacantly awaiting their turn to be called. He made for a plump mother goat that was being nuzzled by her two kids on the western side of the court. The people were startled by the billy-goat's impropriety, but forgot it the moment Pendekar Atan called out the name of Zakaria bin Mat Saman. These past few days, Pendekar Atan had joined the court staff. His work was to call and usher in those whose turn had come to sign a contract with Tuan Pekok's lawyer.

Pak Kia rose. Tuan Pekok's lawyer was waiting inside, with the Assistant Penghulu. Pendekar Atan usually stood beside the table as each deal was completed between the

lawyer and a villager. He acted as unofficial witness, the official one being the Assitant Penghulu himself. Pendekar Atan was shocked when Pak Kia, instead of coming forward towards the steps, turned back and walked out. He rushed to stop Pak Kia, but it was too late. He had gone. Bewilderment turned into uneasiness. The villagers, no fewer than fifteen in all, exchanged glances. Their eyes were filled with questions. They watched as Pendekar Atan returned, heading for the Assistant Penghulu's office. Sensing those unvoiced questions, Pendekar Atan turned to face the villagers.

"Sit down. Don't bother about him."

"Maybe something's amiss," said one.

"We'd better ask him first. We don't want to be cheated."

"Maybe Pak Kia can't sign without Zaidi. The land has not been divided," said another.

"Sit down. Don't worry. He's that way. Just like Zaidi. Must always act differently from others."

Some who had risen sat down again on the benches. Others hesitated. Finally all were seated again. Except Pak Abu. He walked out.

"Where are you going, Pak Abu?" Pendekar Atan asked. There was anxiety on his face.

"Going out for a while," Pak Abu replied tersely.

The rest remained seated though they still looked doubtful. Pendekar Atan went into the Assistant Penghulu's office.

"Quick! We must get everything signed by those present. Then Pendekar must deal quickly with the problem of Pak Kia dan Pak Abu," Tuan Pekok's lawyer decided after hearing Pendekar Atan's story. The lawyers's face was grim, his tone harshly commanding.

By midday the business was done. The Penghulu's Court was empty of the villagers. Young goats began jumping and scampering around the legs of the benches and on the vacant spaces near them. Pendekar Atan came out. The

lawyer and the Assistant Penghulu also came out. Pendekar Alan hurried across the court to the entrance. The gambolling kids ran helter-skelter. The lawyer and the Assistant Penghulu went into the Penghulu's office.

Pak Abu caught up with Pak Kia at the wooden bridge over Gementi River.

"I don't know. I don't understand Zaidi's behaviour," said Pak Kia.

"You said you had spoken to him. And he had agreed."

"That's it. I can't sign by myself. He said yesterday he would come."

"What's to be done now?"

"I don't know. And you, why did you leave? Have you signed?"

"I won't. You don't sign, I don't sign. You don't sell, I don't sell. You go to Janda Baik, I go to Janda Baik. You go to Lebu, I go to Lebu."

"If I sell but don't move?"

"How can that be? If we sell, we'll have to move. What's there for us here. You and I are the same. We want to plant rice. We have no rubber plot. What would we hang around here for?"

Pak Kia grew silent. He felt torn between his friend and his brother. He had tried several times to persuade Zaidi, first, to agree to sell their land, second, to agree to his moving to Janda Baik to open new land. In the end Zaidi had faced up to the undeniable fact that there was no use clinging to their land. Zaidi's dream of getting all or most of the villagers to revive their rice land and to open a rubber plantation at the fifth mile could never come true. Except for Pak Abu, none of the people in the riverine area was prepared to do that. Even Tutung and Tapa had stopped trying to revive the land downstream. They had got jobs with Tuan Pekok's dredging operations at Camang. Zaidi had surrendered. He had agreed to sell the ancestral land and his own land which had been worked by Tutung and Tapa.

"I don't know what to do," Pak Kia said.

"Why? Hasn't Zaidi agreed? What else are you worried about?"

"He only agreed to sell the land. He doesn't want me to move."

"What then?"

"He wants me to change my way of life."

"What does that mean?"

"To open a rubber plantation at the fifth mile. He said he had paid the premium for fifteen acres there. All the money from the sale of our land, his and mine, is to go to opening the land there and planting rubber."

"So?"

"That's the reason he didn't come. It must be because I didn't give him a firm answer."

"But what's your answer -- will you agree?"

"I don't know. I don't feel safe planting rubber. For a proper village life, we must have rice fields. Planting rubber is not a proper way of life."

"So?"

They reached the junction and went into Jalil's coffee-shop. It was crowded. Those who had finished their business earlier at the Penghulu's Court were there, making quite a din.

"Finished?" One of them asked.

"There were ten to fifteen more at the court," Pak Abu replied.

"Don't follow me, your business won't be done," Pak Kia opened the topic again after Jalil had served them coffee.

"Never mind. Even if I'm late, Tuan Pekok will still want to buy."

Again there was silence.

"Let's say I have to listen to Zaidi. What then?"

"That can't be. I know you, you are like me. Folks like us must live in a village, must have a rice field. Must plant rice, and coconuts. Just see what will happen. If the rubber

get moody and its price drops to nothing, Zaidi too will turn to rice, to coconuts. He'll be trudging to Janda Baik, or to Lebu. If we are not there, whom will he turn to?"

"You are right. But he's so different from everyone else. I don't know. He follows a different path. And a different way of life. In his eyes, money is more powerful than rice. If our country has no rice, we can buy rice from Siam. Even now he's eating Siamese rice."

"True. But if rubber prices drop, where will he get the money from? Even his business may fold up. His customers are rubber people. Not us. We buy very few things. Just oil and salt. At a pinch, we can even make our own oil. Coconut oil can be used to light our lamps."

A number of people came into Jalil's coffee-shop. They had just completed their business at the court.

"Why did you go off so suddenly?" One of them asked Pak Kia and Pak Abu.

"I had to settle something with Zaidi," Pak Kia answered.

"Let's go," Pak Abu hastily said to Pak Kia. He feared the question might be directed at him next; he would find it hard to answer.

They left. "We'll go to Zaidi's shop. I want to settle everything with him right now," Pak Kia said when they reached the five foot path.

"You go. I have nothing to do with it. I'll go home. Tell me the decision this evening."

"Don't forget, we have made a pact. If you give way to Zaidi, you are the one who breaks the pact. Don't blame me. I am bent on moving to Janda Baik. I will never plant rubber. You know that. I want to go on living the Malay way."

Pak Abu turned and went off to his land.

When Pak Kia reached the five foot path in front of his brother's shop, he heard voices raised as in a quarrel. From the front of the shop he saw Pendekar Atan and Zaidi exchanging words. So the Pendekar had come. He must

have completed his work at the court. Pak Kia did not enter, but joined Mamat who was waiting on a bench outside.

"I'm not being unjust to anyone. I'm earning an honest living." Pak Kia was startled to hear Pendekar Atan's voice, harsh and angry.

"Don't misunderstand me, Pendekar. I'm only talking about the people of Ketari. Remember! The people of Ketari. The people of Benus are different. They began moving to Janda Baik long ago. They were the ones who opened up Janda Baik. But the Ketari people? If it weren't for Tuan Pekok's mines, the people of Ketari would not need to move. Do you think the people of Ketari cannot go on working here? That there are no opportunities for them to grow with Bentong's growth? Even if their rice fields fail, the people Ketari have many other means of livelihood here. Why must they run away into the jungle?"

"Tuan Pekok is not asking them to run away into the jungle. Their land is bought at thrice the usual price. Where's the injustice?"

"Are they given land near the town to start a new life?"

"Tuan Pekok is not the government."

"That's where you forget something, Pendekar. Tuan Pekok is not the government, true. But ours is a government of white men, and the whites help the whites."

"That's true. But the government is helping a company that has enough money to open mines and make this country rich. Don't think, Cik Zaidi, that I know nothing of the government's ways."

"I'm sure you know all about that, Pendekar. But what's the sense of getting riches for the country if the Malays must flee to the jungle? Isn't that injustice?"

Pendekar Atan fell silent. He remembered stories about Cikgu Brahim. It must be true that he was being investigated for leading the younger folks of Ketari astray. How foolish these people were. Were it not for the Chinese and the Indians, they would have remained in the jungle

forever. They blamed the white men for bringing in the Chinese and the Indians. They said the white men did that to drive them into the jungle. But they did not know how to live an urban life.

"Don't you see, Cik Zaidi, what our people were like? They are the ones who are bent on planting rice. Others open plantations and mines, but they cling to their rice fields. That's why they have to move."

"That's it. They have to move. Do you think they have a choice, Pendekar? They have to move. They are forced to move. They are treated like buffaloes: shooed off, willy-nilly, into the pen."

"Don't blame me for it. I have not been unjust to anyone."

"I don't blame you, Pendekar. If you understood me, you wouldn't have listened to rumours, accusing me of leading people astray. Saying I was Cikgu Brahim's minion, inciting the Ketari people not to sell their land, to go against the white men, against the government. And all sorts of other things. You know, Pendekar, I care for the Malays. And I myself don't just sit idle. I work, I toil, I plant rubber. If I were against the government, I wouldn't have planted rubber, or started a business; and in the end I, too, would have fled into the jungle. You, too, don't want to go into the jungle. But you felt nothing when others are driven into the jungle. That's where you and I differ, Pendekar."

Pendekar Atan rose and banged his fist on the table. Pak Kia hurried in. The Pendekar seemed to have flown into a rage. It was time to step in.

"Enough. I've heard everything. Don't show your gangster ways here, Pendekar. Whether we want to sell our land or we don't, that's our choice. You'd better go home this moment."

Pendekar Atan was thrown off balance. In a moment he had cooled down. Zaidi, too, did not quite know what to do. But he remained seated, looking calm.

"Sorry, Pendekar, I was rather rough. I feel we were

both rough. Go home for now, Pendekar. Tomorrow, my brother Kia and I will give our decision."

Pendekar Atan still stood by the table. His face was still tense. He did not know whether to go or stay. Slowly Zaidi rose and offered his hand. Pendekar Atan looked at Zaidi's face. Zaidi smiled. Pendekar Atan took Zaidi's hand. Then he went out, his head bowed.

"Praise be to Allah. If he hadn't gone out, I would have dragged him out to the five-foot path. Just because they call him Pendekar, he thinks he can be rude," Pak Kia grumbled.

"*Abang*, I am anxious to do good. In Islam, when we want to do good, we must be patient. Patience means accepting all sorts of trials but never giving way to wrongdoing or evil. However long it takes, we must keep trying. Allah willing, the time will come when Allah will open our adversaries' hearts to the good that we have been striving for."

"You grow more and more different, Zaidi. I find it harder and harder to understand you."

Pak Kia sat down. Zaidi seated himself again. Both were silent.

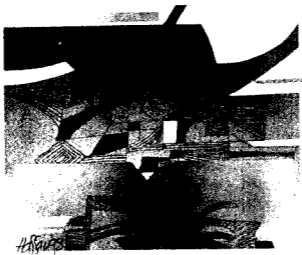
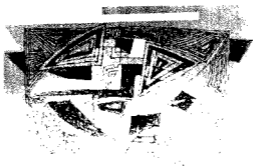
"Actually the land question is settled, *abang*," finally Zaidi spoke. "I thought it all out last night. If you still want to move to Janda Baik, what can I do. The fact is that you can't understand my way of thinking yet. We'll sell the land, and you can use your share of the money to fulfill your wish of carrying on the traditional Malay way of life. I'll use my share to plant a few more acres of rubber."

Hearing his brother's decision, Pak Kia bowed his head. He accepted the division of the money from the sale of their land. He could not bear the thought of accepting help indefinitely from his brother. Felling trees and clearing land, starting a new settlement, planting dry rice for a start, growing vegetables, coconuts and fruit trees were no hardship to him.

"There are just the two of us, *abang*," said Zaidi. "For

richer or poorer, we are one family, and each cares for the other's children as much as for his own. Only our paths are different. You are bent on following the old path. Let me go on with the new way of life I have begun."

Translated by Adibah Amin





Shahnon Ahmad

SHAHNON AHMAD, Prof. Datuk (1933-), a writer who was born on 13 January 1933 in Banggul Derdap, Sik, Kedah.

Shahnon Ahmad or his pen name Juwahir or Tutang, is not only well known for his novels *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* and *Reutong*, or for frequently winning the Literary Prize, or for being a scholar at the University of Science Malaysia, but also for being a writer with a passion, and one with his very own philosophy. Shahnon does not write for the sake of writing alone, in fact he is someone who always tries to improve his art by experimenting with a variety of styles and approaches, exploring the world of the mind to enrich the content of his writing and always reconsidering his philosophy as a writer in his search for the real truth.

Shahnon started writing in the mid-fifties, and within ten years gained recognition as a writer of superior talent. He is a writer who pays careful attention to important events that happen within and outside his ethnic community. He introduced the concept which he referred to as 'Malay Power' when he saw how weak the Malays were when faced with political, economic and social pressure, as was obvious in the May 13 incident of 1969. This is one of the factors that motivates him to defend those who are helpless in the face of violence and Nature's forces, and to

improve their way of thinking to a way that makes them feel the necessity to defend their own kind when threatened with the strength of another.

He received his basic education at a Malay school in Sik, Kedah, and passed his Standard V examination in 1946. He then continued his studies at the Sultan Abdul Hamid College, Alor Star until he passed the School Certificate Examination. In 1954, he worked as a teacher at the English Grammar School, Kuala Terengganu. Between 1955 and 1956, he served as an army officer in Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan. An accident had caused him to leave the army and resume his career as a teacher, teaching English at *Sekolah Melayu Gunung* and *Sekolah Bukit Besar*, Kedah between 1957 and 1959.

From 1960 to 1963, Shahnnon worked as a language teacher at the Sultan Abdul Hamid College. Later he moved to Jenan, and taught literature at the Sultan Abdul Hamid Secondary School till 1967.

In 1968, he went to Canberra, Australia, and worked as a research officer at the Australian National University (ANU). He took the opportunity to continue his studies at the ANU until he obtained his bachelor's degree in 1971. Upon returning to Malaysia, Shahnnon worked as a lecturer at the Sultan Idris Teachers' Training College, Tanjung Malim, and in 1974, was offered a job as lecturer at the University of Science Malaysia. He was later conferred the Master of Arts degree in 1975. Shahnnon was appointed Dean of the Centre for Humanities in early 1979. In June 1980, Shahnnon was appointed Professor of Arts, University of Science Malaysia. In 1982, Shahnnon became full professor at the same university. Subsequently, Shahnnon was made Director of the Islamic Centre, University of Science Malaysia.

In modern Malay literature, Shahnnon Ahmad is a celebrated writer, important and much discussed in society. His early works were translations published in the magazine, *Mastika*. Following this, he continued to write prolifically,

particularly short stories, novels, essays as well as critiques. Although Shahnnon had explored practically all genres, he himself admitted that poetry and plays were not his forte. His strength obviously lies in short stories and novels, and lately, essays and critiques.

Shahnnon has been writing prolifically and been well-known since 1956 for his short stories, essays and critiques. What comes through in his early short stories are issues that smack of cynicism and sex. The stories he wrote give us a peek at the suffering of the rural people and the starkness of city life. Within a short time of the publication of his first novel *Rentong*, Shahnnon became better known as a literary writer. *Rentong* is a novel which clearly displays Shahnnon's great talent as a novelist. After publishing his second novel, *Terdedah*, Shahnnon came up with *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*. This particular work was very well received by the reading public and students and was used as a textbook for the teaching of literature to sixth formers for several years. This novel too was made into a film in 1983.

Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan and *Rentong* can be regarded as works that have pushed Shahnnon Ahmad to the acme of his career as a novelist. *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* has been translated into English by Adibah Amin with the title *No Harvest But A Thorn*. *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 1973 categorized the novel as one of the 10 most interesting novels for 1972.

Shahnnon admires the works of several foreign writers. Amongst them are Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Patrick White. He admires the works of Pramoedya for its powerful language while Patrick White's for the scenes of country life that they portray.

The concept behind Shahnnon's cause can be seen in most of his works and this he revealed in the preface he wrote for the GATRA anthology of poems, *Kebangkitan*, which reads 'We are Malays, struggling to establish our identity through literature'.

From his life story we can at once recognize the back-

ground of the novels he writes. Through *Rentong*, for example, we see Shahnnon attempting to analyse rural society which is badly in need of development. Shahnnon Ahmad clearly displays his great sympathy for the plight of the poor farmers in his village Banggul Derdap. Several of his novels show soundness of technique and content, and the reader is able to feel the turmoil that evolves from the conflict experienced by characters such as Dogol, Semaun, Pak Senik, Jeha and Lahuma.

Shahnnon's strength in his works lies in his sensitivity and imagination as a writer who is able to successfully capture the internal conflicts of the rural people. By subordinating rural life which is very much a part of him, the picture he paints of Banggul Derdap's natural surroundings and ambience becomes vivid and meaningful. A special quality that we find and which is obvious in Shahnnon's careful study of the poor farmers is that he has no intention of palming the blame on the government as is frequently done by *ASAS 50* writers during the movement's heyday. He sees the kampong folks in all their simplicity as they strive to make an honest living and at the same time submit themselves totally to Almighty God. The enemies of their crops are gifts from God and it is to Him that they pray for protection.

Shahnnon too brings to the fore serious themes such as godliness as in *Protes*, and the sociopolitics of the Malays in *Menteri* and *Perdana*. What is evident in all of Shahnnon's works is the language he uses and his casual way of writing. He employs original comparisons a great deal, the Kedah dialect and reiteration for effect. The words he uses are selected in such a way that they help create a certain atmosphere and sustain the interest of the reader.

In 1973, Shahnnon published yet another novel, *Srengenge*. The Panel of Judges for the Literary Prize selected it as the best novel for 1973. *Srengenge* is an attempt to find a synthesis between traditional beliefs and modern psychology. In addition, the technique of transferring and exchange-

ing opinions from one character to another to portray the events that happen in flashback is an innovation by Shahnon. In 1985, Shahnon's novel *Al-Shiqayy I* was published.

In the genre of short stories, several of his short stories have won the Literary Prize. At least three collections of his short stories have been published, that is, *Anjing-Anjing*, *Debu Merah* and *Selesai Sudah*. In addition to this, Shahnon's short stories have also been published together with those of other writers in several anthologies.

In the 1960s, Shahnon on several occasions won the RM100 prize for short stories published in *Berita Harian* and *Mastika*. In 1974, Shahnon won the Literary Prize for essays and critiques.

In 1975, Shahnon was selected as a member of the Panel for the Literary Prize. He was conferred the title *Pejuang Sastera* or Literary Exponent by the Prime Minister in 1976. In 1982, Shahnon was awarded the National Literary Award by the Malaysian government and from 1983 onwards, was once again appointed member of the Panel for the Literary Prize. As is evident, Shahnon is in a class of his own whether one is talking of his talent or his dedication to writing. He not only writes across genres but also discusses a variety of issues, and of late, shows a keen interest in shifting the focus of his writing from the suffering of the rural community to issues that touches on Islam in literature. The polemic which involved Shahnon and Kassim Ahmad on the definition of Islamic literature was published in several issues of *Dewan Sastera* in 1984.

Shahnon was awarded the *Darjah Kebesaran Datuk Setia Diraja Kedah*, which carries the title *Datuk*, by the Sultan of Kedah in 1980.

Translated by Nor Azizah Abu Bakar

LIST OF WORKS**Novels**

1. *Al-Syiqaq I*. Kuala Lumpur: Teks Publishing, 1985.
2. *Menteri*. Alor Star: Pustaka Sekolah, 1967.
3. *Patriach*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1991.
4. *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Melayu Baru, 1971.
5. *Rentong*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Melayu Baru, 1971.
6. *Rope of Ash*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979.
7. *Stumps*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993.
8. *Tunggul-Tunggul Gerigis*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1988.
9. *Sutan Baginda*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1989.
10. *Sumpah*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1974.
11. *Perdana*. Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 1969.
12. *Ummi dan Abang Syeikhul*. Pulau Pinang: Yusran, 1992.
13. *No Harvest But a Thorn*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972.
14. *Protes*. Melaka: Abbas Bandung, 1967.
15. *TIVI*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1995.

Short Stories

1. *Anjing-Anjing*. Kuala Lumpur: Jambatanmas, 1964.
2. *Debu Merah*. Melaka: Abbas Bandung, 1965.
3. *Perajurit yang Hilang*. Melaka: Abbas Bandung, 1964.

4. *Seketul Hati Seorang Pemimpin*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1989.
5. *Selesai Sudah*. Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann, 1977.
6. *The Third Notch and Other Stories*. Singapore: Heinemann, 1980.

Research

1. *Gubahan Novel*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979.
2. *Kesusasteraan: Kepolitikan, Kealaman, Kedirian, Kemanusiaan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992.
3. *Kesusasteraan dan Etika Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Fajar Bakti, 1981.
4. *Kesusasteraan dan Permasalahan Manusia*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1988.
5. *Penglibatan Dalam Puisi*. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Melayu, 1978.
6. *Sastera: Pengalaman Ilmu Imaginasi dan Kitarannya*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1994.
7. *Panduan Menghadapi Kertas Peperiksaan Bahasa Melayu*. Alor Star: Dinas Penerbitan Pustaka Sekolah, 1968.
8. *Sastera Sebagai Seismograf Kehidupan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993.
9. *Koleksi Terpilih Shahnnon Ahmad*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1995.
10. *Pongang Sastera*. Kuala Lumpur: Fajar Bakti, 1995.
11. *Corat-Coret Berkelongsong*. Kuala Lumpur: Fajar Bakti, 1995.

Plays

1. *Si Anak Rempang Karam di Kota*. Alor Star: Pustaka Maha, 1968.

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Love

ON this beautiful and peaceful night, my heart tells me that I should talk about something that may seem mundane to us; in fact, many people throughout the ages till today have had a lot to say about it. Nevertheless, this mundane matter is very important in every aspect of life including culture, politics, religion and literary activities too.

Maybe, because it is too often mentioned by people, it has been trivialized. Often it is devalued intentionally; sometimes it does not even carry meaning anymore.

It is a fact that we are very diligent in speaking about this matter, especially among young men and women. It is also sung by our singers from the past till the present; it is written in poems, *syair*, *gurindam*, *seloka* and *sajak*; (Trans. note; these are different types of Malay poems). It is used as themes by novelists and short story writers, spoken by politicians, called upon by evangelists and religious officials. In fact, it is no less whispered in moments of crying and laughter.

Often, we are unable to verbalize or express in writing this small and mundane matter. However, it is always

woven into our hearts and souls, especially in our relationships with the people who are closest to us such as our spouses, in-laws, lovers, parents, national leaders, national citizens and others. In fact, we often forget that this trivialized matter is actually the basis and the main objective of our activities in life which covers areas such as education, communication, unity, culture, evangelism, politics, national leadership, labour, literature, and others.

This is what we often call and know as LOVE.

Literature is a branch of the arts that is rooted in love: love for beauty and love for truth. Works of literature have been produced by writers for the purpose of enriching humanity to love beauty and truth. This love that has varying status, degree, value, integrity and quality, rises to the purest and the most eternal love which is love for the Creator: *Allah Subhanahu Wataala* (God Almighty).

Syukur Alhamdulillah (thanks be to God) for our country that has been blessed with endless pleasure from our Creator, which facilitates our efforts to raise this pleasure to the highest status of love. From its geography, its history, its rich traditional heritage, its kind and gentle people, this country has provided much inspiration to our writers for ages to create their literary works.

The climax of all the pleasures that have been awarded from God to our country is when the sign of truth which is Islam was spread throughout this land for centuries; Islam upholds the purest beauty and truth. Islam guarantees the right path that is valid for guiding oneself, family, community and country. It allows us to face every aspect of our life in a rational, scientific and intellectual manner as a product from love of the highest degree to God; it is not based on irrational, non-scientific and fairy-tale ideas like the values before the arrival of Islam, before we were awarded the true sign from God.

However, unfortunately the rationalism, science and intellectualism that Islam upholds and which is able to elevate the lower levels of love to eternal love has lost its spi-

rit; its life has disappeared, its soul has dried up, its manners, decency and kindness are unseen. This history of the arrival of Islam is between the pre-Islamic time and colonial time. This has kindled various types of love especially that of the lower degree which is cheap in value. This type of love only fulfills physical needs; the animal instincts and the sensual calls of the lower type. It does not kindle love of eternal beauty and love of eternal truth.

In the discipline of literature, in name, we are characters experiencing until today the age of the spread of Islam. However, our literary works express and record love that is cheap and of the lower type. This includes literary works that diligently tease the perception of our five senses, projecting the angle of sensual taste until the sensual contamination brings to fruition a climate of intoxication, desiring animal-like lust; finally the most common is the addiction for pure materialism.

Because of the awareness for only the lower levels of love, not awareness for love of beauty and love of eternal truth, not love of the highest degree, literary works that are produced are in a dilemma, characters are in a dilemma; literary works are in a state of intoxication, literary works offer the lower type of love. Novels have themes concerning people in lower types of love and poems have lost their decency. Dramas are engrossed in non-Islamic aesthetics. Criticism is arrogant, proud and hateful.

This also produces literary figures whose characters are in a state of dilemma and in a state of confusing values. They breed literary works which proliferate in an atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty, depending on the whims and fancies of the sensuality of the various lower levels of love. Resulting from this type of taste and sensuality we quickly feel that we are big and powerful. However, it is obvious that this taste and sensuality of the lower types of love is a product of the culture and artistry of the pre-Islamic and colonial ages. It is not a product of Islamic culture that has been awarded from God to us, an Islamic cul-

ture whose beauty and truth we have only heard but never experienced nor understood its beauty and truth in every facet of our life.

However, *syukur alhamdulillah* for, presently, under the new era of national leadership, a clear and unshaken awareness has emerged to truly raise love to eternal love, one that surpasses all other levels of love. This awareness to produce responsible individuals will lead towards responsibility to God. Thus, producing *takharah* (noble) individuals that will lead to *takharah* of the faith, *syariah* (Islamic laws) and morals. It will also produce individuals who are *itqan* (diligent) in leading themselves, family, community and nation. This is an awareness that will rise to eternal love of beauty and truth which when combined comes to mean love for God.

Syukur Alhamdulillah because the eternal beauty and truth that have spread throughout this land not only have triggered awareness and action taken by our national leadership but have also begun to take root in the awareness and actions of our literary figures. *Alhamdulillah*.

It is obvious that our literary figures know that the artistic gift that has been awarded to them by God is only meant for expressing the eternal love and truth of the highest level of love, not to seduce readers to the various lower levels of love. Our writers understand that the message in their works should concern the experiences of mankind, not only the physical experience, the emotions and senses but also embracing aspects of our minds and souls in the context of our relationship with *Allah* (God). Our literary figures also know that their delivery techniques should project the structure and style that focuses on nobility rather than humiliation, the esteemed rather than the disgraced, the obedient rather than the rebellious. Our writers have also realised that their works should have an effect that will lead to the eternal love of beauty and truth.

But as we all know, every battle of beauty and truth that will lead to the goal of eternal love surely will face

trials and tribulations. Demons and satans will emerge in various forms and tricks to stop this battle. This challenge will always remain. The enemies are always waiting to devour their prey. However, it is obvious again that the challenges and enemies from these trials are only testing our leadership. And trials such as these will always remain for as long as one attempts to attain the goal of eternal love.

However, *insya-Allah* (God willing), we will succeed amidst these trials if we know how to differentiate between the various lower types of love which are cheap and love of the highest type which is priceless. *Insya-Allah* (God willing).

Finally, in order to avoid straying away from the path leading to eternal love of beauty and truth as is being fought by national leaders today, we need to know what steps to take in everything we do. Writers who are still intoxicated with the lower levels of love in their works will be a dying breed, nowhere to be seen, like the proverbial dust on a stump. Politicians who are still intoxicated with the lower levels of love in their political activities will also be extinct. The horizon leading to that time can be seen clearly today. What will remain are writers, politicians and those who love absolute beauty and truth in the real sense of that word. Therefore, be wise in dealing with love.

Translated by Rusdina Abdul Rahim

SELECTED WORK

A Merdeka Tale

YUYI knew the exact time and day. It would always be on a Monday morning. At this time daddy would have gone out to meet the *rakyat* (masses), mummy would be teaching in school and Mak [*mak*, a shorter version of *emak* means mother; it is also a term by which elder women are addressed] Leha would be busy cleaning the kitchen at the back of the house. It would be at this time that Yuyi would already be outside of the house. She played all by herself in the garden: jumped about, sang merrily, drew lines on the ground with her fingers and sometimes just sat on the solidly carved cement steps as she nodded her head. And when she heard the cries outside the fence, Yuyi rushed to the iron fence. Yuyi knew that Merdeka was approaching her. Yuyi would press her right cheek, so cute, soft and smooth to the iron doors of the mighty iron fence as she tried to follow Merdeka's closely approaching steps. She watched him with wide open eyes. From afar both her ears have caught the same, always the same shouts - the very same she had always been hearing on a Monday morning.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!" ["Merdeka" means free-

dom. In this story it is also the name of a person].

Merdeka would come lurching lop-sidedly, flapping both hands wildly about. Sometimes Merdeka would jump up as he stretched his hands with his fist clenched. Other times he would give out a hearty laughter and show off his row of dirty and stained teeth. Often times too Merdeka would stop in his trek so as to scratch his armpits, his buttocks and his private part which was three quarter exposed. Only when Merdeka stood straight at the gate, showing his chipped alms bowl, only then did Yuyi react. She would stare at the thin body on the other side of the imposing gate. Really, the body was so thin - as thin as a bamboo pole. The hair was thick, long and uncombed. The ends of the hair were so knotted and twisted like a piece of old, hardened latex. The eyes were sunken and the shine was no longer there. And the face, the exposed chest, the arms, the neck and the bottoms which were three quarter exposed, were all thickly covered with black dirt, dark blotches everywhere similar to the saliva stains, the maps, as they are called, found on dirty pillows.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

Merdeka shouted loudly as he stretched his chipped alms bowl. Yuyi was ready with her 10 cents coin. And as soon as the rusty alms bowl touched the iron railing, Yuyi placed her 10 cents coin in the bowl.

From there Merdeka would walk away as he continued with his shouting.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

He would flap his hands wildly about. He jumped and scratched all over. Yuyi would then pressed her cute, left cheek close to the iron railings as she followed Merdeka until he was out of sight. Yuyi would then move away from the gate to jump about all by herself in the garden. She too kept on repeating "Merdeka" several times.

That was what usually happened. But if her daddy did not go out to meet the *rakyat* or if it happened to be a holiday and her mummy would be at home, Yuyi would still

wait for Merdeka's visit. Daddy and mummy would be in the sitting room joking about this and that. Or they would still be in the upstairs bedroom, laughing and joking with each other. In fact even if it was raining that day, Yuyi, holding an umbrella would still wait for Merdeka, for this had become a practice which must be carried out.

Only one morning, things were not as they usually happened. That day it poured. There was no school. Daddy was not at home either, for he was at another mummy's home. The real mummy saw Yuyi waiting with an umbrella by the stairs. The young mummy somehow saw Merdeka standing in the rain by the big iron gate which was tightly closed.

"Hey you beggar! Go away! Go away!"

The young mummy shouted. Merdeka was shocked; he quickly left the place and kept on repeating "Merdeka, merdeka, merdeka...." Yuyi was all confused. The 10 cents coin was already in her hand. The umbrella was also already held tightly in her hands. When she saw Merdeka fleeing away, for he was very frightened, Yuyi put down the umbrella, ran to her room and placed her face on the thick, plush mattress. She cried her heart out.

And outside the rain poured on the fertile earth of a nation which had been *merdeka* [free] for twenty five years.

"Yu! Don't play in the rain, okay?"

The young mummy stood by the door and watched her one and only child. Yuyi was still in the same position: her face deeply buried in the thick, plush mattress. Yuyi turned around, her eyes full of tears.

"Yes, mummy."

Her sobs could still be heard.

Outside the rain was still falling, wetting the earth which was truly fertile. The green, fresh trees were wet, all of which helped to enhance the beauty of this beloved nation. And, far away outside, wherever it was, an old insane beggar was seeking shelter. He was very hungry. His lips were shattering. His joints were aching. And his heart, which pride itself in being free, was empty,

absolutely empty.

"Mak Leha!"

The young mummy suddenly called out to Siti Zulaikha who was in the kitchen. The helper came rushing in and kept on nodding her head in respect; her bowed head appeared to be more crooked and bowed than Pedro's own head.

"After you've bathed Yuyi, splash water on Pedro's body."

"Yes, Datin [an honorary title of "Datuk" given to the male, whose wife then automatically becomes a "datin"]."

Datin Rahimah then went into her bedroom, but on reaching the door, she turned back.

"Mak Leha!"

"Yes, Datin."

"Forget about Pedro. Just give Yuyi a bath."

"All right, Datin."

Datin Rahimah remembered her husband's advice: "Siti Zulaikha is a religious person, she never misses her five prayers. When it is time she will pray; no matter where she is, whether it is in the kitchen or wherever. She will stop working. Pedro is an animal forbidden by her religion. Pedro cannot be touched. Don't ask Mak Leha to bathe that dog."

"Don't bother about Pedro. I'll bathe him myself."

Her voice seemed to echo in that huge two-storey bungalow.

"All right, Datin."

Siti Zulaikha's voice penetrated the huge sitting room all cluttered with antique furniture.

Sometimes Rahimah felt like laughing. Her life seemed to be a joke. That feeling often made her laugh all by herself whenever she saw the reflection of her young face in the mirror. Not long ago, when her late father suggested that she married Datuk Mahbub, Rahimah was offended. She had no desire to marry that old senile man, she said. Moreover she didn't love Datuk Mahbub. She loved Muis.

But when her father, on his death bed, had expressed the wish that she be married to Datuk Mahbub, she simply acquiesced.

Although reluctant, she still accepted; when she had been with Datuk Mahbub for three months, only then did she realize how lucky she was. Her father's death wish was indeed for her own good. Although she was the third wife, Rahimah was still happy. Datuk Mahbub was a cheerful man. Whenever he was in the house, there was always joy and laughter. Datuk Mahbub was really clever at jokes, such that sometimes Rahimah would burst out in tears from too much laughter. With Datuk Mahbub, there was always something to laugh about.

Five months after she got married, Rahimah not only got pregnant, but her love for the man, Muis, vanished completely. Now she really and truly loved Datuk Mahbub although he had two other wives and he was the people's representative for the fourth consecutive election.

That Monday it was a holiday. And that night it was her turn [to have Datuk Mahbub]. Surely he would come back according to schedule. That made Rahimah quickened her steps to go into her bedroom. She looked around the room. Everything was in place. Still, to satisfy herself, she went to the bed and patted the mattress. Then she sat in front of the dressing mirror and looked at all her cosmetic, scattered everywhere on a small side-table.

Like the early morning day, with a fine weather, Datuk Mahbub's return to his youngest wife's house was awe-inspiring. Everything changed so with his presence. His cheerful presence, his fast-paced life in spite of his old age, his constant jokes and incessant wit, all accounted for the changed atmosphere in the house. Siti Zulaikha who spent her time in the kitchen would feel happy and contented to slave for Datuk Mahbub. Yuyi's happiness was beyond description. From the attic she would rush down as soon as she heard the car's horn outside the gate. She herself would unlock the gate and rushed to the car. There, Datuk Mah-

bub would already be looking out of the window, lips pouted, ready to be kissed by Yuyi. At her feet, Pedro obediently and affectionately barked as it wagged its tail. Datuk Mahbub would get out of the car and let his driver take the car into the garage. He would carry Yuyi, embraced her tightly and the two of them would then walk to the staircase. Rahimah would already be standing at the door. She was wearing a short, sleeveless dress, exposing her bare, young, smooth shoulders. Her hair was cut in an unfathomable style: fully blown on both the left and right sides with fine, thin waves at the back. And she welcomed her husband by leaning to the right, with her head slightly tilted to one side and her long neck stretched seductively. Her lips she always carved in a sensuous smile.

"How's the teacher? She's fine; all right?"

Datuk Mahbub joked as he put Yuyi on the floor. Rahimah turned her head to the left as she placed both bare arms to the back without any other motive but to show her affection.

"Fine. All right. And how is the Honorable Datuk? Is he fine? Is he all right?"

Rahimah was also determined to make merry.

"Datuks these days are never all right. They always have many loose screws."

Datuk Mahbub then burst out laughing accompanied in turn by Rahimah. The peals of laughter filled the whole house. Mak Leha, who was standing at the back of the house, also laughed as she joined in the merriment.

"Well, there might be loose parts, but you're still a very special Datuk. You still have many spare parts."

And so the happiness continued among that small family. Datuk Mahbub had brought home many jokes as if he was really the storehouse of jokes. Mak Leha soon brought a glass to Yuyi who accepted it and drank immediately.

"What's that?" Datuk Mahbub asked.

"Milk, mummy says it's good," Yuyi replied.

"Can I have some?"

"Only a little bit, okay?"

"Hmm ... hmm."

And Mak Leha burst out laughing as she watched television in the kitchen. Rahimah looked sweet as she stood beside her husband. He was the crux of everything. His coming home annihilated all loneliness. Beside her was a man who was a storehouse of never-ending merriment, one after another. Whether it was in the sitting room, bathroom, bedroom, in the garden, kitchen or even in the toilet, Datuk Mahbub always found something to joke about.

Datuk Mahbub had three wives. His many children never quarrelled. He also had many grandchildren. But Datuk Mahbub never bothered about them, as if he was so familiar with life's winding path for he knew all the bitterness and sweetness he had to undergo. Datuk Mahbub was an old hand at party politics; he had gone through five different eras.

"This is an experienced Datuk. During the Japanese Occupation, this Datuk had many samurai swords. During the Malayan Union, it was also this Datuk who spat on many white men. In 1957 it was also this Datuk who climbed trees, shouted and screamed. Now this Datuk has a seat, many wives and is old."

Rahimah had heard that often. But it never bored or irked her. There was always some new addition to the tale, be it to the content or the way it was uttered.

Such a happy atmosphere, which started with Datuk Mahbub's return to the house, would continue into the night and sometimes into the early morning. Contentment and joy were felt everywhere; in fact for Rahimah, her husband's homecoming and presence gave her a meaning which was difficult to verbalize although she was a language teacher. She did not know how, but she felt happy, contented, relieved. The house acquired a new shine and gloss [ofhappiness]. Only then she realized the beauty of the trees around her house, felt the cool wind sweeping

into the house and admired the antique furniture which seemed to acquire a new sense of life, scattered as they were around the corners of the house. There were no sighs. No moanings from anyone. No misgivings anywhere.

What came out from Datuk Mahbub's mouth was only joy and laughter as if within that Honorable person there was never any sadness or suffering.

Datin Rahimah was quick to grasp how the *rakyat* would receive her husband each time he visited their kampongs. The applause would be thunderous each time he joked. And this continued from week to month, from one kampung to the next. In fact even the party leaders or even ministers would burst out laughing. *ADUN* [Members of the State Legislative Council] meeting, or other branch meetings or even the unofficial meetings with central party leaders would become happy occasions.

Some time ago, before Rahimah became Datuk Mahbub's third wife, she remembered reading on the front page about Datuk Mahbub's antics in an *ADUN* meeting. From his satirical speech, she could not decipher what connection it had with the opposition party. If she remembered rightly Datuk Mahbub also joked about "filling the stomach, and marrying more". Rahimah barely remembered. In her school, everything was chaotic for it was obvious that there was a joker in the *ADUN* assembly; in fact in another newspaper it was explained that there was a jester in the house of the people's representative. And this was surely a healthy political development.

The situation was the same in Rahimah's bungalow whenever Datuk Mahbub returned to fulfill his husbandly duties. Otherwise the house would be very quiet. It was fortunate that Rahimah was working. If not, she would be extremely lonely. Only Yuyi and Mak Leha were left in the house. And like always, on Mondays, Yuyi would wait for Merdeka to come. From afar she would already know. Merdeka's shouts would reach her ears. Then when Mer-

Merdeka was in sight, she would see him jumping about, flapping his hands, scratching his body and shaking his head with the thick layer of knotted and dirtied hair. When Merdeka came yet nearer she could see his skeletal body completely uncovered, except for his private parts. His hair, loose on top was knotted at the bottom almost like the moss-covered plank. His face was thin and his blood-shot eyes seemed to be sunken in the face. His nose was dirty and his cracked lips which were seldom closed-tight would reveal a few dirty, stained teeth.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

From afar these shouts could already be heard. Yuyi who was playing in the garden stopped suddenly. Yuyi could not believe her own ears for that day was not a Monday. It was a Wednesday. Merdeka never came to that area on any other day. He would be going to other places.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

But when she heard the shout yet again, Yuyi was then certain. That voice was certainly Merdeka's. She recognized very well his voice. So Yuyi ran to Mak Leha to get her 10 cents coin. Mak Leha herself could not be sure for that day was not a Monday. And if it was not on a Monday, Merdeka would not be passing that particular residential area. Mak Leha too ran to the front to determine the real situation.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

It was true. That voice could not have been anybody else's. It was the voice of the beggar which could be heard every Monday.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

The voice was coming nearer and becoming louder. Yuyi would rush to the iron gate accompanied by Pedro. Pedro would bark two or three times and then would become silent. Pedro would then wag his tail quickly. And when he was right in front of that iron gate, Merdeka would stop. A human skeleton with all the dirt would be standing upright. His hair was the same, knotted as ever and it looked thicker and dirtier all warped like the woofs of a piece

of plank and scaly like the scales of the anteater.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

Merdeka jumped with both legs wide open. The thin legs, like two pieces of bamboo, seemed to reveal Merdeka's agility at playing with the wind with both legs. Then both his hands were clenched in a fist. Both hands, thus tightly clenched, would be waved about, even as his mouth loudly shouted the word "merdeka".

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

Suddenly in the garden, Yuyi herself shouted "merdeka" and jumped like Merdeka, flapping both hands which she clenched tightly into a fist. Pedro, on seeing Yuyi's behaviour, barked. Merdeka who was standing outside laughed loudly.

"Merdeka!" Merdeka shouted.

"Merdeka!" Yuyi replied.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!" he shouted three times.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!" Yuyi again replied as she tightly clenched both hands into a fist. Then joyously Yuyi jumped around the garden, each jump accompanied by the rhythmic shouts of "merdeka". Merdeka who was standing outside, watched rigidly the behaviour of the little girl in the garden. He himself was no longer jumping or shouting as if he wanted to give that opportunity to Yuyi who was obviously overjoyed with that kind of jumping and shouting.

"Merdeka!" Yuyi shouted, then waited for Merdeka's response to come from outside the gate. But Merdeka wasn't shouting anymore. The sun was shining brightly, thus quickly drying the ground made wet by the night's rain. The trees around the area looked fresh with its colour and smell.

"Merdeka!" Yuyi again shouted, but Merdeka stood still without moving, without saying a word on that fertile land.

"Yuuu!" Mak Leha called out for she was already standing in front of the door. Yuyi stopped shouting and looked

around trying to fathom Mak Leha's whereabouts.

"Quick. Give the money to Merdeka! Hurry up. Give him the money!"

Yuyi obediently followed Mak Leha's orders. She gave the one dollar note which she had been holding all this while. The note was crumpled and wet for it had been crushed by Yuyi's tiny fingers. Merdeka approached the gate and accepted the offering. He did not say anything. He also did not wave anything. Yuyi scrutinized Merdeka's face on the other side of the gate. Merdeka too scrutinized the face of the little girl.

"Yuuu! Hurry up! It's bath time."

Yuyi changed direction and skipped merrily to the door. She kept on saying, incessantly, "merdeka, merdeka, merdeka, merdeka..." And after she was bathed and had changed clothes, she again returned to the garden. But Merdeka was no longer there. She tried to see through the railings of that massive iron gate, but Merdeka had long disappeared. Yuyi breathed in deeply just to see if she could still smell Merdeka's stinking odour, but she failed to even scent that. She strained her ears to find whether she could detect Merdeka's shouting; even here she again failed. Still Yuyi continued to jump about in the garden, moving from one corner to the next as she slowly uttered "merdeka, merdeka, merdeka, merdeka..."

"What is Merdeka, Mak Leha?"

Yuyi suddenly asked Mak Leha. She had gone to the kitchen after she had exhausted herself jumping about in the garden.

Mak Leha laughed loudly.

"Merdeka is to be free," Mak Leha replied.

"Merdeka is a poor person, right Mak Leha?"

"That's right. Merdeka is a poor person, an impoverish-ed being. Merdeka are people without a big house, or a small house for that matter. Merdeka are people who sleep on the pathways. They don't eat well. Merdeka does not have new shirts and no money. Merdeka is thin, dirty

and smelly."

"But Merdeka calls himself merdeka. He is then free."

"That's right. Who else can he call? He has no one else to call. He has no mummy, no daddy. He has no Mak Leha. He has only himself to call."

"But now he has Yuyi; Merdeka can call Yuuu."

Mak Leha laughed.

"Yes. Now Merdeka can also call out to Yuuu. Yuyi too must also call out to Merdeka. Only then will he call out to Yuuu."

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!" Yuyi called out.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!" Mak Leha also called out.

That Wednesday Merdeka had no desire to go anywhere to beg. He walked quickly towards the city and slept on the usual cement pathway under the Wisma Merdeka Bumiputera building, better known as Wiskara. Across the wide road, always busy and always crowded with human beings, there were other multistoried buildings, like Wiskara. But multistoried buildings and noises made by city people no longer had any effect on Merdeka. He only wanted to sleep on that pathway. He wanted to be alone, all by himself in that myriad crowd of ever noisy people. He wanted to remain silent in that crowded noisiness.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

Although the voice was low and soft, almost like a whisper, it still penetrated him amidst that chaotic condition with its multifarious, multicoloured situation. Mohammed Zaki bin Mohammad Toha recalled that situation. A young cute girl responded to his call. He could feel that child dancing and jumping everywhere. He could feel the child clenching her fist upwards into the wide, wide sky.

But that memory stopped abruptly, to be replaced by ever-changing, colourful circles accompanied by billowing black smoke and multihued lines which had no particular direction. But then, the image of the cute child reappeared. She smiled and shouted "merdeka, merdeka, merdeka."

Mohammad Zaki bin Mohammad Toha remembered the thousands of people walking in a procession along the roads. Their faces were red under the hot, glaring sun. He recalled the face of a leader as he stood erect on a small, beautiful building which was recently built. Hands, with fists tightly clenched, and shouts could be heard everywhere, from each never ending corner. But even that historical memory was quickly annihilated by heaps of colourful whirlpools, billowy black smoke and mirages of lines crisscrossing one another without any particular direction.

"Bung Zaki?"

The sound seemed to penetrate his ears. He turned.

"Bung Zaki!"

"Merdeka!"

"Merdeka!"

The memory invaded him so speedily but it was so quickly covered with whirlpools, billows and lines.

"We fought for the same ideals, Bung."

"The same ideals."

"The colonialists must be expelled. The informers and Malays who were against independence must be killed. We'll surely be independent, Bung."

"Definitely Bung, definitely!"

"Merdeka!"

"Merdeka, Bung."

"Let's go!"

"Let's Bung."

"March forward!"

"March forward, Bung!"

"Malays will never disappear from this earth."

"Malays will never disappear from this earth."

Ever so rapidly these historical memories came to haunt Mohammad Zaki bin Mohammad Toha, but these memories disappeared as quickly as they came to be replaced by whirlpools, billows and lines. In these memories there appeared a firefly jumping about and simultaneously with the firefly, there were small waves which shook and

emitted whorls of multicolored smoke. And from in-between these whorls, the tiny firefly could be seen always jumping about like a small child dancing away.

In the garden, in front of the bungalow house, Yuyi was active as usual jumping within the circles and rectangles which she had drawn on the fertile earth. And from her small mouth was emitted the word "merdeka", verbalized quickly and sometimes brokenly.

That day her daddy would be coming home. And as always the house was in tip-top condition. Datin Rahimah had got up very early for by seven thirty she must be in school. But before that she had already left all sorts of instructions with Siti Zulaikha such that when her husband, Datuk Mahbub, returned, he would immediately feel the serenity and beauty. The Datin herself would be able to meet her husband for she would be home in the afternoon. Yuyi was instructed to wait for her daddy at the gate, together with Pedro. As usual Datuk Mahbub returned and although he was exhausted, he still looked fresh. He never stopped smiling. Peals of laughter could be heard especially when Datuk Mahbub recounted the funny incidents which happened when he went to see the *rakyat* in his electoral area. Yuyi jumped about in the house and in the compound as she kept on softly uttering the word "merdeka, merdeka, merdeka."

Datin Rahimah looked really cheerful that afternoon. They would have their dinner together that night. After which, together, they would watch television for a while before adjourning to the bedroom. Yuyi would be allowed to sleep on the cushion first; later she would be carried to her bedroom. But Yuyi continued to be active that night as she kept on repeating the words softly. Sometimes she would say the word according to the number of jumps she made, or the steps she took or according to the number of stairs she had to climb. But her mummy and daddy never pondered about what Yuyi was singing day and night. It was just a song that was shouted by Yuyi according to the

rhythm that she knew: be it the rhythm of her jumping feet, her flapping hands or her hippity-hop steps. Datuk Mahbub was too engrossed with the jokes he wanted to tell his wife. Datin Rahimah was too absorbed with the jokes which she wanted to hear from her husband.

"What is merdeka, mummy?"

That was how Yuyi asked as the three of them were relaxing in the sitting-room after dinner. Rahimah was laughing hilariously for at that same moment Datuk Mahbub was telling her how votes were transferred only for a bag of fertilizer.

"What is merdeka, mummy?" Yuyi repeated her question.

Mummy stopped laughing. She turned to Yuyi who was standing beside her.

"What did you say?"

"What is merdeka, mummy?"

"What!?"

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka! What is merdeka?"

"Gosh. Why don't you ask daddy. He's a merdeka man - has been for ages."

Rahimah burst out laughing; stretched her long neck until her overblown hair formed waves, or so it seemed. Yuyi was again confused. She neither knew the beginning nor the end.

Datuk Mahbub was shocked; he was captivated by his daughter's question and his wife's response. At the same time his face became clouded.

"Maybe our daughter has fallen in love with Mat Zaki, that mad freedom-fighter. Every day she's shouting his name. Last night she had a nightmare over Merdeka."

Datuk Mahbub's face changed. He looked at the green carpet spread wide on the floor.

"Mak Leha!" Datin shouted.

There was no answer from the kitchen.

"This Mak Leha is really too much. When she has finished working in the kitchen she does nothing except pray,

pray, pray."

"Was Merdeka here today?" Datin again asked her daughter who was at her side.

Yuyi shook her head.

"Dear Honourable Datuk Mahbub. Can your honourable self with all your cleanliness, efficiency and trustworthiness explain to this poor soul who wants to know the meaning of merdeka."

Rahimah was still in a joking mood as she kept on swaying her undeniably beautiful body.

Datuk Mahbub was again mesmerized. Both his eyes, focussed on the carpet, remained wide opened. His face was clouded. And from his lips no smile could be seen. Mad Mat Zaki's face came to Datuk Mahbub's mind. That old, mad beggar was still alive. He really had a long life. Datuk Mahbub remembered: they were enemies in an age when they were fighting for independence.

"What is merdeka, daddy?"

Yuyi turned her question to her daddy who was still looking at the green carpet.

Datin Rahimah was quick to detect the change in her husband. She could strongly feel the tensed atmosphere. Rahimah took Yuyi by the hand and pulled her aside so as to reduce the tension. Mat Zaki's face again flittered across Datuk Mahbub's mind. Mat Zaki wanted total independence: a hundred percent; he wanted complete and absolute independence. Colonialism in whatever form was still colonialism. And each colonialist must be expelled from this beloved nation. Datuk Mahbub recalled Mat Zaki's stand. He himself opposed Mat Zaki for he never believed that the Malays would be free. After all what could the Malays do.

"Quiet!"

Datuk Mahbub held his head. His eyes were opened wide, he looked straight at his young daughter, Yuyi. Everyone was surprised. Yuyi was shocked as if she had been attacked by some paralyzing disease. Rahimah herself was jolted beyond imagination. Mak Leha who had just

removed her praying garb rushed out immediately.

Really no one expected such a shout to come from Datuk Mahbub. In that tumultuous condition Rahimah looked at her husband's face. It was devoid of all joy and gaiety which he possessed all this while. Both his eyes were really opened wide. The aged skin was wrinkled forming grooves which resembled bunds of worms all stuck together.

"Go to sleep. Don't anyone say 'merdeka, merdeka' here. Don't ever!"

Datuk Mahbub's index finger pointed in the direction of the shocked Yuyi. The child immediately made a face and started to cry. She howled her heart out, sobbing heart-brokenly. Rahimah quickly hugged Yuyi, tried to say something but hesitated. She was still in a deep shock. Really, it was totally unexpected. Datuk Mahbub, who all this while was a joker full of joy and gaiety, a popular, well-known political jester actually changed to become fierce and short-tempered.

Rahimah got up, carried Yuyi upstairs and head for the bedroom. Mak Leha who stood there for quite a long while, moved to the kitchen. The sitting room remained brightly illuminated by the myriad shaped lighting fixtures. The ceiling fan swirled furiously. The television was still showing a movie. And on the thick-cushioned sofa Datuk Mahbub still sat rigidly. He was still looking fixedly at the corner of the bungalow house full of antique furniture.

Such was what the Almighty determined. That moment also made him rethink the historical events that had occurred more than a quarter of a century ago. The memories were unfolded slowly as he tried to rectify his former aims and objectives but each time he opened the folds of his memory, his heart began to beat frantically. He honestly felt the futility of his life as he had been deceiving himself all this while by hiding behind jokes and forced gaiety. He tried to annihilate the feelings which were engulfing him. The feelings were the truth. And the truth would always be

the truth even though its existence was wrapped within lies and falsehoods this past quarter of a century.

Mohammad Zaki bin Mohammad Toha was the real independence fighter, not him. Mohammad Zaki bin Mohammad Toha was the one with all the privileges now, not him. Mohammad Zaki bin Mohammed Toha must be the one to have this seat, not him.

Datuk Mahbub's innermost voice tried to uphold the truth; one which had all this while been buried and forgotten by the *rakyat*. The innermost voice kept on pestering and pestering to expose the falsehoods that had held sway for the past quarter century. The innermost voice attacked every corner of Datuk Mahbub's being. It poked and bit until all falsehood that had held sway was utterly destroyed.

Night proceeded to its zenith. Datuk Mahbub felt ashamed especially of himself. He was ashamed and afraid, afraid if the truth were to burst out like the coming out of a tortoise's head trying to uphold the rusty, aged falsehood. Truth was destroyed. And he would return to meet the *rakyat*, to see his wife and child, entertained them with his gaiety and jokes which could be altered and created. But his heart continued to voice out the truth although people had forgotten all about it.

It was really late at night. The television was switched off long ago. The fan had stopped swirling. The bungalow house which was huge and lighted felt really quiet; a stillness which gnawed into one's very being, killing all joy and gaiety which were there all this while. The corners in the house, the pictures, potted flowers, plants and other paraphernalia, arranged as decorative pieces, stood rigidly as if they had acquired a life of their own and were really living, and they were all scrutinizing the falsehoods that were contained in the soul and spirit of Mahbub bin Diah.

The whole night long Mahbub could not sleep; he was too busy unfolding and refolding the history of his struggle for independence. And for the first time he braved himself

to look into the very core of his being; no longer did he look out and blamed other people. And in his very being there were falsehoods, pride, desire for honours and awards, arrogance, desire for sexual fulfillment, for power and everything that would perpetuate his leadership. And from within himself he saw how the *rakyat's* mouths and eyes were opened wide accepting everything that was said even though they were nothing but mere lies and falsehood. And from his soul and spirit came the admission that he was not the real leader. Leadership meant sacrifice and he had never sacrificed. Leadership meant to give not to receive, but he was a recipient not a giver, except giving jokes or gifts only to cover the falsehoods that had grown roots all this while. And within his very being too were the desires which all this while had made him forgot himself. He continued to look into his very being and bring down those values of self to the level of garbage, to the same level as filth and muck along the dirty drains. He closed his eyes to avoid the light which continued to shine. And in the temporary darkness he remembered something which touched him tremendously; Allah, God the Almighty.

That remembrance made him recalled the history of his being, not only of his own self, his parents, grandparents or great grandparents but also the history of the fight for independence in which he was involved. Those memories were warped, entangled, distorted like lines haphazardly drawn on a piece of paper by a young child. Such haphazard thoughts finally did not yield jokes from his mouth, but clear water from both his eyes, which a short while ago, were indeed opened wide.

Datuk Mahbub stood up tiredly, looked towards the steps leading to the bedroom. Rahimah and Yuyi were sure to be fast asleep. He would explain the meaning of "merdeka" to Yuyi that very night itself. But the meandering lines harassing his thoughts weakened his intention. Thus he quickly snatched whatever came to his mind, rushed out into the garden, opened the iron gates and got into the car.

He left the huge bungalow house standing so imposingly and carried with him the distorted, warped lines which continued to harass his thoughts.

Along the pathway of Wisma Merdeka, a building owned by Bumiputera, and one where corners conglomerated and met with terrazzo floors, an old, aged man lie. He was lying like a pile of old, tattered clothing with one or two pieces unfolded and opened, thus sweeping the floor. His body was curled and resembled a question mark minus the dot at the bottom; his legs were curled up tight such that his knees almost touched his chin. Beside him were old paraphernalia which he greatly valued.

And when it was dawn, the busy city also began to have a life of its own full of noises everywhere. A hundred thousand feet walked on the terrazzo floors of Wisma Merdeka, that building owned by Bumiputera [literally *bumiputera* means prince of the soil]. But the old, aged beggar did not move, not even a step did he move. He remained there stoically solid in the place of his choice. Only when dawn was over, when the sun became rounder and hotter, the air became dirtier and the smell of passers-by more pronounced and unbearable, only then was it felt that there was something not right along that pathway of Wisma Merdeka owned by Bumiputera. The old beggar continued to sleep; he did not get up, did not move, not even an inch did he move. And when Wisma Merdeka's loyal security guard did his duty, for he kicked the old piece of cloth covering the body, he saw a wide smile carved on the aged, frozen lips. A crowd gathered for a while to see the smile which looked really sweet.

But the incident did not last long. It ended when a lorry with its wet floor arrived. The old beggar was carried into the lorry. And the lorry left. The loyal security guard smiled to himself as he recalled the smile which touched his heart.

On the other side of the city, at the same dawn time, Rahimah woke up as usual to get ready to go to school. The

fact that her husband had left without her knowledge did not worry her. It was usual for Datuk Mahbub to rush away like that when the *rakyat* needed him. A politician's wife must be prepared to face any situation. In an election week, the situation would be worse. Sometimes meals must be left unfinished when it was crucial to respond to the *rakyat*, to the race and nation. Yuyi would still continue to jump about in the garden, her feet would try to avoid stepping on the lines she had drawn on the fertile earth. Her mouth would be saying non-stop "merdeka, merdeka, merdeka, merdeka...."

That day Yuyi was not hoping for Merdeka to come for it was not a Monday morning. She did not know what morning it was, but Yuyi was already certain that it was not a Monday morning.

Yuyi continued to jump as she sang the Merdeka song. But when the following Monday morning came Yuyi was disappointed. Merdeka did not come. She waited until afternoon but there was no sight of Merdeka. And that night Yuyi was terribly sad. When daddy came back from visiting the *rakyat* Yuyi would not only ask for the meaning of merdeka, she would also pose a new question. She would ask where Merdeka went, for he no longer came to their place, although Monday had come and gone. This time, even if her daddy were to be angry, she would still ask him.

That afternoon, Rahimah was already outside waiting for Datuk Mahbub's return. As usual everything was in order. Since that morning when Rahimah was in school, Mak Leha was cleaning this and arranging that. But Rahimah was also more aware. Datuk Mahbub was a changed person. If her husband were to shout loudly, she would quickly figure out whether the shout was a joke or whether it was an anger. She would laugh if she was convinced that it was a joke, but she would keep quiet if she felt that it was an expression of anger.

Datuk Mahbub was an old man. His behaviour could change suddenly. Anything could happen. Rahimah must

always be prepared to face any possible happening. The *rakyat* now were different from the *rakyat* then. Now *rakyat*s could get rid of their leaders. Now *rakyat* could replace her Datuk Mahbub.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

Those shouting really came from the iron gate in front. Yuyi and her mother were in the sitting room waiting for Datuk Mahbub's return.

Like lightning Yuyi discerned those shouts. She rushed to the gate. Rahimah got up and she too rushed to the main door. In that foggy twilight it was difficult to see faces clearly.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

"Daddy!"

Yuyi shouted when she noticed that the man shouting 'Merdeka' outside the gate was really her daddy.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!"

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!" Yuyi responded in her little girl's voice. Yuyi was really happy. She rushed to her father when the iron gates were opened.

"Merdeka!" Datuk Mahbub shouted. He clenched his fist and raised his hand high up to the sky.

"Merdeka!" Yuyi replied spiritedly.

They walked to the house. Rahimah was already standing outside.

"Merdeka!" Datuk Mahbub said in greeting.

Rahimah was confused

"Where's our car?" Rahimah asked in that confusion for she too loved that car.

"Merdeka!" Datuk Mahbub responded.

"Merdeka!" Yuyi reciprocated.

Mak Leha, who was in the kitchen, rushed out to welcome Datuk Mahbub home.

"Merdeka to you Mak Leha! Merdeka!" Datuk Mahbub clenched his fist and pointed it in the direction of the cook.

Mak Leha who was prepared to burst out laughing for she thought the situation was really funny suddenly felt

strange. She did not know what to do. She looked at Datin who was also not laughing.

"Merdeka!" Yuyi responded as she jumped about happily.

"Merdeka!" Datuk Mahbub again reciprocated as he too jumped about like Yuyi.

Rahimah turned.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!" Datuk Mahbub continued.

Rahimah sat down and buried her face in the cushion. She closed both eyes. And in that situation clear water oozed out from her closed eyes. This was the first time that Rahimah responded to her husband's jovial gaiety with tears and sobs.

"Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!" Datuk Mahbub continued wholeheartedly.

Rahimah got up. She went to call Mak Leha. She whispered something to Mak Leha. Mak Leha nodded for a while, then changed her mind by shaking her head. Mak Leha then whispered something to Datin. The Datin stood rigidly still, then nodded her head. It was already late evening. It was difficult to go at that time of the night.

"Tomorrow morning you must go and look for the *bomoh*, the Malay medicine man, Mak Leha."

That night Datin and Mak Leha prepared the paraphernalia: a cut of areca nut, a piece of betel leaf, a knob of gambier, a piece of twisted candle and fifteen cents. When the *bomoh* arrived the initial stage would already be prepared.

Translated by Solehah Ishak



Usman Awang

USMAN AWANG (1929-). A poet and writer who was born on 12 July 1929 in Kaupung Tanjung Lembu, Kuala Sedili, Kota Tinggi, Johore. Usman bin Awang is also known as **Adi Jaya**, **Amir**, **Atma Jiwa**, **Manis**, **Pengarang Muda**, **Rose Murni**, **Setiabudi**, **Tongkat Warrant**, **U.A.** and **Zaini**.

As far as formal education is concerned, **Usman Awang** only attended Malay school because of his circumstances and the dire poverty his family was in. He attended several schools - in Kuala Sedili (1936), Mersing (1937) and lastly in Bandar Maharani (1940), where he studied until he passed his Standard VI examination.

During the Japanese Occupation in 1942, **Usman Awang** became a farmer in Segamat. Not long after that, he was recruited in Singapore under the Japanese system of forced labour for six months but managed to escape and returned to Segamat. **Usman Awang** found employment as a peon at the Segamat Irrigation and Drainage Office and later joined the Japanese Police Force (*Botai*). However, after he had undergone a few weeks of training, the Japanese surrendered.

Usman became a policeman when the British resumed control in 1946. He underwent training in Johor Bahru before assuming his new responsibilities in Malacca. In 1951, he resigned as a member of the police force and

moved to Singapore. He was employed as a proofreader at *Melayu Raya* for six months, then became a reporter before being appointed to the editorial staff of *Mingguan Melayu*.

In 1952, Usman was offered a job at *Utusan Melayu* as editor of the newspaper *Utusan Kanak-Kanak*, and later editor of *Utusan Zaman* and *Mastika*. When Malaya gained its independence and *Utusan Melayu* moved its office to Kuala Lumpur, Usman too moved with them. In 1961, he took part in a strike organised by *Utusan* employees. As a consequence of this, he resigned and was for a while unemployed.

In 1962, Usman obtained a position at the Federal Publications and a year later joined Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, initially as a member of the editorial board of the journal *Dewan Bahasa*, later as the editor of the journals *Dewan Masyarakat*, *Dewan Sastera* and *Dewan Budaya*. He held the post of Senior Research Officer at Department of Literary Development, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. He was Head of the department from May 1982 until his retirement in July 1985.

Usman began carving a niche for himself in the world of modern Malay literature as a poet. His poems are always fresh, powerful, and very close to the grassroots. Among his more popular poems are *Bunga Popi*, *Gadis di Kuburan*, *Pak Utih*, *Ke Makam Bonda*, *Nasib Buruh* and *Salam Benua*.

Usman too wrote short stories but has not published one for a long time. In fact, he wrote many short stories. Many of the short stories he wrote in the 1950s and the 1960s clearly show his attitude and stand as regards the concept 'Art for Society' which he advocates. *Degup Jantung* is this far his only collection of short stories.

Up till now, Usman Awang has only published one novel, *Tulang-Tulang Berserakan*.

Other than poems, another genre in which Usman had

carved a name is drama. He has explored this genre since the 1960s by writing numerous radio and stage plays. His plays, include *Scrunai Malam*, *Malam Kemerdekaan*, *Tamu di Bukit Kenny*, *Matinya Seorang Pahlawan*, *Degup Jantungnya* and lately, one of his much talked about plays, *Muzika Uda dan Dara*. This play was staged by *Gemaseni* in 1972. The story of Uda dan Dara actually developed out of one of his early poems, *Gadis di Kuburan*. This poem was rewritten as a short story with the title *Uda dan Dara*. In 1972, the same story was adapted for television.

Usman's contribution is greatly felt in the country's literary circle. He actively participates in activities which involves writing. Since the 1950s, he has been one of the pioneers of Ikatan Persuratan Melayu Melaka (IPM), Secretary of ASAS 50 and the first President of PENA (1962-1965). He also took the initiative of organizing *Hari Puisi*, *Cempaka Berbunga*, *Malam Gema Puisi* and *Genta Rasa*, *Manifestasi Dua Seni* and many more. The anthologies of poems *Keranda 152* and *Teluk Gong* were put together by Usman Awang in collaboration with other poets.

Because of his achievements as a poet and dramatist, Usman has been invited to visit the United States, Indonesia, China, England, the Philippines and Russia. Several of his works have been translated into English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, French, Thai, Czechoslovakian, Danish, Tamil, Italian and Russian.

He still writes, in fact, he is said to be a writer with high aspirations who does not tire of working towards enriching the national literary heritage. He was appointed to the *Panel for the Literary Prize* and was conferred the title *Pejuang Sastera* Literary Exponent by the Prime Minister on 29 May 1976. From 1979 onwards, in view of his outstanding literary talent, experience and dedication, he was made Secretary of the Panel for the National Literary Award.

In 1982, Usman won the S.E.A. Write Awards. On 11

August 1963, Usman was conferred an Honorary Doctorate (of Letters) by the University of Malaya. Usman Awang also won National Literary Award for 1983. In 1985, he was awarded *Zamalah Sastera* by the daily, *Berita Harian*.

Translated by Nor Azizah Abu Bakar

LIST OF WORKS

Novels

1. *Tulang-Tulang Berserakan*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Melayu, 1966.

Poems

1. *Gelombang*. Kuala Lumpur: OUP, 1961.
2. *Gelombang (Sajak-Sajak Pilihan 1949-60)*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979.
3. *Kaki Langit*. Kuala Lumpur: Asiah Enterprise, 1971.
4. *Puisi-Puisi Pilihan Sasterawan Negara*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987.
5. *Salam Benua*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1982.
6. *Puisi Baru Melayu 1942-1960* (joint author). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1961.
7. *Duri dan Api*. Melaka: Abbas Bandung, 1966.
8. *Himpunan Sajak* (joint author). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1969.
9. *Sajak-Sajak Melayu Baru* (joint author). Kuala Lumpur: Fajar Bakti, 1969.
10. *Suara Tujuh* (joint author), Kuala Lumpur: Setia Murni, 1969.
11. *Kuala Lumpur* (joint author). Kuala Lumpur: GAPE-NA, 1975.

12. *Puisi-Puisi Nusantara* (joint author). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979.
13. *Tinta Pena* (joint author). Kuala Lumpur: Pena, 1981.
14. *Lagu Kehidupan* (joint author). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1983.
15. *Bintang Mengerdip* (joint author). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984.
16. *100 Sajak Malaysia* (joint author). Kuala Lumpur: Tra-Tra, 1984.
17. *Bunga Gerimis* (joint author). Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1986.
18. *Puisirama Merdeka* (joint author). Kuala Lumpur: Pena, 1986.

Plays

1. *Dari Bintang ke Bintang*. Kuala Lumpur: Angkatan Baru, 1965.
2. *Di Bawah Mentari*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Pendidikan, 1969.
3. *Drama-Drama Pilihan Sasterawan Negara*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987.
4. *Matinya Seorang Pahlawan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992.
5. *Muzika Uda dan Dara*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1976.
6. *Tetamu di Bukit Kenny*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1968.
7. *Tirai Zaman*. Kluang: Pustaka Pendidikan, 1969.

Research

1. *Tema dan Tugas Sasterawan Melayu Modern*. Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publications, 1963.

A Writer's Voice of Humanity

EXCUSE me if I begin tonight's speech by talking about myself in the context of the award which I am receiving. Social etiquette and Malay manners have taught me not to talk about myself in public. If I were to do so, I would be considered proud and ill-mannered. Nevertheless, I will accept that accusation with a smile, for we are now in an age which requires that once in a while we be ill-mannered.

After all a nation would not be great without some ill-mannered attitudes.

Several months ago, when University of Malaya conferred upon me an honorary degree, the Doctor of Philosophy in Malay Letters, I was astounded by such a distinguished honour, one which I never dreamt of, which made me feel as if I was on top of the clouds.

What with my level of education, just imagine how perturbed and perplexed I was, when I stood and spoke at the ivory tower amidst all those scholars, professors, distinguished guests, to receive that esteemed degree.

And on this auspicious night, I stand in this building, this place, where the nation's constitution was enshrined

and I again stand amidst distinguished guests, scholars, diplomats, well-known writers, to receive yet another accolade.

Such is the case that when I have attained half a century, I am inundated, (almost), by all sorts of honours which are suddenly heaped upon me. It is no wonder then that I suddenly feel overwhelmed and odd. Have I erred or faulted? Have I ceased to be the voice of the poor and the oppressed? Or, is it because I have, not only high blood pressure, but also problems with my heart, that it is felt that something ought to be given to me before my blood stops flowing and my heart stops beating?

Yet when I scrutinized the papers, television news and the statements by the Chairman of the *Anugerah Sastera* (National Literary Award) panel, who emphasized that this *Anugerah Sastera*, is closely affiliated with the struggle against tyranny, injustice and poverty in addition to all the characteristics of humanity, I then begin to believe that even amongst the rich and the powerful there are those who support and feel the same anger towards tyranny, injustice and poverty. These problems not only obstruct the progress of a nation, they also mar the greenery of this homeland, the beauty of its beaches and islands beside rending assunder the joys and laughter of our beloved children.

I feel especially happy that the *Anugerah Sastera* is given at a time when this nation is moving forwards, that it is taking steps to fulfill some of the dreams which I had voiced throughout my writing career.

For in our country, there are still those who consider themselves special people, forever above everyone else and always living in luxury and pretence. As we all know, according to Islam, only Allah is perfect and permanent, and we mere mortals are all equal in His eyes, and only to Him do we prostrate. I pray to Allah that a time will come when we will no longer witness such unfair privileges.

A discernible transformation is taking place in our

country now. We can almost feel the winds of change calmly and vigorously sweeping away the decadent dust and obsolete ruins. We can sense a new dawn emerging forth from the clear, bright morning sun. And we can certainly perceive the waves unfurling, rolling and billowing along the paths of our history.

The *rakyat* (masses) for the first time since *merdeka* (independence) have begun to loudly and openly voice their feelings. A new dawn shines forth, a new hope gleams, that henceforth the ordinary *rakyat* will receive social justice and equality, and that the special conditions and privileges for the rich and the influential, which now exist, will be annihilated.

My hope now is that this new energy and milieu will be directed at big problems, like poverty. It is most sad that in a prosperous country, the *rakyat* is poor. It is most depressing that our rural areas are still backwards. We are still lacking in schools, that our school children are wanting in everything and that medicines are deficient and doctors insufficient. It is most disheartening that a lot of poor children have become drop-outs, it is also most distressing to see only a dismal number of girls testing their intelligence and trying their skills in all fields of education and new horizons.

Can we all join forces and overcome this problem? And not least of all these blights. I offer to voice out my hope against corruption, against unfairness, against deviations - in whatever form that they be abolished for they have indeed become a burden, one which will certainly not profit the *rakyat*.

It is indeed a pity that some of our writers are not too sensitive to these glaring facts which fecundate their milieu. Literature should encompass all aspects of human life in its widest context. In this age of development the fishermen are no longer dependent on their boats and small fishing vessels but have become acquainted with new methods of catching fish, have used boats with engines equipped

with outboard motors and all sorts of other things. But does it mean that their lives are unruffled and that the lives of their families are untroubled?

Labourers abound for we are not only looking west but also east. Hundreds of modern factories have been built; skyscrapers have mushroomed. How are the lives of these people, their sadness, their hopes, their dreams?

Estates have increased, not only in numbers but also in size. All sorts of farmers' institutions and estates have emerged in the rural areas. But what about the spirit, the sweat and the tears of these farmers in this age of development?

Unfortunately all these are still only vaguely and indistinctly portrayed in our literature, yet these are the people who constitute a majority of our society. Can there be such a thing as social justice for these *rakyat*? Does the new atmosphere that now pervades our nation also offers a new dawn for them? When I first started writing, my friends and I never dreamt of any acknowledgements, let alone such honours. We lived under the menace of colonial domination and ours was the language of the subjugated lot. Yet we used that language as a tool to provoke opposition against the colonizers. At that time there were not many who were prepared to join forces with us.

We learned to be brave so that we will be fearless and courageous writers.

But in using that language, the language of a colonized people, we were indeed looked down upon. In fact it was as if the user of that language was marked with contempt. For it was almost as if that language was only meant for office boys, policemen, army people and the kampong folks. The Malay language then was used by the master in conjunction with his slave. Even in the university, at that time, many Malay students themselves were not convinced that that language could become the language of the people, one that everybody can use. On the other hand, how odd it was that there were some non-Malays who

argued about the role of the Malay language as an agent to unify the diverse races of the country.

After several struggles the Malay language was instituted as the legitimate national language of the country.

Now when we talk about *Bahasa Malaysia* (Malay language), I am really sad and disappointed to see how this beautiful and sensitive language can be so parleyed, due to the interests of party politics. For as long as *Bahasa Malaysia* does not become the common language of all Malaysians, used, loved and respected by all races, it can never then become a tool of unity, and without real unity our country will indeed be weak and poor.

One common language and culture will emanate from the usage, hope and dreams shared by all races of this nation. Such a possibility will not come true if it is totally dependent on political agitation or bureaucratic decrees.

No one can claim that it has a monopoly over the culture of Malaysia. Our shared, common culture can only emerge from a mutual acceptance by all the *rakyat*, not only from some arrogant examples of the privileged few.

I am not an expert who is fit to give advice on how to overcome these problems. I am but a humble being, ever grateful to Allah Almighty who has blessed my talent in using this Malay language which I consider to be the most beautiful in the world. And I have used it to try and voice my innermost feelings which I believe are also the innermost feelings of society. Thus in my voices, I have not demarcated race, nationality, beliefs or the colour of the skin. I have repeated time and again that the clamourings of the Chinese noodle-seller in Petaling Street is no different from that of the Malay *nasi lemak* seller in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur, or that of the Indian *tose-seller* in Jalan Brickfields, as they all go about peddling their food-stuffs.

The same goes for the misery of Pak Ngah Ali and Pok Nik, symbolizing the Malay farmers and fishermen of the east coast, the anguish of Ah Kau or Ah Lim representing

the Chinese miners in the Kinta Valley or the construction workers in the city of Kuala Lumpur. Their agony is also no different from the despair of Ramasamy or Kandaya, the Indian roadbuilders and estate rubber tappers.

I believe this is the voice and meaning of humanity which has more or less formed the basis of Malaysian literature. For this, writers of all races in Malaysia must first and foremost destroy whatever racial barriers that now exist. Only then can a new wind blow forth and the bloom of Malaysian literature flower with all its colourful and fragranced splendour.

I have been told that I must abide by a certain time limit, and please excuse me for I have exceeded that.

Finally, at this historical moment, I want to convey my appreciation and gratitude to those who are the sources of my inspiration, namely the *rakyat*: the farmers, the labourers, the fishermen. It is their lives, their hopes, their dreams, not to mention their kindness and love, that have touched my feelings and my sensibilities. They, plus the fact that Allah has blessed my endeavours and enabled me to write such that people have believe in me and have honoured me with the highest award in the field of literature that this country can offer.

In all sincerity, I offer my thanks to the Chairman of the *Anugerah Sastera* panel, the Honourable Datuk Musa Hitam who, although, he is very busy with the affairs of the nation, still is interested and has given precious time to the field of literature. To each member of the *Anugerah Sastera* panel, with all humility, I offer my sincere thanks for believing in me and sanctioning this most glorious of awards. My thanks to Prof. Dr. Muhammad Haji Salleh for his citation which so touched my heart.

These honours, kindness and love will be forever cherished and remembered.

Translated by Solehah Ishak

SELECTED WORKS

Father Utih

I

He has one wife – whom he embraces until death
five children who want to eat everyday
an old hut where an inherited tale is hanging
a piece of barren land to cultivate.

The skin of his hands is taut and calloused
accustomed to any amount of sweat
O Father Utih, the worthy peasant.

But malaria comes hunting them
even though he offers a million prayers
and Mother Utih calls the village medicine man
for magic formulas, curses repeatedly chanted.

The poems in this selection were translated by Adibah Amin except for "Greetings to the Continent" which was translated by Muhammad Haji Salleh.

The medicine man with his reward goes home
with money and a pullet tied together.

II

In towns the leaders keep shouting
of elections and the people's freedom
of thousand-fold prosperity in a sovereign state
a golden bridge of prosperity into the world hereafter.

When victory brightly shines
the leaders in cars move forward,
 their chests thrust forward
O! the beloved subjects wave their hands.

Everywhere there are banquets and festivities
delicious roast chicken is served
chicken from the village promised prosperity.

Father Utih still waits in prayer
where are the leaders going in their limousines?

1954

Poppies

From blood, from pus that rots in the soil,
from skeletons that have lost their lives,
 snatched by weapons,
the result of war maniacs who kill love,
the red flowers bloom beautifully, requesting to be adored.

Those who live on are remnants of life, full of sufferings,
wizened, bent, deformed, maimed and blind,
war in retrospect in full of horrors;
they remember now, in bitterness, in solitude.

Others lost children, husbands and sweethearts,
lost their sources of support, their livelihood,
they live in starvation,
thousands widowed, thousands disappointed,
thousands tormented;
millions of orphans live on, and beg.

The war maniacs have killed all love!
war raged and found profit in colonial lands!
war raged and killed babies in their cradles!
war raged, and destroyed cultural values

Poppies are the flowers of fallen soldiers,
flowers drenched red with blood, full of horrors,
we hate war, full of killing!
we cry for a never-ending peace!

1955

White Dove, Explore the World

In a critical situation when man is hesitant and suspicious,
the dove wings out to explore the world,
its white pinions beckoning to peace,
the fluttering flags of coexistence fly with it.

White dove, explore the world!
refresh the air you breathe in the night,
let all flowers bloom,
let all lips freshly, smile.

You who have not lost hope,
breathe a new air, fresh and expansive,
fill this world with belief in peace,
breathe in the quiet night.

But you who have ever been treacherous,
go, vanish like flying dust,
your world has foundered with its worn-out statues,
in the mirror of life, a new spirit brightly shines.

1959

Ancient Sky and Mankind at War

I

Pale is the moon, the stars are not festive,
grimly scattered, carved on the ancient sky,
with wings of clouds moving, racing
over the vast field with colours sweetly flowering,
thousands of years wandering endlessly.

How the sky laughs mockingly
at the green earth and the faces of men,
embers of destruction bursting into flame
and death rejoicing everywhere.

Listen to the clear cry from the sky
a prophecy from the clouds, chanted by the wind
brought by a glimmer of the sorrowful moon;
on this earth, mankind is at war
black metal bursting and burning
smear and stench of red blood
tears swelling wounded hearts.

Those who have known the quivering pain
of vinegar poured on torn flesh,
those who have wept silently
bitter is the colour of a bleak season:
witness the panoramic scene
sweet death swinging his sword
look at it! look at it!

O those buried in luxury
 faces smiling in deep sleep
 or jesting on the warm breasts of women
 let your eyes and hearts witness
 children of Adam who have lost their loves.

Shattered, shattered is all beauty
 violence reigns in a sea of blood!

II

Twin hills firmly enthroned
 like a pair of amorous giants
 with *betukar* hair in the black night.

At their feet nature's music whispers
 song of a stream softly flowing
 a cool breeze combs their summits.

A long line of men appears
 a procession with weapons bristling

Listen to the muted marching beat
 against the earth's breast
 heavy packs and the gleam of devouring fire-eyes
 wild, unshaven, a child-terrifying sight
 forcing their way through the virile jungle.

It is the jungle squad
 identical in their uniforms
 hordes of leeches on their flesh.

Crystal dewdrops scatter and fall
 they march forward seeking their victims
 forward! forward!
 the virile jungle is surrounded.

III

At the feet of the twin-giant hills
 crouches the thin starving one
 he drinks the cool clear water
 caresses his burning wounded flesh.

Where now are his friends in battle
 where the sweet child he loves?
 (the friend's ranks are broken
 the sweet child is still sobbing).

The Thin Starving One with the moon-shaped face
 how pale his cheeks, his body all scratched
 yet his eyes piercing sharp and bright

(at the battle in the last shred of midnight
 he saw death claim its debtors
 blood dripping like latex from his wounded leg)

A cloud slowly wanders
 and rests solitary on the twin hills
 he remembers the last night he came home
 creeping amidst *lalang* grass shivering cold
 a moment's tapping on the floor, his wife awoke.

Smothered the sobs of the woman who loves him
 warmth of tender embrace seeping to the heart
 "Dearest, look at our son,
 why does he breathe so low?"

He caressed the brow of his beloved child.
 "How ill you are, my son."

He let the teardrops fall
 a sigh escaped from his congested throat.

Before dawn he was far off again in the hills
 the kiss he left softly glimmered
 warm and moist on the brow of the sick child.

He had whispered as his wife wept:
 keep back your tears, let not your sobs sound
 hold me close for sweet remembrance
 your breath shall pulse in my last shred of life.

And he wandered on
 wandered on for life and death
 seven days and seven nights passed by
 then death appeared on the slumbering twin-hills!

IV

How violent the battle that broke out
 three friends fell with chests split open
 so many wounded but still would not surrender

The eternal vow: never surrender,
 wars has awakened in the world today
 the world is eclipsed, the whole jungle is red.

The battle has changed to silence. Silence everywhere
 the Thin Starving One left alone
 his last bullet has been fired.

Far far behind he is left
 aesolate he gazes at the moon
 moving in the current of woolly clouds.
 (he hears a rustle from far in front)
 is it death lurking behind the tree trunk
 or ghostly visions from the stench of blood?

"Come, waiting death,
 I shall face a man's end."

As clouds clear the sky
 the Thin Starving One limps forth
 dragging a leg that burns with pain!

V

The uniformed line traverses the *belukar*
right in front is the wild-eyed bren-gun man.

The leader is a sergeant by rank
beads of sweat on a hairy chest
the death revolver hung at the hip
has devoured thirteen victims
killing to him means a Hero's Medal.

His heart intoxicated with the shining Medal
he pictures with eyes full of hope
how all eyes shall be transfixed
at home, his wife shall gaze at the reflection on his
shimmering chest.
"O, husband, my world is the Medal on your breast."

When his bullets kills a victim
he imagines the applause at the ceremony
all around eyes shining with awe.
"Medal! Medal for obvious merit in service!
Come to my breast even if I have to kill all mankind!"

Below him is a corporal stuck at his rank
his heart an angel's beloved flower
performing his prayers five times a day
(even while death is waiting)
counting sins and virtues for the Hereafter.

"None other do I worship except Thee, my God,
I am as a tiny grain of sand beneath Thy light!"

Who is the stout, wild-eyed bren-gun man?
a wretched youth from a fenced village
his land *lalang* his house *belukar*

So he joined the uniformed ranks:
he has killed men, whose enemies are they?

he does not care for he gets his pay
 death to him is a pleasure sought.

Thus assemble all characters and vendettas
 machines of death in uniform.

VI

The line advances to the flowing stream
 a moment startled, the line swiftly takes cover
 they have caught the stench of the enemy's blood.

Tasting the sweetness of blood
 the sergeant leaps forward
 "Forward! Forward quickly
 we have found the tracks we sought!"

They rush forward thirsting for blood
 leaves fall from broken branches
 at every slight movement before them
 a volley of shots rings out
 screaming echoes split the jungle.

Where the bullets are aimed
 only leaves are scattered....
 Forward! Forward!
 the light of dawn is crimsoning!

Bayonets with death points
 mossed over with dried blood
 forward, bringing death beneath the light of dawn!

VII

The Thin Starving One stops awhile
 wrinkles line his brow
 the pain in his leg pierces and spreads
 (there is a tear in his eye
 his face is pale as the moon).

A shred of memory glimmers in his eyes
a lovely dream comes shining.

He sees the face of his beloved son
how strange, he is flying and playing
amidst the laughter of girls in a world of flowers.

How startling to find that he too can fly
rivers with blue water
the doves gliding everywhere
such peace amidst the flutter of butterfly wings.

"This is my world, the world of love I yearn for
with pretty fishes playing among pebbles
everywhere sweet strains of music
everywhere the warmth bond of brotherhood."

He gazes at the shining city
his eyes are fixed on its name:
'THE CITY OF LOVE'

How peaceful the people with flower faces
lovely overflowing light of a thousand-coloured life
there no black burning metal can be found
no welded steel forged into weapons.

In the distance his son waves a hand
how sweet, though he does not speak
a butterfly comes to rest on a flower
and how strange, the smiling flower
blossoming into his wife's pretty face.

Both mother and child
have drunk the eternal honey of love.

The sweet dreams quiver away
the Thin Starving One starts as the *belukar* shakes

"Don't move!"
a male voice rings out!

VIII

The moon grows paler in the face of dawn
 the dark '*belukar*' is fenced around
 the uniformed men rush with burning eyes.

The Thin Starving One stared around
 a kick sends him sprawling to the ground.

After that moment he can no longer think
 but neither can he find oblivion
 from the incessant pain that follows.

He folds out his skeleton chest
 ribs that can be counted, one-two-three
 to receive the blows of flaming angry lust.

Though human flesh is not steel
 though bones feel the full measure of pain
 he never once sighs against his fate.

Only once in a while a heavy snorting breath
 from a violent fist-blow on his belly.
 How far away the dream world of the City of Love
 with sweetness of music, fished in crystal water
 and the doves and white butterflies?

The beloved son?
 chubby fingers and flowering smile
 (it was the last dream before blood flowed).

Worlds of dream and reality
 such contrast of within and without
 look, men's hands are smeared with blood:
 LIFE IS SLAUGHTER!

Except God, none can hear
 the mighty cry of the Thin Starving One:
 I am a man!
 my breast and my bones may be crushed

but I can never be bowed.
 for death is not defeat
 for justice can never be crushed.

The moon on the hill feels an ache in her breast
 the heart of the Thin Starving One cries out:
 my faith shall never be weakened
 though I should lose my life.

(A Cloud Covers the Pale Moon
 The Thin Starving One Loses His Strength)

A glimpse of a chance catches his eye
 death shall end all
 he is past all caring
 he grabs the hand grenade on his enemy's hip.

With his last strength
 (and knowing it shall avail him nothing)
 he wrenches off the hook of the hand grenade
 screams of death echo in the wild jungle!

Blood! Crimson blood
 Blood! Beautiful blood.
 Flowing still warm into the chasms of death
 and thus men die before God wills it so
 for they possess their own instruments of death

IX

Morning lights the land at the foot of the twin hills
 amidst beads of dew set in lovely patterns
 five mangled bodies lie stretched

The chest of the sergeant is torn open
 where shall the service Medal be pinned?

The stout bren-gun man lies in a pool-blood
 paid in full are all his debts in life

the Thin Starving One with moon-shaped face?
twisted, stiff, his throat slashed.

X

This is part of the story of mankind at war
the sad visage of the world before our eyes
trumpet of death echoing everywhere.

Carved is this memory on a weeping heart
for I too was once uniformed
but the Thin Starving One is not my enemy.

Kuala Lumpur, June 1959

Humanity

(On Kennedy's Death)

The leaves and the wind greet each other indifferently
as do the flags waving at half-mast
for they are unmoved by such momentous news
the stroke of will that stuns all mankind.

They have witnessed from the first red blood spilt
sons of Adam in conflict killing-killed
and death after death sung out everywhere
and carried on till all the earth is a grave.

How many teardrops are wept for one goes
before the coffin leaves and a little after
compared with the roar of the Niagara falls
of the beloved children, and girls waiting at the
front windows
flow of tears of mothers who once breastfed them
on hearing news of violent death on battlefields?

If we lament the death of one
and the heart feels no pain at other deaths
humanity does not exist on the crown of truth
for humanity limited is no humanity.

And now all cities weep and utter laments
for rightly men's humanity should be touched
but none will weep for the slaughter that will come
or say: let us extinguish all conflict flames.

Those who have suffered and lost their loves, weep on,
the world is set: life is a bloody death.

Kuala Lumpur, November 1963

Voice from the Grave

i

Mother,
weep your older poverty
from the older poverty
I see they offer wreaths
and lengthy condolences
most impressive
after our bloody death.

Father,
no more will you receive the few dollars
I wrung each month from a wretched pittance
(my pay: cost of a pair of shoes for a minister)
and my promise of a new roof for the hut
forgive me, father, will never be fulfilled.

Dear wife,
your grief shall not last long

I hear they are collecting donations
 why such kindness after we are dead
 in life did they ever ask
 about our crowded rooms, our measly pay.

Dear children,
 your school uniforms are torn
 you will have to patch them again
 and who will buy your books this year?
 like your father
 dream on, dream on, my children
 if you still possess dreams
 that you will study at the university.

ii

They talk a lot about my death
 they grieve and raise donations
 but they could never spare a piece of land

no land for us
 except to bury my body.
 (even this, one day they will think
 how much better to build a factory on it)

They who never noticed us
 today wrinkle up their faces in sorrow
 they who never asked about us
 now write and deliver speeches
 and call us national heroes.

Dear friends, you and I have died
 for a prosperity not ours
 so the owners may sleep and dream deep
 so each estate can gather its rubber
 so each mine can pile up its tin
 so each bank can count its profits
 so each industry can survey its products in peace

(for all this is not ours!)
for them we die.

Parliament meets with Royal speeches
rural progress-prosperity for the people
and schemes for raising taxes
by the brilliant Finance Minister

Our death is talked of for a while
then with the gift of a cheque
payment for my life, forgotten by all
except my mother, father, wife
and beloved children who shall suffer
all their lives.

.June 1968

Greetings to the Continent

I

They separate us
the passports visas frontiers all names for barriers
they rob us with their laws
sending bullets wrapped in dollars
forcing us to choose
and choose we must
there is no other way

II

Friend, you have chosen guns and bullets
many leaders prefer their dollars
for this you must soak your clothes
red grass, red river
children's weeping
the blood of the exploited

III

You squeeze cactus and grind stones
to make food and drink
girls toil decorated in dust
little children sling on their weapons
you darken the sky with exploding pipelines
others sing in prisons
for the freedom of Palestine

IV

We strive in drying rice fields
daring peasants have begun to clear the virgin jungle
small beginnings in a cloudlike calmness
a calmness that nips us in the bud
we the few are still learning
from all your experiences,
and our own

we shall consolidate the May eclipse
at the true target
of this archipelago

V

Greetings
without visa
passport
golf
colour
to humanity, people,
of all continents.

Travelling by air, May 1970

Black Snow

Pine leaves
 in the light of the overcast red moon
 row after row
 pouring into the teeming city
 moving ever moving
 like the trees in macbeth's eyes
 here the snow has a different colour
 black

Black

BLACK

the mightiest colour
 that is its colour.
 falling not from the stars
 nor from the sky
 flowing with the current of history
 bones ... bones

BLACK

manure for the fertile farms
 of prosperous America.
 black snow

BLACK

the blackest of black
 echoes ... reverberating

WE SHALL OVERCOME

in the south in the north
 everywhere
 caressing the historic wounds of
 forefathers
 to day
 this moment
 shines brightest
 black snow.

San Francisco 1970

Father Utih (2)

(Twenty years ago ...

Father Utih had five children,
and old hut and a plot of padi field ...

- in the city the leaders sloganise
on elections, freedom
and the good life

from here and now to the hereafter.

Twenty years to nineteen-seventy-four

and how fares Father Utih, the free man in the free land?)

I

Father Utih has ten grandchildren
whom he dandles each morning
singing a rhyme:

dandle high dandle low
the kitchen fire is cold
wait my dear when you grow up
they'll put you in the lock-up.

II

Father Utih's hands are rough
swinging a *parang*
he toils each day to earn a living.
Father Utih's land is mortgaged
together with his woman's tomb.
When his grandchildren ask
where her grave is, Father Utih merely smiles
she has become a white saint
her mouldy gravestone covered with white fungi.

III

One night Father Utih dreams
receiving a revelation over the radio

at the shop where he took credit
 a voice blared out
 write this down!
 Father Utih shook his head, I cannot write
 but the voice commanded
 write this down!
 write

And suddenly Father Utih could write
 in letters huge as coconut palms:

I-N-F-L-A-T-I-O-N

Then it seems the letters began to frolic
 and he wrote them again a hundred times
 and the dancing letters took life and multiplied
 a thousand times, ten thousand times
 thirty thousand times in all, and danced and danced.

And Father Utih joined the whirl
 and his children also sang
 to the throbbing of drums rolling in the hollow
 of their bellies.

IV

The next night Father Utih dream again
 a great bird swooped down from the sky
 its voice like thunder
 stepping down from between the clouds
 descending, pausing, at palm-top height,
 about to uproot the *cekur* in the yard,
 and even knocking down the bull in the field
 when its feet touched the earth.

And then there emerged a city official
 proud smile fixed over expensive chest
 followed by more officials who had nothing to do
 but wave and wave their delicate hands.
 Suddenly Father Utih saw himself

and all the farmers transforming into these letters

I-N-F-L-A-T-I-O-N

Thirty thousand dancers high as coconut palms

dancing, singing

even the *bunga manggar* was transformed

dancing their dance, singing their song.

Then quickly the City Official

shaded by an umbrella

lest the glaring sun lick his delicate skin

stood forth and held forth:

my people!

my beloved people

behold about you our lovely land

where the leaves are always green

on the green, green earth

which is for our green people

go to the fringes of the jungle's green

plough, I say, stand on your own feet, I say

and reap, I say, the fruits of freedom!

Suddenly there appeared Mother Utih's face

in white shroud, grandchildren about her

O so many of them, ten all told, also in white shroud,

giggling and laughing behind the City Official.

V

Dawn came with the chatter of birds

and Father Utih rose dream-laden

- with visions of prosperous time for his grandchildren.

Quickly he roused them

and the ten walked out to open up the green jungle

to stand on their own feet, to toil the green earth.

O great day, O hunger

tonight they will feast

for they came upon a patch of *ubi gadung*.

The next day, in the noonday sun
 Father Utih was digging
 digging alone, on his own two feet,
 digging alone, his own green land
 not to sow or plant for the *kampong's* delight
 but to bury instead the *ubi gadung* eaters.

VI

Father Utih now is seldom seen
 the mouldering hut stands, alone, quiet,
 Mother Utih's gravestone, a crumbling shrine
 decaying in her own green earth.

The people, in wonderment, ask
 who clears the grandchildren's graves
 there's not a blade of *lalang*, and the frangipani blooms.

Now and then in the still of night
 from the hill-top on the jungle fringe
 a voice comes chanting:

dandle high dandle low
 the *parang* has been sharpened
 once you're set to have a bath
 let the water really flow.

December 1975

A Ballad Mourning the Murder of an Old *Beringin* Tree

Old *beringin* tree on the roadside
 in a relatively young city
 hundreds of years it stood there
 absorbing the sun, sheltering the earth
 birds flew around it singing
 it was their haven, their happy home

butterflies flitted around it flirting
children played in its cool shade.

Suddenly that black morning
the giant Technology attacked
with his rapacious steel teeth
you could almost hear the old *beringin's* screams
as it crashed to the earth.

To this day, when twilight graces the sky
you can hear the old *beringin's* farewell
 Goodbye, goodbye, cloud
 Goodbye sun, goodbye moon
 Goodbye dear butterflies
 Goodbye nesting birds
 Goodbye frolicking children.

I was an old *beringin* cast aside
By an enemy called Development.

1979

Letter from the Bird Community to the Mayor

Lord Mayor
we the bird community called a meeting
one fine clear morning
on the roof of the deserted Parliament building.

All sent their intellectuals to represent them,
all but the crows, for they were too busy
mourning their loved ones, shot dead
and drifting down the River Klang.

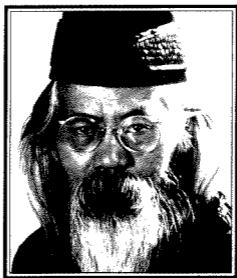
Special guests came as observers,
a delegation of butterflies,
involved in the issue.

Lord Mayor,
 though we had no hand in electing you
 since franchise is not for the feathered,
 still we honoured you for your promise
 OF A GREEN CITY.

Alas, they have desecrated THE GREEN of nature
 to worship THE GREEN of dollars
 since Kuala Lumpur's mud turned to concrete
 we birds have been the silent sufferers
 the late *Belatuk* was crushed under a felled tree
Merbuk was conned by the name Padang Merbuk
 While he and his kind were cooped in cages.

The *Pipit* delegation are protesting
 against the insult in your proverb
 "*pipit pekak makan berhujan*"
 (deaf sparrows feed in the rain)
Pipit and *Punai* both feel
 it's most improper of you to call
 certain private parts of your anatomy
 by their names, when you well know
 your '*pipit* and '*punai*' can't fly.
 (you have deflated our egos
 in the process of erecting yours).

Lord Mayor,
 this letter requests that in your wisdom
 you will protect each branch, each root,
 each leaf, each petal, each bower,
 for these have been our homes through the centuries,
 and it would also be for the good of man,
 his health and happiness, his peace of mind,
 to let nature and its myriad beauties bloom
 in the brilliant sun.



A. Samad Said

A. SAMAD SAID (1935-), writer and Malaysia's fourth *Sasterawan Negara*. He was born on 9 April 1935 at Kampung Belimbing Dalam, Durian Tunggal, Melaka. His original name is Abdul Samad bin Mohamed Said. He writes under the pseudonyms Hilmy, Isa Dahmuri, Jamil Kelana, Manja, Mesra and Shamsir. A. Samad received his early education at *Sekolah Melayu Kota Raja*, Singapore in 1947 before joining the Victoria Institution, Singapore, where he studied until he passed his Senior Cambridge in 1956. He had his first taste of journalism when he started working as assistant editor of the newspaper *Fikiran Rakyat*. Following this, he worked for a year for the Utusan Melayu Group as editor of *Mastika* before joining *Berita Harian* also as editor. His last post was assistant editor of the New Straits Times Group. He was also Head of the Literary Development Unit of the Group.

A. Samad's involvement in creative writing, be it short story or poetry writing, began when his novel "Gerhana" (later changed to *Salina*) won the consolation prize in the Novel Writing Competition organized by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 1958. This novel has been translated into Korean, Japanese, English, Russian, Chinese, Tamil, Tagalog and French. His novel *Duerah Zeni* won the Malaysian Literary Prize 1984/5 while *Hujan Pagi* won the Malaysian Literary Prize 1986/7. He also writes children stories and

novels for teenagers. Apart from writing novels, A. Samad too writes short stories and poems.

In appreciation of his involvement in the literary activities of the country, the Malaysian Government conferred him *Anugerah Pejuang Sastra* or Literary Exponent Award on 29 May 1976. In 1979, he was appointed a member of the Panel for the National Literary Award by the Prime Minister, and in the same year, won the S.E.A. Write Awards. He reached the apogee of his career as a literary writer when he was selected for the National Literary Award in 1985. In 1989, A. Samad went on a 'literary' strike because of his dissatisfaction with bureaucratic red tape involved in the handling of literary works. Today, A. Samad is a full-time freelance writer.

Translated by Nor Azizah Abu Bakar

LIST OF WORKS

Novel

1. *Salina*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1961.
2. *Bulan Tak Bermadu di Fatehpur Sikri*. Melaka: Pustaka Abbas Bandung, 1966.
3. *Sungai Mengalir Lesu*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Gunung Tahan, 1967.
4. *Di Hadapan Pulau*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Sistem Pelajaran, 1978.
5. *Langit Petang*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1980.
6. *Daerah Zeni*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1985.

Children/Teen Novels

1. *Bendera Merah di Atas Bukit*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Melayu Baru, 1968.

2. *Lima Kawan ke Rumah Rahsia*. Kluang: Pustaka Pendidikan, 1968.
3. *Jangan Ikut Jalan Ini*. Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 1969.
4. *Yang Berat Sama Dipikul*. Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 1969.
5. *Mengejar Tetamu di Waktu Senja*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Melayu Baru, 1974.
6. *Keledang*. Kuala Lumpur: MacMillan Publisher Ltd., 1979.
7. *Antara Kabus ke Kabus*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Melayu Baru, 1980.
8. *Di Simpang Jalan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1980.
9. *Adik Datang*. Kuala Lumpur: Adabi, 1980.

Collection of Literary Works

1. *Liar di Api*. Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publications. (Collection of poems and short stories).
2. *Daun-Daun Berguguran*. Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publications, 1962. (Collection of poems and short stories written with Salmi Manja).
3. *Tema dan Tugas Sastera Melayu Moden*. Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publications, 1963. (Collection of essays and critiques written with Usman Awang).
4. *Debar Pertama*. Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publications, 1964. (Collection of short stories).
5. *Di Mana Bulan Selalu Retak*. Singapore: Malaysia Publications, 1965. (Plays).
6. *Ke Mana Terbangnya Si Burung Senja?* Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Melayu Baru, 1966. (Short stories and TV plays serial).

7. *Benih Harapan*. Kuala Lumpur: Grafik Sendirian Berhad, 1973. (Collection of poems).
8. *Daun Semalu Pucuk Paku*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Nusa, 1975. (Collection of poems).
9. *Dari Salina ke Langit Petang*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979. (Autobiography).
10. *Tangan yang Simpatik*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Adabi Sdn. Bhd, 1981. (Collection of essays).
11. *Benih Semalu*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984. (Collection of poems).

Writing is a Happy Malaise, a Beautiful Sadness

I AM rather uneasy when I have to blow trumpets, especially personal trumpets which can usually become act of arrogance. This is more so for a writer, for each time he writes, he in fact exposes himself; and generally there is a tendency to exaggerate one's personal egoism.

There are two ways of doing this: one is to announce a great idea which usually cannot be fulfilled; the other is to glance at history as a foundation to rebuild the contemporary world so that it can be better understood. I prefer the second trail.

A progressive scholar suggested that "[a] history of society" be written, not "[a] history of important people". According to him, the previous emphasis is wrong. History is not an accumulation of gargantuan objects. Coincidentally, that too is the emphasis and essence of my work, naturally with all its shortcomings. As an example, allow me to read my poem which can approximately highlight this spirit. The poem is entitled "The Wink".

*He is being transported to a nostalgic past
Remembering SITC, Gunung Jerai*

*Winstedt's Dictionary, Raden Mochtar
 Rough Rider cigarette, Miss Tijah, Shihang Gakko,
 Nagasaki, Robinson's in the afternoon, the riots of
 Maria Hertogh, Awang Bakar; Proud Jah's
 Brassieres, chettiers' debts, Belakang Mati,
 Sputnik, the Cap-Ji-Ki lottery, the din of
 Freedom, Polygamy, R. Azmi, Leopold Ville,
 Yap Ah Loy Road, the bank's loan. We
 Bule, the scabbies of Nafeesah Bee, the lawyer's
 warrant
 The thrill of tea-lambung, a declaration of bankruptcy
 And the death visions of Ampang Cemetery.*

*He is now caught between the wink of
 Noreen Noor and the blink of a computer, transported
 again into a nostalgic decade.*

(I)

*He would love to see the nation grow
 with roots nurtured by devoted
 sweat, from
 the rakyat's belief and loyalty
 although the two can't possibly be equal.*

*He would also love to see all
 the leaders' promises
 fulfilled before they all die
 for shoots can still be manured
 and he is diligent in watering them.*

*He would love to see the Member of Parliament
 who, even after the expiration of his term
 continue to visit his constituency
 inquiring about the children and subsidies
 and not to approach them
 only because he wants to sell some spare-parts.*

*In fact, he would like to see instantaneous
millionaires
products of the NEP, still ready
to wind down their car-windows, point to the
destitute rakyat – and still
proudly proclaim; these are our people –
the struggle is still on.*

*At the criss-cross of viaducts, falsehood
overcoming truthfulness, 'tis indeed unwanted,
a whole week's cloud won't linger on one's head
A flock of crows hustled together at dusk need not be
friends,
still he would love to see a glorious nation where
the citizens and their leaders are equally prosperous.*

(II)

*And we would like to encourage differences in
ideas, changes of attitudes, whose
foundation is nevertheless trust and loyalty
For such exchanges and changes
are beginnings of new visions
For those who must doubt or are just stupid.
And he himself too
Cannot always be in agreement
With each leader
(or vice-versa)
And if sincere, a smile is a
smile, an axe is an axe.
If not, a smile and an axe
will always be at odds,
For confrontations
can unravel peaceful ties
and those that are at the crossroads
of confusion and trust
(and loyalty) can find*

*a flag of sincerity – implant it
 Until there are those who will shout:
 A fox in sheep's clothing or
 A dry spell in a never-ending flood?*

(III)

*Standing underneath
 the naked structure of Dayabumi
 hearing the calls of the muezzin
 And the noisy shunting of trains
 he is proud that
 dust and dirt
 from crane have fallen on him,
 Conscious that pride
 (more so self-respect) wherever it is
 will not enhanced
 only with words,
 will not exist
 without
 dust and dirt from the tower.*

*Between the wink of Norcen Noor and the blink
 Of the computer, there is a desire to begin again
 Writing a diary commemorating everything: SITC,
 Winstedt's Dictionary, Rough Rider cigarette,
 Sputnik ...
 But, oh my God, he has fallen asleep these 44 dusks!*

Sure we can paste or hang all sorts of labels, give all sorts of major interpretations which can never be realized. But, the truth is, we as human beings and as artistic creatures always grow – challenged by the demands of each era. In the decade of the aristocracy, the literary person is a recorder of the impressive life-styles of the nobility, literature is the world's documentation about great people, great events, great wonders. In this age of development,

literature chronicles ordinary people, ordinary events and ordinary phenomena.

On the whole, literature records and provides an insight into the interactions of creative beings with their society and their problems. Each work that is produced, more or less draws that creative being nearer to a small part of God's vast universe, besides bringing him into closer contact with other beings who are also searching, appreciating and experiencing life's bitterness and sweetness.

True, literature cannot suddenly provide food, but without drawing nearer towards literature, the food that is being chewed cannot discharge its special properties required for man's healthy and active minds. At its most basic, literature formulates morals – the sincere will proliferate, the false will languish. And literature will always climb to the summit. And the summit is when literature achieves its supreme artistic level – and art is beauty, enlightenment, justice, piety. Art is also reason, wisdom and sympathy. Or at least art is an exalted promise with a physical form and a spiritual heart. And all this is nourishment for man's mind and soul.

In the 50's I said: "Should a turbulent tempest raged this beautiful land/I will not retreat, not even a step will I succumb in despair/let a hail of bullets search wildly for its victims/for love of my land, death I willingly embrace." In the 60's I was still saying: "This democracy must/continue together with babes born/in deteriorated huts, romping in boats/craving in castles and growing up by the paddy fields/this democracy breathes/and all can savour/the pleasure of their rights..." In the 70's I began to be more realistic, only occasionally indulging in memories. And in the 80's I learned to argue so as to understand contemporary life. And I say "All that is true/no matter how it is coerced/will continue to proliferate/without sustenance/still it will bloom/even without air/it will be robust."

Because of its background and influence and the fact

that literature must nourish man's minds and souls, inevitably there are groups who want to have literature under their control. The master of all trades demands that the creative artist becomes an all-competent hero. The politician persuades him to promote certain ideologies; the environmentalist goads him to become their annunciator; the sociologist feels that the artiste needs to dissect man's behaviour. And so on ... and so on.

But this is too much. For what is obvious is that, whilst there is an Ananta Toer in Indonesia, there is also an Ummar Khayam - the former's praxis is ideology, the latter's art; in Japan, besides a Yukio Mishima, there is also a Yasunari Kawabata - one rigid like an army, the other gentle like a virgin; in Germany besides Gunter Grass, the bitter activist, there is also a Heinrich Böll who is sweetly engrossed in artistic endeavours; besides Shahnoun Ahmad who cynically lacerates this country, there is also Usman Awang who gently threatens. These examples are but shadows to reveal that creative artistes need not be harsh and ideological only. Their world, their universe and its inhabitants are also important. And creative beings must be loyal to their mighty districts to be capable of ameliorating them. It would be good if he has the time and is able to facilitate human lives as philosophically as he can; if he does not champion tyranny and falsehood, that in itself would suffice, for then he would have accomplished part of the vital task and trust of his art. And definitely a creative person will surely base his work on truth, honesty and beauty.

Politicians only appreciate literature as a tool - literature as a political instrument and not vice versa. For them, literature that does not endorse certain political ideology is not good literature. But an artiste knows when he should support someone or something, that is only when and if he feels it is necessary - but it will be sustained by his clear conscience and unsullied mind. If he supports a leader, his assistance is a solid, careful service, not something that is hurriedly and recklessly pursued, for it will be built on sin-

cerity and the benefits that a leader advocates. Deviating from this premise, artistes too have the right to change their attitudes.

Like the politician, the artiste too makes promises. But he is not compelled to make mammoth commitments, nor utter them as loudly as possible. The artiste affirms in silence and solitude, sending artistic signs and enabling those avouchments to simmer in the reader's soul, no matter how disturbed that soul is. If political guarantees are physical pledges, artistic assurances are more like spiritual throths. In this sense, political bestow gifts, whereas literature bequeaths wisdom.

Nevertheless there are those who believe that artistes are dreamers, living more in the realm of imagination than in the world of reality. In fact there are those who suspect that literary figures delight in portraying an absurd world or that sometimes they are even fond of brutality. The truth is, it is indeed difficult to delineate where reality ends and imagination begins. The literary person enters the realm of imagination to look for possibilities in the world of reality, and he stays in this real world to delve into the probabilities of the imagination. And usually the horizon of the literary being wavers along this margin – momentarily he is panting in the world of reality and in another instant he is drowning in the realm of imagination, and often he is torn between the crossroads of these margins. Between the panting and the drowning, amongst the perturbations of the world of reality, imagination and the marginal choices, therein emerge his works.

What is also obvious is that a genuine artiste usually records the absurd so as to understand the sane, documents cruelty so as to find humanity. Because of this, each experience, be they thorns, gems, things he abhor or objects he love, they are all useful to him.

For me, writing is a happy malaise, a beautiful sadness. And I only want to write about a part of life, "a slice of life", in order to leave it as a mirror and a pool of experience,

hoping that it will become an inheritance of knowledge to help us understand a point in time in this age which we are passing through. If we encounter a mirror, we will see our own reflection; if we fall into the pond, we will swallow the water of experience. Maybe from this we can absorb knowledge, discover beauty, digest wisdom. And surely art widens, life, teaches beauty, and leaves behind knowledge.

This - a big part of this - is the impossible dream, of each creative being who may achieve this only after he is old and at the end of his life's journey. But for an artiste, it is still not too late, for besides achieving that objective, it is journeying towards that achievement which is also very important; the passage will enable him to confront life's realities. And the travel will also spur him into the realm of imagination. Along such multifarious peregrinations, the artiste will encounter both beauty and ugliness. Little by little he will discover that facts are frightening, but dreams are soothing. Thus is he propelled into the world of illusion. As an example, I recite my poem which deals with the question of fact and fantasy. It is entitled "Squatter 72 Speaks Out".

*I want to erase the scars of suffering
to let them be is to ache in smouldering awareness;
I want to gather grains of happiness
from remnants of sorrow, fragments of grieving
This land is too beautiful to be tyrannized*

*by consuming jealousy, or, sadder still
by vengeance without aim or direction
or grandiose words with garbage sense.*

*I will not join the cobra josthon,
to sting spirits, to provoke
scorpions to fury, to claim
others are to blame when the nation shakes.
I will clean drains,*

*plant papaya, tapioca and ulam raja;
rear ducks, catfish and geese
to prepare for another disaster - and join a
cast-off palm-sheath
with tangled straw, to form
a makeshift shelter if I need one.*

*I hope our great-grandchildren will not
be traitors ever ready to sail
away from the nation's harbour -
fly a pirate flag, admire the
beauty of a foreign land, condemn this*

*country as devil's mudhole, demon's nest,
when her tin, rubber and petroleum are
leaving dust and worms.*

*I hope their love will remain a bright flame,
their conscience pure as a saint's in prayer
so that they do not rush to rage at
spirit of 45, minaret of parliament, but
champion justice and honour,*

*without poison posters, centipede banners
without smearing persons and communities.*

*I hope the news-sharks that
gulfaw in bars of posh hotels amidst
whisky, wheedling reggie and sex queens,
will not turn pimp and telex
muddled news and predictions to*

*AW, NW, TM or FEER and hypes that here
NEP millionaires multiply, other races suffer
when I, at 72, am dirt poor and hobbling
from railways quarters to PWD shack
to this squalors settlement.*

*But I remain proud to be here
even if I am last in the happiness queue*

*even if I get mere crumbs from my heritage,
or perhaps get nothing at all.*

*The brave remain joyous in a wretched land
the clowns are the first adventurers to leave*

*In this squatters settlement I will erect
more sheds, I will hang up
a giant loudspeaker to say out loud:
I am for my country, her
joys and agonies,*

*Better begin from hell and not the other way
even in agony this noble land holds me close.*

And finally, for I feel that our government is very sensitive – it does not matter which eminent statesman, who because of his convictions, participated in this award. And God willing, this genuine intention will be reciprocated and will elevate this person to be a more respected, a wiser, a more fortunate and a more self-esteeming being. And I myself have been overwhelmed with such invaluable benefits – Literary Pioneer Award, S.E.A. (Southeast Asia) Write Awards and now the National Literary Award. For all these, I want to end this speech by quoting Ariff, who, in my novel *Langit Petang* says, "God, You have endowed me with so much, and I can only repay You with so little. Forgive me God."

With all humility and a sense of great responsibility; feeling how minute and insignificant man is in front of God, I accept this Award.

Translated by Solehah Ishak

SELECTED WORK

Salina (Chapter One)*

I

THE sun was almost ninety degrees high in the heavens as a small old lorry wound its way slowly and noisily into a tiny potholed road. The people who lived in the village were mostly Indians and Malays – many were looking out from the Public Works Department quarters to the left of the road while others in the houses to the right were craning their necks to see for themselves at a closer angle who the newcomer was who had just moved into the village. The children were making a lot of noise fussing around and following the lorry as it wound its way slowly and shakily. Some dogs were barking loudly; a mangy one among them appeared to have lost most of its fur.

Arriving at a small lane the lorry stopped, but the engine, which was not in the best of condition, was kept running. A young man of about eighteen dressed in light yellow shorts and a thick white singlet full of holes, got down from

* Excerpted from A. Samad Said, *Salina*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1991.

the seat next to the lorry driver, followed shortly by an old woman of forty nine or so wearing a long greyish blue *baju kurung* and a dark greyish yellow batik sarong. The old woman was coughing as she alighted from the old lorry whose engine was still running. She shooed away a dog by her side.

"Is this the right place, mother?" said the young man as he wiped the perspiration off his forehead with a dirty, crumpled, old handkerchief, his hair falling over and covering his forehead with beads of sweat. He tried to push his hair back with his hand but it covered his forehead again. His eyes roamed the village.

"Yes it is. There's the *cempedak* tree. At the back is the room," replied the old woman coughing as she pointed towards the *cempedak* tree, some of the fruits of which were covered up in brown paper; as far as the eye could perceive clearly, there were four in all.

"Then let's stop here," said the young man once more. Quickly he approached the lorry driver - a thin Chinese man with a greyish green hat slouched over his head - and said, "This is where we stop."

The engine was immediately switched off. The driver alighted. There were beads of perspiration on his forehead and neck. He looked at the people who were taking a closer look at the lorry and himself. Then he turned his gaze towards the *cempedak* tree.

The village had long been known as "Kampung Kambing" (village of Goats). According to those familiar with its history, it got its name from the origin of the present day houses in the village. Originally they were goat-sheds or pens later extended by their owners for the purpose of renting them out. They belonged to the Indian labourers working for the Public Works Department of the Singapore Municipal Council, who had been given permission by the authorities to put up these sheds or pens. They (according to the owners) were necessary to house the goats they were breeding.

These goat-sheds or pens left much to be desired. The walls were made of planks taken from old crates with rough surfaces, timber barks which were thick and mouldy, zinc from rusty oil drums that had been flattened (some parts were still uneven) and frayed cardboard stained with rain water which had seeped through. The roofs too were made of zinc from oil drums, *rumbia* palm, the barks of timber and on top were laid *nipah* or old rubber mats with holes in them. On the roofs of some of the houses, the leaves of the creeper pumpkin plant had been allowed to grow wild. The floor of nearly every house was mere mother earth, with the exception of the low raised platforms used for eating and sleeping purposes - platforms of unevenly arranged planks with a rough surface.

Many lived in such houses. A large number of these houses, had in former times, been either the target of bombing or had since changed hands and now had new owners until such time as they themselves became displaced. The old woman who had just moved in had gone to the village a week before that (after she had been informed by a friend that a vacant room was available there); she was lucky to get a room to rent, one which had only recently been vacated. However, it was not easy to get this room. It took all of fifty dollars paid in advance as 'coffee' money to obtain it in addition to a promise to pay twenty dollars monthly rent on a fixed date each month, then and only then did this room, roofed with zinc from oil drums, *rumbia* palms, barks of timber laid with old rubber mats on which lush pumpkin leaves grew wild, walled with planks taken from milk crates, zinc from oil drums, barks of timber and cardboard and a floor paved with earth, become theirs to rent, a shelter from the sun and rain.

"Looks like I have to watch out more carefully," said the Sikh watchman guarding the water taps of the P.W.D. workers' houses. "I thought when Paliamah left the house surely no one would want to live there. But now there's someone new," he continued as he twirled his thick mous-

tache which curled upwards like the horns of a bull. His big, deep set eyes spotted the young lad who was carrying his things from the lorry which had stopped not far from where he was. He went on twirling his moustache more sharply and pointedly.

By the side of the small, old lorry, several little children had crowded around, most of them naked. A few were helping to remove light things from the lorry. But many of them were just looking on, while yet another few of the naughty ones were sitting in the driver's seat, touching and playing with the horn whenever the driver disappeared into the house with the things he was carrying from the lorry. Two or three others nearby simply laughed at the antics of the naughty children when the driver scolded them on coming out of the house. Then the children would run off for a while, only to return once more to sound the horn time and again.

"But I think this time there are not many people," said the Sikh who watched over the water taps of the P.W.D. houses. "There are so few things." His hand pointed to the things that were still on the lorry and it quickly returned to the moustache, twirling it upwards once again.

A thin, lanky Indian man, dressed in an old white singlet that had seen better times and faded blue trousers, nodded as he served his customers. And having wrapped the dried chillies for the customers, he said:

"Yes, there aren't many. Only two of them. Mother and son. A week ago, she came to inquire about the house. She said a friend had told her there was a room here. She asked me. I said that's true. Kurapaya Samy has a vacant room. He wants to rent it out."

"So that's it," said the Sikh watchman in his big voice with phlegm in his throat. "What's the room rent like? Has it gone up again?"

"Yes. Now it's up a little. Before, Paliamah had five people living in the room, and the rent was \$18/-. Now I hear Kurapaya Samy has increased it again. Now its \$20/-

per month," said the Indian shopkeeper shaking his head and rubbing the palms of his hand as he usually does when he speaks.

"Goodness! This scoundrel Kurupaya. He has a lot of money already; now he wants more," said the Sikh watchman spitting away as he sat down. "How much coffee money did he give?"

"Fifty dollars," the thin lanky Indian said as he entered the shop once more to serve the other customers. Then he came out and said:

"Now, nobody minds \$50/-; people will pay. It is difficult to get a house. Even at \$100/- per month people will still be willing to pay."

"Yes indeed, how true. But it isn't fair to rob the poor of so much money!" said the Sikh watchman.

The Indian shopkeeper remained silent; as a matter of fact, he and Kurupaya had connections.

In front of Kampung Kambing there was a long, old and ugly building badly in need of paint. It was divided into compartments or rooms marked "A" to "F". Here the P.W.D. workers and their families lived. They included Chinese, Malays and Indians; Indians mostly. In all, there were six compartments and eight families lived in each one of them, sharing only two bathrooms and a toilet among them. The bathrooms and toilet often became the bone of contention among the tenants because most villagers in Kampung Kambing were forced to get their supply of water from the very same bathrooms, which they felt they had a right to, especially because the people who rented out the rooms to them were the Indians, who themselves lived in the compartments. The water issued caused strained relations between the villagers of Kampung Kambing and those who lived in the P.W.D. compartments, so much so that at times it inevitably spread among the people living in the compartments themselves because those who did not have houses to rent became angry with those who had, which subsequently made them rich. As a result complaints were

brought up and the authorities responsible sent the Sikh watchman to the village to supervise water supply so that it would not lead to further strife and strain.

Several people from compartment "A" of the building watched the lorry which had stopped there and the people who were taking things out of the lorry. Some showed their disgust because they were aware that the arrival of newcomers to Kampung Kambing almost always brought all sorts of problems. Then a fat, pregnant Indian woman standing by room no. 3 said loudly:

"Kurupaya will soon be rich. His goat pens have all been turned into rooms for rent. If it were possible, he'd like to rent out even his own room."

Two or three young Indian women and an old Malay woman living in compartment "A" laughed. The Sikh watchman and the shopkeeper too laughed. Once more their eyes reverted to the lorry. All the children had begun to disperse but though far from the lorry, this did not stop them from being mischievous. The lorry had begun to move again; its noisy engine was quite deafening while its rusty brown funnel at the back emitted black smoke in abundance. The engine spluttered a few times - in the beginning short splutters followed by a long spluttering sound; then it went dead - however it eventually moved along the narrow potholed road that separated Kampung Kambing from compartment "A".

The lorry moved along emitting black smoke from its back funnel. Two or three children ran after it along with a thin mangy dog while those who were left behind cheered and applauded making such an awful din.

II

The two who had recently moved to the village were Kati-jah, a widow, and Hilmy, her son, who was still at school. Both were victims of World War Two: the war had robbed them of their families, their homes and their possessions.

After the war they lived in a rented room owned by an Indian merchant. But when the merchant returned to India along with his Malay wife whom he married during the Japanese Occupation, the house was sold to a Chinese merchant who turned it into a shop for repairing and selling bicycles and also motorcar tyres. As the entire house was to be made use of by its new owner, the two of them, along with three or four other families, were forced to move out. Having lived for some time with a friend, the two then moved to Kampung Kambing.

To Katijah, moving to her new home, despite the room being so dirty, was indeed comforting. All her life she had seldom boarded in other people's homes and even when she had to, she felt uneasy and somewhat miserable primarily because of the gossips and criticisms aimed at her behind her back. As for Hilmy, moving to the new home was also comforting, even though he was not aware of what would happen after he had settled in the new place.

The room had been tidied two days before they moved in. On that particular day, what mattered most was how to arrange their belongings which anyway did not amount to very much.

Some people living in Kampung Kambing came to the room recently occupied by the newcomers. Those who came smiled at them, a sign that they welcomed the arrival of the newcomers. An old man in a white *haji* skull-cap which had turned brownish and which he wore slouched over his head, came very close to Hilmy and said:

"Just the two of you?"

"Yes," answered Hilmy smiling as he lifted his bag of books.

Then the old man asked Katijah.

"Only you and the boy, is that right?"

Smiling, Katijah replied: "Yes, just the two of us, me and my son. We've been looking for a house; we're not able to get one. Once before we managed to get one but the 'coffee' money was too much, we couldn't afford it."

"Is your son working?" the old man asked again. He was like a detective who wanted to know every detail about a person.

"No. He's still in school."

"Oh," said the old man nodding his head in acknowledgement. His open mouth revealed many broken teeth, sticky, slimy yellow in colour!

Hilmy came out again to get the small case containing his clothes. Soon after he was questioned by the old man:

"Which school do you go to?"

"Who? Me?" retorted Hilmy looking at the old man fixedly. He felt uncomfortable to be questioned while he was busy working. The old man nodded.

"Victoria School. Close by. In front of the New World."

"Hmm! A Malay school?" asked the old man appearing somewhat ignorant.

"No, an English school," Hilmy replied as he went in carrying the small case containing his clothes.

"What standard is he in?" the old man then asked Katijah. Katijah looked at him, surprised to be questioned further. Her reply was:

"Eight. When school reopens, he will be in standard nine."

"Why don't you send him to a Malay school?" inquired the old man as if he had the right to pose the question notwithstanding how busy these people were at the moment.

"He was from a Malay school before this; later he was sent to the English school. His father is no longer around. Fortunately in this school, we don't have to pay," explained Katijah as she quickly entered the room carrying the crockery which had been placed in a basket wrapped in thick cloth.

"This chap here is Haji Karman, he wants to know everything. Think he's a detective," interrupted a tall, slim, young lady with a pretty face. She was wearing a green *baju kurung* that had big red flowers and a dark yellow *batik sarong* with dark brownish flowers. The young lady

had been standing there for a long time but had only just spoken after watching Haji Karman 'questioning' at length the two people who had just newly come to live in Kampung Kambing.

"Oh, I didn't mean to question them; I just wanted to know. We must get to know the good and the bad side of everyone who comes here, don't you think?" said Haji Karman swatting a mosquito which had settled on his neck.

"You know very well Pak Haji: most people who come here are poor. If not, who would care to come here where it's hot as hell during the day and teeming with mosquitoes at night. Moreover if those here aren't good folks, what can you do about it? Are you going to preach as usual?" said the young lady openly. Those close by - nine or ten of them - all laughed.

"True, you can't help them. If you want to, it's not necessary to keep on preaching. There are ways and means. You have not tried them; the trouble is, you keep on preaching," said a young lady of eighteen who had just arrived at the place and knew instantly what Pak Haji had been talking about.

"Ah, what do you all know?" Pak Haji said quite angrily and hastily as he walked away. The crowd watched him take a corner by a clump of banana trees not far from the place till he came to one where a big nanny-goat and its two kids were tethered. One was brown with white patches and the other black with white patches - the kids butted the nanny-goat's belly to get at its milk. As Haji Karman approached the nanny-goat, it bleated continually giving way to little shivers. Everyone laughed out loud once again while someone among them laughingly remarked:

"Ah, the goat's quite right: preaching is all Pak Haji is good at."

Pak Haji turned round to face them - his face red, his eyes twitching (a habit of his when angry). Then he quickly moved away: "They think I'm crazy," he said to himself.

"Pak Haji's like that, sis," said the young lady dressed

in a *kebaya* and *batik* sarong to Katijah who was making up her mind which of her things she wanted to bring in. "He often talks about the hereafter world. A great pity, though; he himself is no fit example. All he does every day is to preach. There are times when I feel sorry for people like him."

"Perhaps he's gone senile or maybe he has become a religious fanatic," Katijah said still searching among her things for something light that she could carry.

"It's difficult to say, sis. I really don't think so, since he teaches the children here to read the Koran. He has many students. Frankly the children here all learn from him," said the pretty young lady.

"Oh is that so?" said Katijah after a moment's silence, then she picked up a small bundle of clothes. On coming out of the room once more she continued, "What's your name, dear?"

"Me? My name is Salina. Siti Salina. But they call me Inah. I live over there," she said pointing to a room not far from Katijah's. "I've lived here a long time, almost two years, ever since this village began."

There was little time to continue the conversation as a middle-aged Indian man came by. He was dressed in a worn-out black shorts and a greyish white singlet with holes all over.

He was wiping his bald head which had very little hair all round.

"Oh, so you've come? Good, that's good! How are you? Well, I hope...."

Before Katijah could give a reply, Siti Salina said, "Here sis! The one with the bald head is Kurupaya Samy; he is the owner of these fine houses."

"Fie!" Kurupaya said sticking his tongue out a little. Nine to ten people standing near Katijah's house quickly moved off. Only Siti Salina remained. She craned her neck into the room only to see Hilmy still arranging the things. He had removed his thick singlet and his body

was full of perspiration.

"Oh yes. I've come for the same reason too," said Kurupaya Samy when he saw Katijah taking out twenty dollars from her waistband purse. You have already given me the 'coffee' money. I told you the day you come in, you'd have to pay a month's rent."

Katijah handed the red notes. Kurupaya took them with a smile on his dark red lips. (He took it without issuing a receipt). He counted the money again carefully notwithstanding the fact that there were only two notes, then he put them into the pocket of his worn-out black shorts. Afterwards he entered the room, looked around for a moment then came out again and spoke in Malay with an Indian accent:

"In this house you must not hammer into the wall too much, you know. The walls are not strong enough. If you hammer into it, it will collapse, everything will collapse."

Katijah nodded when she caught Siti Salina smiling at her. Kurupaya Samy was quiet for a while. He rubbed his head - bald in the middle - with the palm of his hand which bore marks of dirt. His somewhat reddish eyes (red because he had been drinking toddy) were rolling about as if in search of something to say. Then his eyes reverted towards the roof of Katijah's room, on top of which lay the trailing lush green leaves of the pumpkin plant. The index finger of his right hand, veins clearly visible to the eye, quickly pointed to it as he remarked:

"You must watch out for the roof. There are too many leaves. But don't throw them away. If you do, when it rains, a lot of water will get in. The leaves will help seal the holes in the roof. You mustn't get rid of the leaves, you understand?"

"Yes of course, big chief; we do understand," said Siti Salina shaking her head, "you just have to say it once, we all understand. You needn't worry. We won't hammer the walls. We won't throw the pumpkin leaves away. If we hammer, all the walls will collapse; if we pull out the leaves, the

roof will come down!"

"Oh my God!" Kurupaya Samy said as he shook his bald head and lifted his right hand to point at Siti Salina who was still smiling. "I know that you already know: I am talking to this person. She doesn't know yet. Goodness!" said Kurupaya Samy as he shook his head from side to side.

"Yes, I know Kurupaya Samy," said Siti Salina in a teasing tone, "If you didn't open your mouth I would have told this lady myself, you know? I would say: "Sis, Kurupaya's house is expensive but not strong. So don't hammer or else everything will collapse," as she said this she laughed, "the roof's not sound. Lots of holes in them. So don't get rid of the pumpkin leaves trailing along the roof, don't pull them out, sis." Her laugh which came in waves became more shrill.

Katijah too laughed but soon she got into a fit of coughing.

"Goodness gracious!" Kurupaya Samy exclaimed again. He quickly explained to Katijah, "Don't you listen to this woman here, understand? She's really crazy; she's crazy about Fakar." He emphasised and stressed the word 'really'.

"Yes, I'm really crazy," Siti Salina agreed, emphasising and stressing the word 'really'. "Kurupaya, you're not crazy, are you? That's why you allow people to live in houses like this. It's all right my being crazy about Fakar," said Siti Salina with a long laugh.

"My, oh my!" Kurupaya Samy remarked as he moved away quickly. He was irritated because Siti Salina had made a fool of him. Siti Salina continued:

"Goodness gracious Kurupaya! Is that all you have to say! Don't you want to say something about the water?"

It was as if Kurupaya Samy had just remembered: "That's right! I do want to talk about the water." He was shaking his head again. "Water is a problem here. It wasn't like this before. Only now. You are not allowed to take water in the day. There's the Sikh watchman keeping an eye. Before that they used to take water day and night.

Then some people who were annoyed complained. Now there's the Sikh watchman keeping an eye...."

"Of course people complained because only Kurupaya makes money. No wonder your friends are annoyed. That's why they complained," Siti Salina interrupted once more; this time it was not accompanied by a laugh, instead she shook her head in imitation of Kurupaya's habit when talking; Siti Salina purposely did this to poke fun at him.

"For God's sake, Inah have mercy. Be quiet, I want to speak. She's really and truly crazy," Kurupaya Samy said in earnest as he looked at Katijah and pointed to Siti Salina adding emphatically, "This woman is really crazy."

All the more Siti Salina laughed at him, so much so that she pressed her hands to her stomach.

"Dear me," continued Kurupaya, "this woman is crazy. You there, just go home to Fakar. I want to speak." This time he slapped his thin bony thigh where a mosquito had settled.

Siti Salina went on laughing and exclaimed, "Very well Kurupaya, now you can speak. I will not disturb you."

Kurupaya smiled, "She's truly crazy," he said again looking at Katijah, "you are not to take water in the day. The Sikh watchman is on the look-out. You may take water at night; any amount you like. But sometimes the Sikh watchman comes at night too. If he's there, don't take water. Do you ... hunderstand?"

Katijah nodded.

"So you must collect water at night. Take a lot more. You can store the water in a jar. To wash clothes, you can use the bathroom. But this must be at night too. Hunderstand?"

Katijah nodded again. She looked at Siti Salina; Siti Salina nodded too.

"But it's better to wash in the house. Take a little more water at night. You can use it in the morning to wash clothes. Is that h ... understood?"

This time Katijah and Siti Salina nodded. Siti Salina

said out loud, "Of course we hunderstand!"

"Goodness gracious me! You're crazy, shut up, you hear," said Kurupaya Samy to Siti Salina, his tongue sticking out a little at the end of his words. Siti Salina laughed at her. Kurupaya continued, "Use the toilet if you need to ease yourself. But you have to go at night too...."

"Is that so?" intercepted Siti Salina. "What if you want to defecate early in the mornings, then what? Must you wait till nightfall?"

"Gosh! You'd better shut up Inah. Let me have my say, the correct thing," said Kurupaya Samy, his tongue sticking out a little. Then turning towards Katijah once more he continued, "At night you can defecate over there. But in the morning, you have to do it here; in the bushes, afterwards bury the faeces into the ground. Do you hunderstand?"

"Heh Kurupaya! Not hunderstand. The word is understand?" said Siti Salina poking fun at Kurupaya's pronunciation. Then she laughed again, greatly amused.

"That's enough, shut up!"

Hilmy emerged from the room after he had finished bringing in and arranging the things in his room as he thought fit. His light yellow shorts and his shirtless body had become dirtier. His face too was dirty, being covered with dust and spider's web. Outside, he noticed his mother talking to an Indian man - Kurupaya - with Siti Salina by her side, still laughing. Hilmy approached them but did not come too close because he gathered that his mother was still talking to the landlord. For some time now the questions he had vaguely heard were about the rent, the water, the walls and the roof of the house.

"Who's this?" Kurupaya asked pointing to Hilmy. "Your brother or your son?"

"My son."

Siti Salina intercepted. "Well, if you must know, this is the big landlord of Kampung Kambing - the bald-headed landlord!"

"Heh! What's the matter with you," Kurupaya exclaim-

ed staring fixedly at Siti Salina. Hilmy, Katijah and Siti Salina laughed.

"Sis," said Kurupaya, "I'd better leave now. I'm coming again. If there's anything you want to tell me. You hunderstand?"

"There is," replied Katijah as Siti Salina went on, "Do you understand and not hunderstand?"

All except Kurupaya laughed again.

Kurupaya was about to leave when Siti Salina reminded him, "Have you mentioned the date when the rent should be paid?"

"O yes, I almost forgot," Kurupaya's voice indicated he had only just remembered the matter. "I don't like to fuss about the house rent. What's the good of fussing around. Nevertheless I'd like you to pay the rent on the fifth of every month, hunderstand?"

Katijah nodded while Siti Salina shook her head. Meanwhile Hilmy simply laughed at him.

Kurupaya proceed to where the goats were tethered to the banana tree. The nanny-goat was lying down, while the two kids had their faces pressed to her large and long udders.

Kurupaya felt the goat's belly hanging limply, pattered it for a moment, then untied the tether wound around the banana tree. The goat stood up, bleating softly as it looked around. The kids too got up butting blindly at the she-goat's belly while it did its best to avoid them.

Katijah, Siti Salina and Hilmy watched from afar.

A male voice calling for Siti Salina could be heard. The voice came from inside a room, the voice of someone drowsy. At first Siti Salina did not hear it. But when Kurupaya was passing in front of Siti Salina's room with his goats, he heard the voice and promptly told her, "Did you hear your darling calling! Hurry up!" Only then did Siti Salina hear and she hastily made for the room. "I'm going, sis," she said to Katijah. To Kurupaya, as she pointed to the goats, she quipped, "That's your darling, hunderstand?"

Kurupaya gave a long laugh. He tugged at the goats saying. "Crazy woman Inah's really crazy." He laughed as he shook his bald head several times. "But she really means well," he went on stressing the words 'really'. "Her man is not a good person, takes life easy, you know."

His goats bleated again. The bleatings were long and weakened towards the end. The two kids hurriedly followed the nanny-goat; they too were bleating – sort of shivery bleats. Kurupaya tugged harder at them. His lips were moving up and down. As he passed by the small road to get to the bigger one he heard someone screaming – the voice of someone scolding another in shrill voice. He recognised the voice at once. As the goats bleated he said. "That damned Zarina. Day after day she keeps on quarrelling!"

He continued to tug at the goats.

Katijah who was still outside her room, craned her neck trying to figure where the voice had come from. Siti Salina who also heard the noise, came out for a moment. On seeing Katijah cranning her neck, she quickly explained.

"Who else but Zarina. Perhaps she's quarrelling again with Sunarto."

"Her brother?"

"No."

Katijah was quiet. But as Siti Salina was about to enter her room once more, Katijah asked further.

"Her husband?"

Siti Salina shook her head again then entered her room with these word:

"Her enemy!"

Katijah quickly took out a broom from inside an old milk case and began to sweep her room. Hilny was still arranging the things in the house. As she swept, Katijah said to her son:

"What a place! Water is a problem, so's the toilet, the rent must be paid on a fixed day and the very day we move in, we hear people quarrelling."

All of a sudden, a young girl of fifteen or so, came run-

ning into the room. She was wearing a *baju kebaya* edged with lace and a bluish sarong. On entering the room, it was quite obvious that she was frightened, but on seeing that the people in the room were not angry with her, she quickly explained:

"I thought there was nobody here. I had forgotten. My mother is quarrelling again. I'm frightened. And my brother isn't at home. So I ran here."

She paused for a moment. One could hear her gasping rapidly, she looked worried. Katijah and Hilmy looked at each other, not knowing what to do.

"If my mother were to look for me, please don't tell her I'm here," the worried girl pleaded. Her eyes were on Katijah and Hilmy.

Katijah looked at Hilmy with questioning eyes. Hilmy nodded in agreement, then Katijah too nodded.

They waited.

Translated by Haica Abdullah



Arena Wati

ARENA WATI (1925-), novelist and Malaysia's fifth *Sasterawan Negara*. He was born on 30 July 1925 in Kalumpang, Jeneponto, Macassar, Indonesia. His original name is Muhammad bin Abdul Biang @ Andi Muhammad Dahlan bin Andi Buyung. Arena Wati received his basic education at Voor Volksschool between 1932 and 1937 in Kalumpang, Macassar, where he completed his Standard Six. Between 1940 and 1941, he continued his schooling at the Hollandische Inlandsche School (HIS), a Dutch school for the children of the natives of Macassar, but did not finish his schooling because of the outbreak of the Second World War. During the Japanese Occupation of Indonesia (1942), he fled Macassar and set sail for various islands of Indonesia. In the same year, he signed on as a sailor and worked as a clerk on the *Sekuner Sorga Bone*.

In 1943, when he was 17, he was made the unofficial captain of the ship. Between 1947 and 1948, he sailed for Bangkok, Rangoon, Singapore, Penang, Sumatra and Java. In 1950, he returned to Macassar to continue his studies at the *Sekolah Menengah Islam*. Following this, he enrolled at *Sekolah Menengah Pertama* (1952) and *Sekolah Menengah Atas* (1953). After completing his schooling, he served in the *Angkatan Darat Terroterium VII* and was appointed *Penolong Ketua Perancang Harian* in 1954.

In October 1954, Arena Wati obtained a position at the

Royal Press, Singapore, on the editorial board of the magazines *Hiburan*, *Hiburan Filem* and *Kisah*. It saw the beginning of his involvement in the world of writing, specifically literary writing. In the year that followed, he found employment as a part-time editor of the magazines, *Mutiara*, *Fashion*, *Belia* and *Dunia*. Following this, he was engaged by Penerbit Melayu Limited in Johor Bahru, as assistant manager (1957-1961). Subsequently, he was appointed chief advisor of Percetakan Light, Brunei (1961-1962). Between 1962 and 1974, he worked as editor at Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, Kuala Lumpur. In 1974, he was employed as research officer at the Sabah Foundation, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. In 1977, he was made Head of the Department of Planning and Research, Sabah Foundation.

Between 1983 and 1992, Arena Wati was engaged as guest writer at several academic institutions in various parts of the world: at the University of Cornell, USA (August 1983-January 1984); the University of Leiden, Holland (February-June 1984); the University of Kyoto and University of Waseda, Japan (July 1984 - January 1985); Faculty of Developmental Sciences, National University of Malaysia (April 1988); Institute of Malay Language, Literature and Culture of the same university (May 1988 - 1991); and lastly, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur (1990-1992).

Arena Wati's involvement in the world of writing began in the early 1950's when he was just 22. In his early years as a writer, he tried his hand at short story writing. His first short story, "Impian dan Kenyataan", appeared in the newspaper *Pedoman Rakyat* in 1952. This was later followed by other short stories which were published in various magazines and newspapers both in Singapore and Malaysia. In the 27 years he was involved in this line of work, he had successfully published more than 85 short stories and five collections of his own short stories. Central to his work are issues relating to man and the sea, the environment, man and the writer himself. As regards the philosophy that is reflected in his short stories, his works which were publish-

ed in the sixties and seventies were a great influence on modern Malay short stories from then until now.

A prolific litterateur, Arena Wati is evidently not only known as a short story writer but also as a novelist. The micro and macro universe of his novels is not restricted to the world around him, but also encompasses the boundaries of the Malay Archipelago in particular, Asia (such as Japan), and extend to the European and American continents. The scope of the issues related to living and human life that are reflected in Arena Wati's novels likewise, also covers a wide range of universal values: politics, economy, the arts, beliefs, solidarity and knowledge in its broad sense.

Through his active participation in the world of creative writing, Arena Wati has won various prizes and awards. His novel *Lingkaran* (originally *Tumbangnya Pokok Tak Bertangit*) won the consolation prize in the 1962 Novel Writing Competition organized by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. This particular work was later translated by Hawa Abdullah as *Wheels within Wheels* (1992). His novel *Sandera* (1971) won the third prize in a writing competition held in conjunction with the 10th anniversary of Independence. His short stories too won him prizes.

"Wisata" won the Literary Prize 1971 followed by "Bukan Satu Jalan Ke Mekah" and "Alun Menggulung Perlahan" (1972). In addition, Arena Wati was conferred the S.E.A. Write Awards in 1985. In 1987, Arena Wati became the fifth writer to be awarded Malaysia's National Literary Award.

Translated by Nor Azizah Abu Bakar

LIST OF WORKS

Novels

1. *Kisah 3 Pelayaran*. Singapore: HARMY Press, 1959.

2. *Jalan Malam ke Ibu Kota*. Brunei: Pustaka Cahaya, 1961.
3. *Gelora*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1963.
4. *Lingkar*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1965.
5. *Gandaria*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1969.
6. *Sandera*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1971.
7. *Eno*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1980.
8. *Rontok*. Kuala Lumpur: Teks Publishing Sdn. Bhd., 1980.
9. *Royan*. Kuala Lumpur: Teks Publishing Sdn. Bhd., 1980.
10. *Bunga dari Kuburan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987.
11. *Kuntum Tulip Biru*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987.
12. *Sakura Mengorak Kelopak*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987.

Collections of Short Stories

1. *Tingkah Manusia*. Singapore: HARMY Press, 1960.
2. *Burung Badai*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1967.
3. *Johor Baru*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1967.
4. *Bara Batu*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1984.

Literary Research

1. *Bunga Rampai Dongeng Melayu*. (co-editor Ehsan

- Kastawi), Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1954.
2. *Perkembangan Kesusasteraan Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1964.
 3. *Rampai-Rampai Melayu Lama* (ed.). Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1964.
 4. *Asas Pengetahuan Puisi*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1965.
 5. *Bentuk Sastera*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1965.
 6. *Cerpen Zaman Jepun: Satu Kajian*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1968.

General Reading

1. *Sejarah Tanah Melayu dan Sekitarnya* (jointly with Wan Shamsuddin). Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1964.
2. *Harith Fadhillah*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1967.
3. *Salsilah Melayu dan Bugis*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1973.
4. *Dusun: Satu Tinjauan dalam Konteks Kepercayaan, Kultus dan Hukum Adat di Sabah*. Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Sabah, 1978.

Literature: The Spokesperson of an Enlightened Heart

TO discuss literature is to discuss civilization in the life of man. There are three main factors which need to be considered, namely:

- (a) Knowledge - to understand nature's secrets
- (b) Philosophy - to seek for truth
- (c) Religion - to acquire certainty

To continue and control the development of this civilization, we need two types of strength, namely:

- (a) Rules - to determine justice
- (b) Power - to implement justice

Thus, man's civilization is often analyzed based on whether the three main factors are in harmony with one another. It is also evaluated to see whether they function perfectly; one must also see whether there are discrepancies in determining and implementing justice in that civilization.

Nevertheless, on this earth, what often happens is that all these factors are in disharmony with one another. This

surely prevents not only a further development of that civilization, but also encourages a regression.

It is in this context that there exists a minority, a tiny minority, who are provoked by the call of loyalty, who yearn for justice, who, from the deeper recesses of their own being, hear the cry and anguish of the enlightened hearts of others.

This tiny minority, these are the literary writers who fulfill that call of loyalty through their creative works.

The aspiration of writers breathe, cry out and struggle to achieve fruition within the context of an evolving civilization and the vortex of life itself. One must then fathom these latent ideas embedded in the writer's consciousness when one tries to decipher the ideas and hopes of these writers.

Under these conditions, under certain conditions, on a certain plane and during a certain time; it is that literature which does not have any strength but for that voice from an enlightened heart; that literature, which does not have my instrument except for voice, paper and ink; that literature, which seemingly appears to be weak, is confronted by man-made rules and regulations; that literature is the confrontation of the weak and the powerful. Thus under certain conditions, at certain times, literature becomes muted, forced as it were, to silence its mouth. Hopefully, such phenomenon will not happen in this region.

People sometimes forget that when writers become silent, this does not necessarily mean the death of literary works. People forget that when a writer outwardly becomes silent, inwardly he is talking to himself, which means that within his own inner self he is nurturing his thoughts, encouraging and ensuring its growth and development in the deeper recesses of his inner self. An analogy can be found in the *terbul* fish which lays its eggs in the deepest part of the river, to later reappear at the water's surface with its horde of small fishes.

This happens when there is pressure on literature.

Still, whatever pressures there are, literature will never be killed: this is because literature is not a body which can be annihilated. Literature is but the soul of an idea. Certainly man's body can be imprisoned and destroyed, for it is but a mass that grows and is nurtured by food. But man's thought cannot be manacled: unseen, undetected, grows and develops, for man's thought and hopes are nourished by the strength of his enlightened heart and further developed by the glory of truth.

Literature will not worship or enslave itself to anything; instead it will build a bridge of humanity aimed at awakening mankind to the truth of its existence, to realize its ownself as a being to its Creator.

The world of literature has never been and will never be freed from the context of the natural world. It is most interesting to see the gist of an Arab proverb which roughly means:

The Universe and time are like ever pregnant mothers,
each second giving birth to thousands of events.

Literature's foetus can be considered from these three branches: space - time - and movement. Literature's body is made living by the soul of ideas.

Literary works form but an enlightened world of a race. This enlightenment/intelligence reigns supreme in the innermost hearts of that race. From the throne of this innermost depth, comes that intelligence and enlightenment which loudly proclaims the dignity of a person.

The intelligence/enlightenment of a race can never be annihilated by another race and it can never be destroyed, by whatever power.

There was a time when the politics of the Malay world once collapsed, its nation was once colonized, but its literature, which encapsulates that intelligence/wisdom was never nullified.

Allow me to quote and highlight part of our race's

intelligence and enlightenment, one that has been deeply embedded in our own selves.

Firstly: For a Malay person, when his dignity is threatened, he will react spontaneously, concomitant with this saying:

"Membujur lalu, melintang patah."

[Follow the tide, and succeed;
go against the tide, and be defeated]

Secondly: Before a Malay does anything, he is guided by this wise, cautionary statement:

"Salah taja, sesat kelarai."

[A wrong move will yield but many complications]

The Malay Annals clearly illustrate what happens when one ignores the above saying: the leadership of the Malaccan Sultanate became so disorganized, its leaders in such disarray that it was easily defeated by the Portuguese.

Thirdly: When the Malay race holds on to a conviction, it will not change its minds, as clearly illustrated by this old poem from Macassar which translated means:

One voice, one eternal promise
the captain of my ship
to sail
the ocean within my breast.

It is this intelligence/enlightenment of our race which needs to be further developed. From that intelligence/enlightenment, our place stands erect and from there we will build a bridge to the innermost hearts of universal mankind to be our very own contribution towards the building of a loving, caring society amongst mankind.

What is our duty; we, who are fated to be a generation that now rears its head after having been submissive for so long, like the [rotting] branch that lays in water and is now taken out to dry? Is it fated that in our lives, we have freed our nation which was once colonized? The answer is crystal clear: It is the nurturing of our self-dignity and

pride, the unification of our race in the wider context of the Malay world which was deliberately destroyed by that race which once colonized us.

Co-operation and mutual interdependence from amongst the nations of this Malay world are very crucial and necessary to determine a concept and arrange a strategy to ensure the rise of our civilization.

In this case, literature fulfills a certain function. Without this provocative anger, without the despair of our hearts, we can achieve nothing. Catalytic chimes from literature's lute will awaken a whole nation engrossed by its indifferent attitudes and enthralled by daydreams.

A question surely arises: What sort of literature, what sort of civilization can be used to increase one's worth, one's dignity and to develop the intelligence of one's own race?

Firstly: We will completely ignore literature that is perpetuated and encouraged by sheer lust. Simultaneously we will return to the original meaning, namely, that reading [... and understanding ...] is but the highest form of activity in man's existence.

Secondly: We will promote and develop literature that perpetuates physical and spiritual peace, that reverberates with man's pure love as a means of highlighting the pure, sacred path of man as God's vicegerent on this earth; literature that serves our confidence in the truth, that remains undaunted and eternally harmonious.

Such is God's Almighty promise to man as he is about to cease being an individual. As the Quran says:

"To the righteous soul will be said, O thou soul, in complete rest and satisfaction! Come back thou to thy Lord, well pleased thyself and well-pleasing unto Him. Enter thou then, among my devotees. Yea, enter thou My Heaven." (*Surah Al-Fajr*, lines 27-30, in *The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Gahd Ibn Abdul Aziz Al-Samed*, p. 1953).

Literature that sparks a longing for truth, literature

that is strong and can ensure peace for mankind, this is what we need, one which is crucial for man's dignity, man as God's - vicegerent, as the builders of civilization on this earth.

Your Royal Highness,

With this short speech, I thank you and I accept the *Anugerah Sastera Award*.

This award is not meaningful for me alone, for surely this award is an acknowledgement and an honour from our nation to the world of literature in general and to all Malaysian writers in particular. Appreciating a deed is but a benevolence from a nation which can afford to build, sustain and can appreciate civilization.

I thank you, Your Royal Highness.

Translated by Solchah Ishak

A Letter from the Mountain

DAMN the rain!
He stopped writing. He raised his pen and rubbed it against his nose. His attention became more and more drawn to the sound of the rain and wind and the gush of water from the ravine. He continued to write:

- Wait!

The monosyllable came to an abrupt halt and he stopped to ponder briefly, trying to establish the affinity between the rain and the wind and himself. At the same time, he thought again of the lengthy piece of news he had heard on the radio. He continued:

- Has anyone ever taught the rain? No, never. Let the rain pour and gush. Who cares? The rain has never been and will never be taught anything. And it has never known and will never know the consequences of the part it plays.

- Why should it care? The rain has never and will never find out that it has its source in the seas and the lakes; that it ascends the heavens and condenses into fluffs of cloud. And so, what possible kindness can be expected from that which does not know its own source? Sure, it does contribute. But kindness? Why be surprised by the insolence of

that which does not know its own source?

- You know it too, don't you? Before man was created, Adam included, the lessons for man to learn had already been prepared. But what gratitude has man shown for the lessons he has learnt?

- When a person, to whom a lot has been taught and to whom too much knowledge has been imparted, perpetrates an evil deed, it is worse than if the evil deed were done by an idiot. Has an idiot ever swindled a bank of millions and millions of dollars? Have you ever read about it in the papers? If you haven't, thank God for it, because then your mind is at peace.

- Why, I wonder. The serenity of the mountains and the forest, and the fact of being remote from the city, gives me an exquisite sense of serenity. He stopped writing again and for a long while was lost in thought. The rain, the wind and the gushing water from the ravine had set him thinking about Ulung. Two days, he had promised. But by tonight Ulung would have been gone three nights. Why hasn't Ulung returned? Is it the floods? What if he does not return? The supplies will only last another day.

A week ago, Ulung had accompanied him from Kampung Ulu to the foot of the mountain and there he had built him a hut. For two days he and Ulung had looked for, examined and selected a variety of plants. It was these varied samples of flora that Ulung had taken to the place down below to be despatched, along with the information attached, to the university laboratory where he worked, on the outskirts of the city.

Upon Ulung's departure, he had focussed his research on the interaction between the fauna and its environment. He also studied the interaction of the Aborigines in the area with their surrounding. And since the afternoon, the drizzle that had dragged on for twenty-four hours in the mountain had turned into a heavy downpour accompanied by the wind. The heavy rain and the strong wind had forced him to pitch tent, which since then had been his work place,

and also to move his personal effects and equipments up to the hut. The lightning and its accompanying thunder jolted him out of his reverie. The radio screeched for several minutes protesting against the interruption. And again he continued writing:

- It this what missing someone is all about? Since our separation, I have always thought of you. But that surely is not what it's all about. Because, I have never had any real feelings for you apart from the fondness I feel, fondness and certainly not love. Missing someone comes from loving the person. But then, surely there is nothing wrong in my loving you the way I love the others, the Aborigines in the area, for instance? Love is not necessarily between people of the opposite sexes, surely?

- Well, feelings of sympathy may lead to love. I love the Aborigines, not love of the sexual kind but a love that grows out of a feeling of sympathy for their plight. Perhaps you are not aware of their adverse circumstances. At the time when you were researching the Aborigines and their world, when you spent three years mingling with them, they still had land reserved for them. But now? Yes, you know it, this country is theirs, but in the present context, claims to landownership must be backed by a piece of paper called 'grant' and also records in the land office supporting this claim. And this they do not have. So what then? Their land has been gazetted as wild life reserve. It is a fact that man, at times, is fond of animals and to prove this, he sets aside land, mountains and extensive tracts of forests for them at the expense of human right: land and the environment.

- I will never willingly say that this attitude of putting animals before man is induced by some latent value in man. What is this value? A too close similarity between man and beast and a clear distinction between man and humanity?

- Because love is the union of two fond hearts and this union will only be if the hearts are closely united, so please ask your heart. Because love is likened to a flame and the

flame comes from a source, a source known as ambers.

Marina! I call out your name!!! Ask you innermost self. If the fire acts as a bond between the ambers and the flame, if love is the union of two fond hearts, then is it you or I, or who are we? The flame embodies life; am I the ambers and you the flame, or are you the ambers and I the flame? We have discussed this before. Do you still remember?

- We were then sitting on a bench at the Tate Gallery in London. We were studying John Everest Millais's painting, entitled *Ophelia*, Polonius's daughter in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. At the time, your perception and mine were so different. You were sad and cried just thinking about the poor princess who became mad and consigned herself to a watery grave on account of *Hamlet*. But I, I was unmoved, at the time, merely fascinated by man's creative ability to point, to portray Ophelia lying supine and lost, under the shade of a big, old tree with trailing white blossoms.

- At another time, we were at cross purposes again. We were then at the Clark Institute in Massachusetts, sitting before Adolphe William Bouguereau's painting, *Nymphs and Satyr*. You were fascinated by the artistic technique employed in the painting, but I, yes, because I was not refined, I was busy considering the fact that which is called woman, no matter how refined, on occasion, compete with three others of her own kind for one member of the male species.

- Perhaps it was because of this that our hearts have become increasingly distanced. But do you still remember? We were at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, busy scrutinising Joseph M.W. Turner's painting, *The Slave Ship*. We were in total agreement on how the punishment accorded by the wrathful sea and the storm on the ship that was carrying slaves from Africa was too harsh. How cold the frozen sea must have been in December, and you were lamenting the death at sea. Why did we allow the misfortune of others to grieve us? Why did we not sympathise

with ourselves, now separated by both distance and time?

- Marina! Again I call out your name!!! Can you please forgive me for ridiculing you, when you, claiming that it was the women who triggered off the French Revolution, declared yourself very proud to be a woman? We were then at the Louvre Museum in Paris, admiring Eugene Delacroix's painting, *Liberty Leading the People*. Yes, it was as though you were excitedly crying out, this was the crucial action, the march to Versailles by the crowd of market place and farm women, the women who later forced Louise XVI to abdicate. But I had maintained that the march from Paris to Versailles was not the deciding factor. It was only a fragment of the works of Voltaire-Rousseau and Montesque. The momentum was set not merely between Paris and Versailles but also further down south in Marseilles.

- I was confident you forgave my arrogance in contradicting your views and ridiculing you, because, on the very same day and at the very same city, we declared our peace after succeeding to fathom Thomas Couture's painting, *Romans of the Decadence*. Did we not share the same opinion that it was man's licentious nature that was the bane of civilization, the triumph of flesh over mind.

- I was confident about that and because of it I tried to hustle you into comporting yourself like a matured woman and dressing like a lady. And I had thought you agreed because you were so enchanted with Thomas Gainsborough's painting, *Mrs. Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, which we studied at the National Gallery of Arts in Washington D.C. Do you remember? And I had imagined you were her, sitting with your back leaning against an old maple tree. But you had said that you preferred to be painted standing among the trellises of your family vineyard in Berkeley, California. Remember how our eyes duelled and we exchanged smiles. Didn't your heart miss a beat then?

- How wonderful it is to look back at the bitter-sweet experiences we shared. What bliss to recall our billing and

cooing. But, where are you now? With your family, at a lecture, or shopping at the Mall? From this letter you will know where I am, on the slope of a ravine, deep in the jungle, at the foot of a mountain. And you know, in the throes of missing you, I fantasise that you are like the girl in Jean-Honore Fragonard's painting, *The Swing*, that we once scrutinised at the Wallace Collection Gallery in London. In my fantasy, you are holding on to the rope of the swing that is suspended high from a tree. Below is a carpet of grass and weeds interspersed with wild jungle blooms.

- Marina! In my fantasy you are that, effervescent and squealing out of exhilaration and panic because to your side, at the base of the giant tree where your swing hangs, the valley, with its slopes of granite, yawns. I imagine you would be nervous about or apprehensive of the strength of the rope that holds your swing, but I? I am afraid I would lose you. And in my fantasy, in the forest deep, there is only you and I. But in the reality of the painting, two men are waiting for you and two children watching you. Ah, two children. Yes, in the painting, that is. But in my fantasy, you are alone, without company, a virgin, without children.

He was startled out of his daydream by the news on the radio. He stopped writing and idly bit his pen. The voice of the broadcaster rose above the howling wind. He carefully cupped his hand around his ear to catch the words and make out the gist of it. It was much later that he resumed writing.

- A short while ago I heard the news on the radio. For three consecutive days there was commotion in the capital city. All because of a crazy fool. Strange, isn't it? A crazy fool was given the chance to have news about him broadcast. Whatever for? If the air time had been filled with commercials, our country's productivity would have increased. Or had the air time instead been filled with lively songs, it would have benefitted me more because it would have established a link between my isolated existence and the happy souls in the city. But then, the unusual never fails to

fascinate city folks. You know that too, don't you? It's their attitude, these folks. They are so easily excited by the ballyhoo of the medicine seller in the street. Yet their heart are impervious to the sermons of the preacher. Now, here's the news:

- On the first day, the crazy fool carried a burning torch around the city starting from eleven in the morning. Across his chest hung a banner with the message "I'm looking for a teacher". Looking at him, the people laughed and jeered, because he was a crazy fool.

- On the second day he reappeared with a bigger torch, and his banner read, "I'm looking for a leader". He began to draw the crowd's interest. Because, isn't it true that a leader is more expensive than a teacher? And it is typical of city folks to go for things expensive. The city folks crowded around him and followed him wherever he went. There is no need to be surprised as it is the habit of city folks to be too eager to become - blind followers.

- On the third day, the crazy fool reappeared, and this time, earlier than before, carrying a bigger torch whose flame, it was feared, would start a fire. His banner this time read, "I'm looking for a judge!" The people crowded around in wonder and followed him wherever he went, because they wanted to find out what the judge was for? Why was his torch bigger that day and why did he appear earlier that he did on the first day? What sort of judge was he looking for and what was he going to judge? Yes, what was he going to judge? This question was passed on from one person to the other and soon spread to the entire city and its outskirts, which is overcrowded with slum dwellers. To be the judge of what?

- Because the flame of his torch was big and something had to be done to prevent any possible outbreak of fire, because his followers had multiplied and were choking up the streets and this was aggravated by the honking of horns by angry motorists who felt that they were wasting their time and petrol, the police, with great discretion and with

the power vested in them, extinguished the torch and apprehended the fool on the charge of obstructing traffic. This wise move received commendations and afterwards nobody gave so much as a thought to the crazy fool who had been committed to a dark cell.

- But, typical of city folks and typical of their desire born of their restless souls, they, who had been his willing supporters, dispersed without getting any answers to their questions. As a consequence, what had not been resolved in their hearts and minds resurfaced and grew into a crop of rumours. A madman in search of a teacher. A madman in search of a leader. A madman in search of a judge.

- What sort and what calibre of a teacher was he looking for? This question resounded in the ears of many. The present teacher seemed good enough. His teachings have given rise to a new breed of readers who read mad literature. The screams could be heard from the squatter huts right up to the luxurious bungalows.

- What sort of a leader and of what calibre did the mad fool want? People asked. And meanwhile, others were shouting from the residential to the industrial areas, "We are fortunate enough to be an independent nation, to have a leader who has won the confidence of the rest of the world, and because of him we have managed to increase our credit facilities so that should we die today, we would have bequeathed to our descendents debts amounting to hundreds of billion of dollars. Isn't it the trend now to be proud of one's credit worthiness?"

- What sort of a judge and of what calibre was the crazy fool looking for? Rumours spread from office to office, from the schoolroom to the lecture hall. "We are a fortunate lot, a nation entrenched by a Constitution and a sound judiciary system, whose judges have eyes that are blood-shot from reading the jury's references and findings and ears that burn from having to listen to the arguments of the defence counsels in their struggle to uphold justice." And a voice grumbled quietly, its complaint being passed on from

one foodstall to another, "If you're caught disposing of rubbish the wrong way, you're liable to a \$500 fine or a jail term. Admittedly, for the sake of cleanliness and health, this certainly makes sense. But a 1.6 million dollar cheating case and the sentence is two days jail? Does that make sense?"

- Marina! How is it that a madman can have such an impact? And why ...

He stopped writing at the sound of a voice calling out to him, above the din of the wind and rain. He put down his pen and cupped his ear.

"Big flood!" Clearly it was Ulung's voice and he felt a surge of relief. Ulung's arrival made the threat of the flood insignificant.

He jumped down from the hut and was alarmed to find himself immersed waist-high in water. The pillars of the hut were still strong enough to hold on to.

"Hold tight, and wait there, I'll get a rope," shouted Ulung.

When dawn approached they sheltered under the tent they had set up at the base of a huge tree on the hill.

"Did you manage to save everything?" he asked Ulung in a voice that shivered with cold.

"Our equipment, clothes and radio!" answered Ulung proudly. "Our books, papers and foodstuff too."

In the faint glow of the neon torchlight powered by six batteries, he put his hand in his pocket and produced a letter, roughly folded, which he had written earlier. His heart sank at the sight of the ink which had spread on the wet paper, the writing no longer legible. He sighed, "Can Marina read this?"

"Who's Marina?" asked Ulung with keen interest because he knew that a name like that belongs to a woman, and though he was getting on in age, he was still a bachelor.

"A friend!"

"Where is she?"

"In America."

"Huh, that's far," said Ulung regretfully. His interest started to wane. He had thought that Marina lived in the city and that the letter would have to be taken to the village and afterwards to the post office in the city. "What sort of letter?"

"One that relates the late afternoon news on the radio!"

"The one about the madman who was looking for a teacher?"

"That's right."

"False news. From an illegally operated radio station. Our government's radio and tv station has already clarified everything."

"How do you know it's false? How do you know that the government's radio and tv station has explained everything?"

"Just now, at Kampung Ulu down below. We Aborigines, do not pay any attention anymore to news from illegally operated radio stations such as that."

Without saying a word, he crumpled the letter, tore it to pieces, and flung it as far away as he could. He knew how disappointed Marina would be to receive a letter that contains false news. So he asked Ulung to bring the biscuit tin to lie on its side so that it could double as a writing table. He will write Marina another letter, a letter filled with words of love and spiced with descriptions of the scenic beauty of his country.

"Tomorrow morning, you shall go to the village and despatch this letter to the post office in the city," he said earnestly.

Ulung laughed, "I'll be lucky to reach the village after a week. We are cut off by the floods. But the food supply I brought back with me is more than sufficient, and before sunrise I will go out deer hunting."

The letter to Marina would have to wait but its content

would be embellished with stories about the deer. 'Am I falling in love?'

He turned the question over and over in his mind. But then, he had already written a very long letter, even without that bit about the madman. He then tried to fathom Marina's innermost feeling:

- Marina! Do you still remember? How our hearts raced when we got up one morning and sat by the window of the farm house in the countryside of Vermont where we stayed? Before us was a wide uninterrupted view of hills and trees whose leaves were a combination of red and gold. It was in the fall. And we spent half a day declaiming Walt Whitman's poems from his anthology, *Leaves of Grass*. We recited over and over "A Song of Joys":

- O the joy of increase, growth,
recuperation,

- The joy of soothing and
pacifying, the joy of concord
and harmony.

- O to go back to the place
Where I was born,

- To hear the birds sing once more

- Why, I wonder. Why did we choose lines of love? And in the full celebration of fall? You longed for your family vineyards in Berkeley. And I? I deeply missed the sun-kissed palms swaying in the breeze. So we laughed. Our longing for each other, if fulfilled, will become more poignant because you're in California and I, in the valley of the Main Range. And so? So we return to our daydream and we each shrug our shoulders. We leave it to Fate?

- Marina! Was it love that led us to want to delight in the severity of winter? In a freezing winter that was killing, we beat back to Vermont. For the sake of experience, you had said. We spent five days in that snow-covered country. Why? Because we yearned to taste the sugary sap of the old maple tree, and because we wanted to find out how difficult the extraction process was? For five days we tapped

the tree amidst the roaring snowstorm. Now I realise that to get and to savour what is sweet in life is not as simple as we had imagined. We had to be sunk in snow before we could get the syrup from the old maple. But how, I wonder. How is it something old like the maple tree could produce something sweet? And how about us? Will we, in old age, be able to produce something sweet? Or will we be cast aside like some useless, old rag?

The arrival of Ulung with steaming hot coffee interrupted his thoughts and made him pensive for a long while. So he concluded his letter.

Have I the right, Marina, to expect an answer from you, not through the mail but by your coming here in person? Your physical presence, Marina. Not a detached presence. Physical presence, Marina. And not one that is meaningless. Because every presence must be proven by the traces it leaves behind. You know, don't you? Billions and trillions of things have existed but their existence had been terminated without their leaving behind any trace of their presence. Fossils are a manifestation of history - they have no meaning. And every existence needs to embody eternal meaning. But, how many that exists is eternal? Only one, a solitary one, embodying the very meaning of love.

He stopped writing and said tersely to Ulung:

"When you get back from your deer hunting, you shall build a raft!"

"What for?"

"For you to get to Kampung Ulu down below. Ask them to despatch this letter to the post office in the city."

Ulung did as he was told. But what he did not know was that, in the throes of love, man is capable of doing the unusual.

Translated by Nor Azizah Abu Bakar



Muhammad Haji Salleh

MUHAMMAD HAJI SALLEH (1942-). Poet and Malaysia's sixth *Sasterawan Negara*. He was born on 26 March 1942 in Taiping, Perak. He became known in the country only towards the late 1960s although his involvement in the world of writing had started much earlier. Muhammad Haji Salleh has lived much of his life abroad and thus most of his poems are in English. Upon his return to Malaysia, his poems began to attract the attention of the critics.

Muhammad began writing poetry when he was a student at the Malayan Teachers' College, Brinsford, in 1963. As his educational background was centred around Malay and English language and literature, he writes in both languages. The poems he wrote in English were influenced by T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden whom he admired at that time.

Muhammad Haji Salleh received his early education at the Bukit Mertajam High School and Malay College Kuala Kangsar. Subsequently, he pursued further studies at the Malayan Teachers' College, Brinsford Lodge, England. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Malaya (Singapore), Masters of Arts from the University of Malaya in 1970 and a Ph.D from the University of Michigan, USA in 1973. In 1977, he was Visiting Professor under the Fulbright-Hays programme and taught at the North Carolina State University, Raleigh, USA. Muhammad Haji Salleh

is now a lecturer at the Department of Malay Letters and was at one time the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, National University of Malaysia as well as Head of Institute of Malay Language and Literature. In 1978, he was appointed Professor of Literature.

Muhammad Haji Salleh's outstanding talent in the world of modern Malay poetry made an impact on the country's literary fraternity not only when he caught the attention of the Panel for the Literary Prize but also when he won the Asean Literary Award in Bangkok. From 1971 onwards, a number of his poems won various prizes and in 1977, Muhammad was awarded the Asean Literary Award for his anthology of poems *Perjalanan Si Tenggang II*.

For Muhammad, poetry is a literary form that is imbued with the music of language and the wisdom of the poet and his tradition. A poem or verse is a musical composition of language which enhances its beauty and is wonderful to recite as well as to listen to. He agrees with the American poet, Robert Frost, who defines poetry as something which when we read, makes us even wiser. Poets help make us aware of our problems, and in fact, help identify our main problems to enable us to solve them.

It is very clear that the theme of Muhammad's poems in general reflects a common problem, the problem of the individual who is faced with the paraphernalia of city life. Tall buildings, modern technology, the motorcar, neon lights are not his friends rather objects he is opposed to and makes moral judgement about (Malayness vs universal humanity). City life is decadent and provides an environment that his mind, his reasoning and beliefs reject. Thus his poems place greater emphasis on the mind rather than the heart. His attitude and way of thinking are mirrored in the pithiness of his poems as well as in his non-emotive diction.

He consciously uses words that are rarely employed by other poets. This results in the coining of new phrases and expressions to bring out meaning more succinctly. How-

ever, it is the employment of these new and original expressions that sometimes lend a certain foreign character to his poems; this perhaps is due to the influence of world literature which he had once studied and experienced.

Muhammad Haji Salleh admires Chairil, Subagio and at one time too, T.S. Eliot and Pablo Neruda. He admires the literatures of the West not only because of the variety they offer but also because in the West, literature has become part of human knowledge, philosophy, psychology and the like. What draws him more to it is the fact that literature in the West is full of experimentations which attempt to find a more complete and definite style of expression. These are among the Western elements that he carefully observes.

Muhammad has published six collections of his own poems besides a number of others which he jointly published with other poets. His collection titled *Sajak-Sajak Pendatang*, are not only poems written during his sojourn abroad, in fact they are a collection of poems that are robust and different from those penned by poets before and during his time. The Panel for the Literary Prize had selected his work, *Buku Perjalanan Si Tenggang II* as his best collection of poems for 1975. This collection of poems are said to clearly demonstrate not only the poet's style and personality but also his concept of poetry which is achieved by the author purposively avoiding the use of romantic expressions and employing words that are precise, functional and potent.

As a poet who writes both in Malay and English, Muhammad's powerful command of the latter enables him to translate Malay poems into English. He is an important translator of literary works who has translated many Malay poems into English. In point of fact, he was the President of the Malaysian Translators' Association between 1978 and 1982. And because of his involvement in creative writing and his knowledge of literary research, he at one time was a member of the editorial board of the journal *Tenggara*, a member of the Board of Control, Dewan Bahasa dan Pusta-

ka, and the Panel for the National Literary Award.

Muhammad Haji Salleh as a literary figure and an academic, has played an important role in the world of Malay literature. In many of the writers' meetings he attended and the papers he presented, Muhammad put a lot of emphasis on theories of literature as far as their relation to Malay literature applies; as an academic, the emphasis on aspects of literary theories becomes his main focus and interest. In addition, his poems are always related to intellectualism, ideas and deliberations. Muhammad sees life through the intellectual eyes of a seeker and thinker. As a poet who loves to experiment and look for new forms that are more resilient, Muhammad of late, writes a lot of poems based on *Sejarah Melayu* (The Malay Annals). These poems are available in his books *Sajak-Sajak dari Sejarah Melayu* which were published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 1981.

Translated by Nor Azizah Abu Bakar

LIST OF WORKS

Books

1. *Sajak-Sajak Pendatang*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1973.
2. *Buku Perjalanan Si Tenggang II*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1975.
3. *Ini Juga Duniaku*. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn. Bhd., 1977.
4. *Tradition and Change in Contemporary Malay-Indonesian Poetry*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1977.
5. *Selections from Contemporary Malaysian Poetry* (ed.). Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1978.

6. *Time and Its People*. Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd., 1978.
7. *The Travel Journals of Si Tenggang II*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979.
8. *Pilihan Puisi Melayu-Indonesia* (ed.). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1980.
9. *Sajak-Sajak dari Sejarah Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1981.
10. *Dari Seberang Diri*. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1982.
11. *Pengalaman Puisi*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984.
12. *Cermin Diri: Esei-Esei Kesusasteraan*. Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1986.
13. *Kumpulan Kritikan Sastera: Timur dan Barat* (edited jointly with Amdun Husain). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987.
14. *An Anthology of Contemporary Malaysian Literature* (ed.). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1988.
15. *Kalau, Atau dan Maka*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1988.
16. *Unsur-Unsur Teori dalam Kesusasteraan Melayu dan Nusantara in Kertas Kadangkala 3*. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1988.
17. *Puitika Sastera Melayu: Satu Pertimbangan*. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1989.

Our People Must Sail the Seas of the World

FOR several centuries in its history, the peninsula and islands of the Malay Archipelago have crossed the straits and seas, narrow and wide, and in the end witnessed the booming waves of the world at large on its coast and harbours.

The diverse world, amazing as it was, touched, disturbed and tempted them and imprinted their influence on their language and way of thinking.

The cultures of this archipelago developed self-confidence and in turn made contributions towards the world outside its boundaries. Srivijaya, Majapahit, Malacca, Acheh became big powers and cultural centres. They had opened their doors and plucked the wisdom of their neighbours, and this wisdom also gave them a longer breath of life.

Throughout its history, the Malay Archipelago was conscious of the rise and fall of the currents of the wider world. Evidence of this may be read in and between the lines of our literary works. The author or editor of *Sejarah Melayu* (The Malay Annals) made use of tools of thought which were delicate, exact and respectful. Literary lan-

guage of the texts brings proof of relationship with Sanskrit, Tamil, Arabic, Persian, Chinese and Portuguese. New borrowed terminology helped to sketch the new universe.

What is exalted as hero by the race is not only a man who is loyal to his master but also a wise admiral, courageous and strong and versatile in the art of inter-State relations. At an early age, this Malay hero is described as a diligent child studying religion besides being very skilled at languages; a child who would live in a world not restricted by traditional boundaries.

After Hang Tuah had learnt to read the Quran for some times, his studies came to an end. Then he learnt grammar. When that was completed, he said to his father: "Father, I would like to learn from a pious Tamil teacher so that I will get to know his language." And Hang Mahmud said: "How right you are, my child." And so Hang Tuah studied under the Tamil teacher. It came to pass, some time after that his study of the Tamil language was completed successfully. Now Hang Tuah said to his father that he wished to study under the guidance of a Siamese teacher. After gaining knowledge of the Siamese language, Hang Tuah then studied from a Chinese teacher. Not long after, he completed his study of the Chinese language. Following this, from a Javanese teacher he became versed in the Javanese language. Thus it was, having mastered 12 languages. Hang Tuah returned home to be with his parents earning their living day after day.

He learned to read the Quran, a basic preparation for a good life on earth and the hereafter. Besides, the author of *Hikayat Hang Tuah* did not forget that he ought to undergo a professional preparation for his career on earth which tolerated the existence of various cultures and languages.

Hang Tuah, the Malay hero who has now become controversial, is described as a man who was at ease in his country as well as in Majapahit, Keling, China, and Rome. On that account, what is held in high esteem is not only

foreign languages and cultures but also the art of international relations. If we were to study carefully the lines of this *Hikayat*, we will come across two incidents where Hang Tuah "reproached" his Sultan. This hero is a dweller of the world at large.

At least two of our early great works are held together by experiences outside the tiny boundary of a person's self. Scores of other oral works such as *Hikayat Terang Pipit*, *Si Tanggung* and *Nakhoda Manis* give proof that the Malay race lived in a world which was more spacious and amidst various races. We had at one time stood erect among them and been respected as a great power and people with knowledge.

It is this vast variety of experiences and relationships that has helped the writer of that time to become a person who was better prepared to step into the foreign world which, more often than not, presented its own challenges. The authors of *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and hundreds of other works, because of global scope and wider experience, helped us reach deep into our basic selves, in which the meaning of the whole world is contained.

Ours is a long history. We did not begin from 1957; bones and drawings in caves prove that we date far back. Then we went through hundreds of years of change, discovering the Hindu religion and Buddhism, and becoming great at the time we embraced Islam. Colonialism belittled us, our culture and language. But now we begin to unravel ourselves, having become entangled by oppression and disagreement among ourselves. A writer must learn from all this.

If we do not learn from history, we are reminded that our race will be condemned to repeating it. The wisdom in historical events can be looked into to help us go through a future that is still to come, which can still be gained for Malaysia, for our literature. A future more diverse (in fact, more varied) than Malacca in the 15th Century or Malaysia

on the verge of the 20th Century – more boisterous, more violent, and more complex.

Do we as writers and Malaysians want to face it as people who know and recognise the world at large, brave enough to face all changes that will confront us no matter where we run?

As writers, we sail into the world's seas and settle on ports where our ships call at. As writers, we cannot avoid this truth or choose merely a fragment of it and claim that we have taken the whole thing. We ought to celebrate the variety of our period with the pride and sophistication shown by the authors of *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Hang Tuah*.

There is no other choice for us other than to prepare to enter all this. Observe the consequences experienced by other races who were not prepared for them. Envy and jealousy, uncontrolled emotion and the stunted technology of war and development have caused them to slip into the tide of time.

We too, once too often, were divided during the period the Portuguese and the English were preparing for colonisation. In the end, we were defeated by the Portuguese and the English who were armed with their knowledge of history, their deceptions and a new technology. The same thing happened to hundreds of cultures in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Carlos Fuentes, the contemporary Mexican writer, feels that the tragic consequences of the Maya race will be experienced once again if modern Mexico were to shut itself out and not be prepared with new knowledge.

This knowledge also exist in world literature and for the writer this knowledge is invariably more valuable because of its multi-faceted, varied quality. Forms of reality which Tagore, Iqbal, Soyinka, Senghor, Marquez and Borges attempted to test, too, were broader than the realism inspired by Aristotle. For this reason, we should learn from writers who are pressured by similar problems.

I have tried to suggest that the Malaysian people and

literature ought to partake of the wealth of the greater and better of man's mind and thoughts, from as many countries and cultures as possible. This wealth is our common right.

For several centuries, we naturally regarded the ocean of stories in the Indian languages as our stories, to be extracted and to be imbibed; stories from *A Thousand and One Nights* as tales for the nights and days of our live; the Islamic tales and romances full of moral examples as part of our great heritage. A Malay version of the stories of Java could be developed according to our tradition. In the years before World War Two, Za'ba related once again the stories from Shakespeare.

It is indeed a good extension of this task that Rabin-dranath Tagore, Naquib Mahfouz, Yukio Mishima, Lu Xun, Frankie Sionil Jose and various other writers have found their voices in Malay. However, there are still thousands of writers not yet touched by our eyes or our reading.

I wish to emphasise here that whatever steps we take into the future should begin from our own selves. To all writers who have ambitions of describing reality, the first steps must come from within themselves.

This is where they should return. Nevertheless, my own experience took a longer path and I returned after journeying far - at this point. I feel it is a move that is altogether not a loss. A writer ought to return to his culture before or after his departure.

Reality and tradition grant us something extraordinary not possessed by other cultures. The manner in which we see the world, life, the way we think and our perception, be it oral or written, are elements which possibly make our literature unique.

Garcia Marquez, the Nobel Prize winner from Latin America, gave an example of how a writer can borrow from his culture, in fact from a human being. He related how his grandmother often told stories about the real and the fantastic and how all these were mixed with narrative confidence. This form of story-telling came to be later known as

magic realism. To be sure, his grandmother borrowed from the tradition of story-telling of her culture and on that account, Marquez too benefited from the collected pool of his tradition.

Behind the thin layer of modern Malay literature, there is a mountain of gold in traditional literature that is strong, excellent and strangely wonderful. There is the tradition of the Tenuar and the Penan, Kadazan and Iban, Terengganu Malay and Melanau, Murut and Langkawi.

Even though these times are somewhat threatened by neon or laser rays, this mountain is omnipresent and for years has created and stated truths. From it, numerous types of poetry have grown, narrative forms, thousands of metaphors for the benefit of our experiences in the long run. Epics alongside concise *pantuns*, myths in contrast to comic sketches, heroes and heroines seeking a definition of values - all this created throughout hundreds, nay, thousands of years as notes to our journey and art.

That we do not take pride in our culture is a worrying matter. The source can possibly be traced to the manner of thinking of people who have been colonised, who have always been taught to evaluate their achievement as low and merely filled with fantasy, things imaginary. Nevertheless we too do not know the race we hold in high esteem. We are trapped between two worlds equally unfinished.

In Malaysia, we are fortunate to be able to return to our language. In several African countries and the Caribbean, the language of the colonial masters had to be perpetuated. Even so, a movement towards traditional roots like Negritude pioneered by Leopold Sedar Senghor and Aime Cesaire brought their literature back to Africa.

In Indonesia in the 1960s, poets returned to their districts in search of their roots. Ramadhan K.H. experimented with the *kinanti* Sunda form, Rendra chanted the torments of the little man and woman with echoes of the songs of Central Java. In the 1980s, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri shook the world of Indonesian literature with the

use of *mantera* in a most extraordinary manner. In Malaysia, we hear the echoes of tradition in the lines of Usman Awang, Moechtar Awang, and Siti Zainon Ismail. The return to traditional literary forms in an expression of self-identity.

We are grateful that the status of the writer has not declined much from that of the traditional poets. Writers are still respected today. But our future is still not clear. Much remains of the traditional tasks that are still not yet accomplished.

Current problems within society often slip by in works written too hastily. Doubts, difficulties of the mind, suppression of culture in a world already made international, the meaning of industry and modernisation in our lives, destruction of the earth, individuals wrapped up in sentiment and prejudice - these we have not yet really and truly discussed.

Our literature too needs to be more intellectual and relieved from the nostalgia and yearning for a lost world. We should be less preoccupied with being immersed in sad emotions or hatred.

Should we be able to carry out our proper tasks as writers, we will at the same time be helping to enlarge ourselves and our society, contributing a word or two to world literature which will also become a rightful and common possession. We hope that society and our critics will support writers who wish to travel the world in search of modes of expression and reality.

Last but not least, allow me to express my thanks to the panel of the *Anugerah Sastra* who have kindly read and appraised my works which are still in the midst of their long journey. God willing, I shall take the support shown by you all as sustenance for my writings henceforth.

Translated by Hawa Abdallah

SELECTED WORKS

no more the world

(for grandma jam)

no more the world
no longer important its voice
no longer necessary its complexity
your mind has denied all
with your old blood that has risen
at the end of your day

there's only the life of the body now,
that slowly ebbs from its banks.
calmness comes to peace
quietness to words.
feelings slide from the day.

ii

goodbye, my grandmother.

The poems in this selection were translated by the poet.

you are cared for by your goodness,
 looked on by your children and descendants
 who oversee your journey.
 the bamboo and the *cempaka*,
 the *bidaya* and *kenanga* flowers
 know of our gentleness,
 the fragrance of the flowers in your rightful air,
 the colour of the earth's body surrounds you,
 from where you lie you can see the hill,
 under it the mangoesteened villages,
 beside you your father and brother,
 from the mosque we'll always care for your soul.

for kasturi

you come in the season of mourning,
 the sad harvest has just been reaped
 from a decade of passion,
 but all farmers know
 that self-respect or respect of belief
 must be winnowed from time and patience.

you will know too
 in this noisy bazaar
 the owner of self-respect who will not sell
 is always alone,
 but for him sleep is always sound.

nothing is easy, my son,
 bur from among us
 there're some who choose pride.
 you will perhaps not believe that
 there is a price for all beliefs,
 in the quiet lanes
 you will see
 some friends auctioning them.

the time that you gave your friends
often returns to drown you in your own home,
but you will stil grow with its suffering
learn to be courageous
before the mob that hides its face.

welcome, my son,
I need you
in this season of floods,
that there may be another
who will fortify this house of beliefs,
dare to speak the soul's words,
and live with them.

I welcome you
as I welcome a new life.

distance

age bestows distance
and gives eyes to see it
to separate desire from value
to choose meaning from language
that which I see, I feel through time
that which I feel, I have collected from the beginning
balanced by dialogue
justified with proofs.

a heap of words

one day
as though fulfilling a loose promise
at an age tortured by sensitivity
i found a heap of words,
out of it i gathered

and built a world
 i sharpen its sound to my voice,
 its sadness to the hoarse,
 its laughter to the tragic.

this is its universe,
 painted by the semantic spread,
 facades of speech and the heart of word –
 all collected from the time's shallow rivers
 soaked in the poets' songs
 or stranded on history's dunes.
 language constructs a world
 arranging itself
 and giving hints of experience.
 lie the thrown-net fisherman
 i catch a spread of territory
 and a fish of many meanings.

this is no place for telling the truth

this is no place for telling the truth,
 do not speak the voice of belief,
 do not answer questions,
 what is required of you is praise and the pretty word.

this is not the place for the naked word
 if you entertain ambition
 practise hiding your kris behind your back
 to stab when eyes are turned away.
 make space for ceremonies,
 be diligent in fetching and taking your boss,
 arrange that you are always present at official receptions
 and often carry sweetmeats to your chief
 and don't forget, stroke his son's hair.
 before taking your leave ask him the price of his new car
 and how he polishes it.

in a little while
 you too will hold a high office,
 stringing titles behind your name,
 or better still also before it,
 you will be the boss
 and demand all these from your subordinates.

all along the way

all along the way i imitated the movement of the range
 all along the way the earth sharpens into pines,
 flowers grow between its silences,
 wild, fine, beyond human territory,
 sharpening nature's meaning.

all along the way clouds play with the rope of heaven
 stopping and moving
 like strings returning to their constituent cotton
 clouds rolling on the valley's pillows.

all along the way nature distances itself
 to deflate and inflate me
 through this silent and cold
 beauty at the end of the world.

rain

perhaps because the red hills are
 neighbours to the grey pot bellies
 of the clouds, they are beloved.
 in its season a whole sky falls for a whole morning,
 straight or slanting, streaming
 to the banks, channels,
 the *senduduk's* roots, elephant grass,
 and the remaining cement left on the road.
 a whole world coppies the hills' colours.

the water bullets shoot at the houses
 climbing windows and creeping to the door's creaks
 till all become the hill's hue.

finally the clouds flow through the village,
 arranged to the water's will.

teller of tales

this is a small, straight tale
 that has not been collected from history's fragments
 or picked from the backstage of events.

this fine universe
 like the mushroom grows
 from freedom and darkness of the soul,
 where a drop of rain becomes a world.

what may i add
 are mere brittle branches of anxiety
 shoots and blossoms of words
 this is the story's tree
 wrapped round with meaning.

shadow play i

on a leather leaf
 a whole world is gathered.
 arranged in its original state,
 forms, colours, types
 all sheltered by their borders.

in the leaf
 there's a mountain,
 on the mountain there's a *beringin*
 in the *beringin* there's a forest
 in the forest birds chirp.

in the heart of the forest roar silences
 quiet and clear is the voice of meditation
 on the edge of the forest in the din of the palace
 around the palace movements pour their colours.

in the leaf are hidden symbols
 in the symbols is analogy's shade.
 all lanes lead to knowledge,
 knowledge spreads its roots.

in the forest leaves are heaped high
 in the leaves a universe grows
 in the universe there's a forest
 in the forest is the leaf.

.the forest's last day

death comes at the end of the chain saw
 with thorns of shrieks that spear the air and red of the sun
 biting into the flesh of wood
 that is shocked by the pain and alien din.
 its world overturns familiarity, strange as fainting
 sap flowing, its essence denying the steel's
 base and supporting roots trembling,
 in its canopy birds still play
 its air made fragrant by the essence of the forest
 the sky is the witness with clear eyes
 fallen is the *cengal*
 fallen is the *meranti*
 fallen is the *merbau*
 fallen is the *pulai*
 fallen is the *seraya*
 fallen is the *nyatuh*
 fallen is the *resak*
 fallen is the *halban*
 fallen is the *nibung*
 fallen is the *rattan*

- family of trees aged by the centuries
- the beautiful and great lying in the shadow
- with a presence in the roots' fibres and shoots' sway
- heat rushes into the air tunnel, existence is scalded.

the wheel of nature turns slowly
 listening to the rhythm of the season and sun
 with a sense of presence in the roots and the sway of
 the shoots
 after the death shatter and scatter of roots
 heat rushes into the tunnel, searing existence

morning-purple flowers fall
 as red as cliffs, as white as clouds, as brown as
 trunks
 buds and fruits on heavy branches fall
 are dotted near the stem or full with the seasons,
 a universe of colours falls
 a hundred stripes of green painting the leaves'
 personalities
 the moon too falls, caught by the branches
 as light that sketches difference
 morning falls, the afternoon and the night

with the rustle tenderness drips from shoots
 the secret mist of nature evaporates thinly
 the frame of balance is broken, since trees become earth
 the quiet beauty filtered by light fades out,
 leaves are dumb, branches speechless, no song, no echo
 no deer, no baboon, no elephant herd
 no pulse of mousedeer's bleat, no question
 the full epic of the forest
 is ended by a convoy of lorries with tyres of concrete
 a gang of paid lumberjacks who wear pity in their eyes

and a bloated logger
 who stands on the red desiccated desert –
 the world of the future

among vegetables

i enter the market,
 gay as young wife,
 discovering villages and orchards,
 gardens and forests,
 shallow marshes, the sago valleys –
 all transported by the dawn gardener
 with all the fragrance and sap of earth.

the market is a leafy bush
 its leaves are the dew of life
 the mist is still – clutching to its veins,
 at the head of the junction aunt inai
 in her blouse, as black as noon,
 is queen over her cabbage subjects,
 round, shadowy green, white as coconut milk
 its leaves are brittle on the teeth of my memory.

grandma runduk tadau wears a head-band,
 her dress as old as herself,
 she smiles with her eyes,
 swallowing her sweet betel mix
 taken from the hill behind the hut
 she arranges the ferns
 as the careful carver
 she has few words,
 only the ferns sell themselves
 with their salad brittleness and colour.

the *kerdas'* skin is smooth on its sides,
 a *jering* is split and put out in the sun,

on a tall heap,
 and the *petai* as big as gamelan cymbals,
 is arranged on a thick green board,
 all these i mix into a salad in my memory's appetite,
 as my ancestors in the forest
 thirty thousand years ago.

and this is the ginger, softly yellow
 bent as a baby in the cold,
 its fine roots hoarding its mud,
 its pungent fragrance creeping,
 all along the market lane.

the sweet potato, copper red,
 gathered in its basket world, are surrendered
 to the morning sun, i make cakes from their tubers,
cucur badak with shrimps,
cucur keria with holes,
 vegetable in coconut soup, the kedah sweetmeat
 and i cook it, deep fried.

beside it is the purple yam
 fat in the marshes, under the skies and clouds,
 water refines its deep texture,
 clears it from its poison,
 light green, cut and bundled.

and all the shoots along the markets,
 tubers, the cashews, *mengkudu* are full bodied over
 the leaves,
 yams, if i go to heaven
 this would be my diet
 at a great banquet
 and i shall never be full.

and here sits a gentleman from sarawak
 with gold teeth and proud ears
 his face is calm and full of smile,

he sells the red *jerangau*,
as red as the centipede,
uprooted from his village's swamp
its roots are for diabetes
and antidote for alcohol.

that is nature's market
for nature is transported here.

politician

his voice teaches with the force of repetition,
its echoes and rhythm arrange his wishes.
he is his own audience
who knows the punch of his syllables
and the urge on his tongue.

words flow into a flood,
at time with no walls,
words are penetrated by sound
or planted in the bed of the self,
conscience is divorced from the verbal river,
guilt hidden by success.
now at the peak
he is celebrated by melodious sounds,
but entombed by his empty words.

i do not recognise him now
that old friend
who was in love with language
and the straight rhythm of his soul.

the slant of ways

age disguises certainty.
lanes become old

repeated by left-over memory
 races become familiar.

yet i still search for the difference
 from moments of middle-age,
 but that which arrives is the familiar face
 that which flickers only the line of difference
 or a slant of ways.

chapter fifteen

"It was reported to Sultan Mansur Syah that Tun Perpatih Putih has returned, bringing with him the Chinese princess. His Majesty was indeed very happy on hearing the news."

how beautiful is li po
 the chinese princess,
 small are her lips,
 her mouth full
 opening to similarly small teeth,
 her eyes almond, like the deer,
 but widened by the black kohl,
 as dark as her long hair.
 falling straight from her shoulders
 now knotted for marriage.

her dress is long
 made from sky blue silk,
 a wedding dress laced at the sleeves,
 embroidered with gold threads
 from neck to the hem.

quiet is the bowed princess
 walking accompanied
 by tun perpatih putih, stepping erect,
 the courteous cheng ho,
 and five hundred illustrious sons of mandarins.

his majesty allows
 the night to be gathered dim light,
 with fantasies of desire to climb to a night tide
 in the bridal chamber.

fragrance from the rose and the frangipani,
 the *tanjung*, *jasmīn* and the *kenanga*
 bouys the room into time's tide
 that roots them to no age.
 the flower scent
 thinly envelopes the walls, the bed
 and two bodies shaken
 by time at the end of the breath.

his consort, the fair bride,
 body wrapped in the northern silks
 is warm with her maidenhood,
 is calmed by the moon
 watching over the straits.
 he touches her ivory skin,
 slipping his fingers into her tapering ones,
 her shoulders and breast round and virgin.
 ageless is beauty
 it's the full bowl of life.

he embraces her heat and cold,
 inhaling the fragrance at the edge of the bed
 and both of them dissolve to become sea at this edge of
 the beach
 roaring, churned by the winds into the bay
 from afar to descend and climb mountains of water
 following time's flow,
 the storms and quiet skies,
 the *casuarina* and *ketapangs* by the beach,
 the waves rush into the bay
 and finally climbs the curve of land
 till the swiftest gale
 swing them to the heavens.

the sea becomes foam on the shore
and breaks on the air's breath.

sleep completes a marriage.

chapter sixteen

"As is told by the *sahibul hikayat*, after a lapse of some time Hang Kasturi was in love with a lady of the king, in the palace."

anum, i choose you from a hundred girls of the palace,
because you soften my voice,
make me long for the night,
extinguish my anger against the sultan,
anum, i choose you from a hundred villages.

now, in the translucent midnight,
only the two of us
ruling over this palace,
i am sultan, and you my consort,
let the tide of life flow far now.
this moon that hangs over the masts
and throw its shadow on to the straits
certainly understand
how i love you.
and a passion this great
needs no tomorrow.
tonight
we shall gather
all there is in two human beings
in the great bowl of time.

if there's a tomorrow
we will love again
on the narrow,
if not, then

tonight we have perfected it
as human beings.

i choose you, anum
from the whole of god's universe.

chapter thirty-two (ii)

"During these times Melaka was full of people, all manner of merchants gathered here; markets lined the way from Air Lilih to Kuala Muar; and from Kampung Keling to Kuala Penajuh there was no longer any need to bring the fire, as whenever one stopped one found houses; from this side of the country to Batu Pahat, too, Melaka was full of people, because during these times the subjects of Melaka were one hundred and ninety thousand altogether."

i

and in the season of fruits, flowers and mangoes
shower colours into the dark green of leaves
all along the road of villages.

fruit fragrance floats into fields and appetites,
doors and noses of children fishing in streams,
into memories of ancient women and young maidens
pounding rice,

into the calculations of new merchants adding profits
for a harvest-time dowry.

the mangoes of air lilih are as sweet as muar's *rambutan*
the *durian* of durian daun are red as polished copper
the *kedondong* of jugra are brittle on teeth of girls waiting
for the wedding

all along the way *jambus* fall into their shadows,
dukus turn purple on trees, tubers fill the hill-sides,
in the night bananas are shared with birds and foxes,
sentuls rot between their branches, the *langsats* is wasted.

bullock carts nod into kampongs,
 from air lilih wheels whine uphill
 and loosely chase down wet and green valleys,
 each time the bulls are tired or my son cries
 a small village awaits behind the hills.
 water and fire are offered with an invitation
 to taste new fruits and rest on the verandah.
 the gay goodbye is loaded with
 baskets of *langsai* and parcels of *duku*.

warm are my people, all along the way
 houses is clusters from road to river
 villages as strung beads
 bending with curves, straightening with the straights.

ii

melaka's house is wide-lawned
 a sail-roof and verandah breezy
 do stop by, good friend
 the sun is hot, the day yet early.

a sail-roof and verandah breezy
 steps of stone and china tiles
 the sun is hot, the day yet early
 the morning has come to our stalls.

steps of stone and china tiles
 carved windows with swinging doors
 the morning has come to our stalls
 with terengganu *songket* and hued head-dresses.

carved windows with swinging doors
 dandies from kedah's realm
 with terengganu *songket* and hued head-dresses
 you may test these blades from mataram.

dandies from kedah's realm

bajus are sewn by tailors of Palembang
 please try these blades from mataram
 handsome on the young, defenders of kampungs.

bajus are sewn by tailors of Palembang
 worn by courtiers from upstream
 handsome on the young, defenders of kampungs
 the style Malay and the craft a dream.

iii

the smell of the market hypnotises five villages
 from *pandan* mats and platforms,
 rafting upstream, calling to remote collectors
 to gather their rattan, rubbers and mountains roots.

mak cik embun sells *dodol* that glitters like Sumatran gold
 its shine is filmed with oil of the *guding* coconut,
 a tray of sweatmeats from grandmother Jam's kitchen,
 its rice clear, its sugar from melaka.
mak su melur, the wife of *pak* lela,
 the puppeteer of Sungai Rambai,
 carries on her head cakes of many tastes
 to the market, to which she comes late,
 because her cakes are many, and so are her children.

at the southern end of the market *abang* Nadin sat before
 his *cencaluk*

his vase clean, his *baju* the colour of the bay
 his shrimps fine, taken from Tanjung Kling
 when the water was calm and the moon full,
 the heap of fishes is offered with pride –
senangin for friers or kedah curry,
terubuk for afternoon roasts,
 the ray fish and mackerel for the whole family,
 sauteed shrimps or squid with vegetables,
 peppered mussels, shells in coconut and lemon grass

and the most delicious, *ikan parang* for *masak asam*,
 all the fishes are arranged on the scaly board,
 pulled up by his nets from the dawn straits.

iv

the melakans are numerous and the streets loud
 all day long the market is coloured with people,
 clothes splashed to the trees and bushes
 and the dark of the shadows.

at the junction a minangkabau man dramatises his
 medicines,
 cures for rheumatism, failing eyes or desires,
 for old muscles and receding energies.
 and the templer, a family cure-all.

at the edge of the village a young man plucks his *kecapi*
 accompanying the sad song of a broken-hearted singer,
 from between the knotted sounds of the bazaar
 the drums beat out a *dondang sayang*,
 tempting feet to remembered steps,
 to dream of dances with the kampung beauty,
 returning old men to a rhythmic youth,
 to old stories, stowed away from children.

traders come, all morning from surrounding hamlets
 from northern towns and creeks that drain brown hills,
 bringing honey from forest trees, coconut sugar,
 cloths from a thousand malay islands,
 all taken from the earth, sea and air.

Melaka is prosperous because it is proud,
 big because its knowledge of life is from a weighing mind,
 unafraid of the new, and always aware of the wrongs.
 there were a hundred and ninety thousand then,
 when the country believed in its people.

no eternity

finally the boat's whistle
is blown,
however fair, the beach must be left behind,
now, this is all.
if there's love
the sound of water at the hull
will dissolve it to longing.

the mist is thickened by distance,
the fields, the hour and a lover's face
ebb from time,
brine sprinkled on the face.

beyond the border
is the country of difference.
ready to be renewed
or made different,
there's no eternity to it.

farmers

on an old farm
in northern portugal, in early autumn
three old men bowed to their land.
we read in this bow a history
and many ancient generations
in its ways and beliefs.

the earth, cracked by the sun
was tilled by their grandfather,
the grass heaped on the afternoon anthill
are descendents of the century's weeds
that were plucked out by their parents
anger and surrender fertile on this land.

on the fence, oak and the clan's stead
 the grape vines and well
 are present in all their memory,
 extending in the feet's mud
 still and dusty at time's centre,
 they too will finally
 be carried to the grave
 on the last words from their friends.

 this thin apple tree
 witnesses with the wind
 the carrier of time which stops
 in its shoots and buds
 the naughty children who climb it
 and grow under its shades.

in the bent backs of these old farmers
 time accompanies work
 shakes the wheat, grinds the flour
 on this earth they ripen their lives
 and finally die.

nothing is ever ended

i

on age's silent desert
 nothing is final:
 its rays become fragile
 at high noon
 nights seep
 into the hill of problems
 that is still heaped
 on dawn's sleep

ii

the ebb bequeaths puddles

for little fishes and hermit crabs,
rivers seep into roots,
the rain seeks out its channels

iii

i depart for destinations
each time
i step on the ground
comfortable dreams are
splatted by the drain's mud,
hearing the scream of suffering
in the sounds of the sweet rain

leiden

firenze

i

the olive hills and grape vines
follow the stony river uphill
and i follow its rocky conversation
to the old city
to the fence of the mountains
watched over by a tradition and a freedom
irrigated by the flow of thought
that floods houses,
school and libraries.

ii

you love your artists,
schooled them
in the workshops on the walls
in the books that give character to your old buildings

and clay that understood
youth's passion
and thought in their studies.

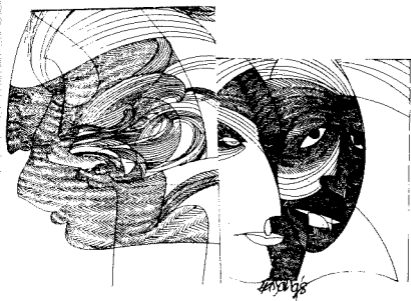
iii

your churches received printers, carpenters,
inventors and sculptors,
they take you to the world,
transcribed your discoveries.

what is greatness?
each time i pass by your city i smelled it.

thoughts were drawn from life
life from difficulties,
and difficulties teach wisdom.

all are completed
with passion
organized by tradition
humanised by its openness.





Noordin Hassan

NOORDIN HASSAN (1929–), Malaysia's seventh *Sasterawan Negara* who was born on 18 January 1929 at Hatim Road, Penang. He began his formal education at *Sekolah Melayu Perak Road*, Penang, in the 1930s. Following this, Noordin attended remove class or Special Malay Class at the Francis Light English School, Penang.

During the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, Noordin worked as a 'boy' at the home of a Japanese family. When the Japanese surrendered in 1945 and the British took over the administration of the Malay States, Noordin continued his schooling at the Penang Free School.

In 1952, Noordin pursued further education at the Kirby College, Liverpool, to prepare for a career as a trained teacher. He took art as an elective. In 1953, Noordin returned to his homeland and taught art and Malay at *Sekolah Perempuan Kampung Baharu*, Alor Star.

In that same year, Noordin staged his first play, *Tak Kunjung Kembali*. From this point onwards, his interest in the field of writing and stage production began to develop. Noordin became increasingly active in dramatic activities while working as a teacher at the Sultanah Asma School and the Sultan Abdul Hamid School, Alor Star. During his stint as a lecturer at *Maktab Harian*, Alor Star between 1957 and 1962, he wrote and staged several plays besides

putting on dances, boria and musicals with college students as his cast.

In 1962, Noordin once again pursued further education, this time at the University of London, majoring in English Language Teaching. He returned to Malaysia in 1964 and worked as advisor to the Dramatic Society of Alor Star Teachers' Training College. Subsequently, he directed a play for Kedah Arts Council. Following this, Noordin was engaged as a lecturer at the Sultan Idris Teachers' Training College, Tanjung Malim. While there, he staged the plays, *Bukan Lalang Ditiup Angin*, *Tiang Seri Tegak Bertima* and *Pintu*.

In 1976, Noordin was transferred to Malaysian Teachers' Training College, Notham Road, Penang and later went to England for further studies at the University of Newcastle in the field of Drama in Education.

In 1978, Noordin was transferred to the Language Institute, Kuala Lumpur. As a lecturer, he taught Malay and Education, and gave special in-service courses to teachers on teaching language through drama. He was made advisor of the Institute's Dramatic Society.

In 1984, Noordin worked as a contract officer at the Script and Short Story Department, Radio and Television Malaysia. There, he was responsible for drama scripts and short stories to be broadcast by the station.

In 1979, Noordin was awarded the medal *Ahli Mangku Negara* by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. In 1993, he became the seventh writer to be awarded Malaysia's National Literary Award.

Translated by Nor Azizah Abu Bakar

LIST OF WORKS

Books

1. *Bukan Lalang Ditiup Angin*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979.

2. *1400*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987.
3. *Tiga Zaman*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984.
4. *Anak Tanjung*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1989.
5. *Sirih Bertepuk Pinang Menari*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992.

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Earthly Trials ... Whereto Our Literature?

I

IN the Name of Allah ...
Dancing but motionless, motionless
If only I could grasp, could grasp the wind
I would kneel at Thy feet.
In wonder at Thy love
Most sincerely indeed.
Dancing with my tears dripping
Lest my steps be deemed awkward
I feel ashamed before the wind
Even more so before Thee
Most sincerely indeed.

II

Their Majesties the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and the Raja Permaisuri Agong, distinguished and respected gathering.

I wish most humbly to express my profound gratitude to God and in all sincerity to thank the Government, the Panel for the National Literary Award as well as Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. My sincere congratulations to the afore-

said Panel for having finally opened this prestigious iron gateway as it were, to writers of drama.

III

As a matter of fact, the speech I am going to deliver is not on philosophies of mankind not is it of an intellectual character; but I wish to say something which is more pragmatic in the hope that we can give it our undivided attention.

IV

A book entitled *Modern Literature of the Near and Middle East* explains how many Arab, Turkish, Iran and Israeli literature writers imitate Western literature which is said to be modern. Allow me to present an excerpt in the original language of this book: "The process of their modernization is synonymous with Westernization, 'development', and the identical stages of secularization and uncritical imitation of the transient literary fashions of the West. Linguistic modernization was tantamount to the rejection of all the traditional forms as well as the content of the classics and deliberate desacralization of Hebrew and Arabic – the vehicle of Scripture – to colloquialisms, local dialects, idioms, slang, vulgarities, profanities and even outright invective and obscenities." Naquib Mahfouz struggled hard to free his novels from these symptoms and put forward his thoughts concerning sociopolitics in the Arabic tradition. See book entitled: *Naquib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning* by Rasheed El-Enany, University of Exeter.

V

The Holy Quran whose writings we acknowledge are of the highest quality. No less than thirteen stories of the Prophets have been revealed through monologues, dialogues, chorus with its storyteller; there are plots, sub-plot, motivation and psychology regarding mankind; there are also symbols,

images and metaphors. I figure that the first ever drama in man's life is the story of Prophet Adam in the Quran. Adam was the protagonist and Satan the antagonist. Satan had his motivations and finally Adam and Hawa were driven out of paradise. The dialogues in this drama can be seen in the Chapters al-Hijr, al-Aaraf, al-Baqarah, al-Israk, al-Kahfi, al-Maidah, and other chapters. For further details, read the book entitled *Dialogue of the Prophets in the Quran*, published by the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department. Obviously, the revelation uses elements of drama, which certainly has its wisdom. The Quran believes in this genre by way of delivering revelations.

In the Quran the whole Chapter on Yusuf is revealed in the aforementioned elements of drama. In all there are eleven acts or episodes each with its scenes. It begins with Yusuf relating his dream to his father until he meets with his brothers and father once more in Egypt. His father's eyes were cured of blindness and the envy and jealousy within his brothers' hearts were cleansed. The Chapter on Yusuf is structurally well-arranged, full of wonderment and surprises that can arouse and hold the interest of either reader or audience if presented on the stage. It plays on our emotion and sentiment and the symbols are so genuine and beautiful. There is a plot and a sub-plot. The characters help to develop the story and there is character development as seen in what happens to Zulaiha. Indeed all these literary elements are to be found in novels too but in the Chapter on Yusuf they are all arranged and structured merely through dialogue. The Chapter on Yusuf is created by God himself. So it is with the other twelve stories of the Prophets. In my view the presentation of Khisasul Ambia found in the Quran is of a truly high quality. Nowadays people are already talking of post-modernist Shakespeare. However we do not wish, for instance, the Chapter on Yusuf or Khisasul Ambia, to be discussed from the viewpoint of theories made up by man. Even though we should have a dynamic attitude and an open mind towards sugges-

tions or ideas which often come up, nevertheless we ought to be cautious so that we do not stray from the straight path. Man's tongue can be ever convincing especially those eloquent in rhetoric. Therefore, we must be careful to observe the Islamic religious laws.

There was an artist seemingly so original in his use of colours that critics never tired in their praises. Finally it became known that actually he was colour-blind. As we all know there are various types of blindness. Throughout the ages, man has made use of writing to obtain one thing or another; also in order to sublimate or express in more socially acceptable ways their problems and if our writing bring negative results to the reader be it directly or indirectly, crudely or in a refined manner, then our writings cannot be regarded as good works any longer. So what should we use as a guide? And what exactly are our aims and purpose in writing?

VI

As to politics and the system of government, our nation has drawn the world's attention to our very own distinct political vision befitting our situation and understanding; the Big Powers have already begun to notice this. Regarding the economy the minister concerned has been complimented by foreign countries and has stated that the time has come for our nation to devise our very own economic theory. The Tabung Haji building is distinctly beautiful in its architecture. Our artists no longer paint women completely in the nude based on aesthetics and Greek philosophy because they have discovered art and spirituality in Islam. Those who are aware will surely realise this. How about our literature?

VII

Wherein the wisdom of dewdrops
Wherein the wisdom of the twinkling stars

Wherein the wisdom of earthly trials
Surely therein lies Your wisdom, O Lord.

Dewdrops become sweet and refreshing when they are likened to blessings which motivate the heart to be grateful, the tongue to utter thanks and the body to move in praise of God. Mankind ought to frequently kneel and bow the head as in prayer at the break of dawn in reverence and gratitude, often giving alms within their means, whether in thought, word of mouth or material things; a sign of profound and deep concern for unbounded blessings. Every morning we are reminded by the dewdrops (that is, if we want to observe closely) and should the dew praise God aloud, which ears would be reluctant to listen? Except those who are complacent and choose to remain so. Among mankind, good deeds are reciprocated, even unto death, says the *pantun*. How is it with God?

I am grateful the iron gateway of the Literary Award has finally been thrown open to dramatists. Forthwith it gives hope to those who write but in all humility do not hope for any reward whatsoever from mankind: to them the sound of banging or slamming in opening this gateway should not rock anything. Not that they are arrogant, hypocritical or egoistic or trying to give the impression that they are self-righteous; they merely possess a specific philosophy. I have had the opportunity of meeting some Christian writers of this category. Evangelism or missionary work is the core and aim of their lives. Should they be given any reward which could be used for God, they are grateful. That is all that matters.

Some years back I was once asked whether I would be willing to accept a cash prize of some considerable amount in lieu of the National Literary Award. The question was certainly well-framed but the message was definitely one and the same: drama was not considered at par with other literary genres by the Panel at the time. I was not in the least offended by the question but I heard the whisperings

of the heart: God forbid! So I answered, "Thank you. I do not want to set a precedence." That was it.

VIII

A friend says she remembers collecting dewdrops from flowers, leaves whilst the soles of her feet get wet from the dew on the grass, then with this, she wipes her face; how efficacious; no need for man-made cosmetics or make-up. Her features are fine, extremely clean. I often jokingly say she is like a tiny white butterfly with fine stripes – full of finesse; the eyes do not tire looking. "That's grandmother's advice," she replies with a most delicate smile. That is why please, do not kill the butterfly.

May God Bless You.

Translated by Hawa Abdullah

SELECTED WORK

1400

INTRODUCTION: "1400" is presented which envelops aspects of theatre, religion, and culture to bring forth the theme which is based on the event of Prophet Muhammad's *Hijrah*. *Hijrah* here is meant figuratively: it is the change or the renewal of the way of living, thinking, and doing things in this world to fulfill one's role as the vicegerent of Allah. From this premise we have to analyse the personality and individuality of the characters in "1400" from the Islamic point of view, not from the secularistic point of view. Indeed the whole of "1400" must be viewed from this perspective. This drama is based on the philosophy of the natural tendencies of human kind from the Islamic perspective. This script is the shortened version. The original version of "1400" was staged on the 1st and 2nd of September 1981 at the National University of Malaysia, Lembah Pantai, as the opening presentation of the theatre festival, of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

STAGE SETTING: Use aspects or motifs as follows: wind, clouds, waves, dead trees, a few old and dying leaves, same

tree (as the dead tree) but which has fresh leaves, rostrum and tower, white background (round, with black edge and slides). There should be no structure which shows any certain place or anything concrete. One corner of the stage can be a voice if a wooden bell is hung there. As an example, an oil lamp and a bookrest can be the house of Siti Rahimah. The best is a prop or symbol that gives the concept of something.

Characters

Wayang Kulit Musical Ensemble

Narrator

Young Woman

Old Woman

Siti Rahimah/Intan Siti Rahimah

Dolah/The Wealthy Pak Tuan Dolah

Soud

Zikir Group Comprised of Five Robed Villagers

Maulana

Tuk Pawang/Tuk Dukun

Lan Jinn

Dolah's Mother's Corpse Tipah

Doctor Horse Ghost

Tailor Haji Sabri

Make-Up Artist Mo-Mo - (weird Animal)

Match-Maker Ancestors of the River

Doli Ancestors of the Jungle

Dolah's Followers Ancestors of the Animal

Architect Officer

Wak Long Judge

Pak Dogol Abu Lahab

Mak Som	Abu Lahab's Wife
Pak Sudin	Traveller I
Romli	Traveller II
Kamar	Flag Carrier
Leman	Pak Long
Mak Uyah	Doa Reader

I

(The music players are ready on stage. The Zikir Group enters chanting "Subhanallah..." One large flag is waves to and fro. [Everybody] take their places. Stop. Silence for a while.)

NARRATOR : In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

(A Young Woman is seen. An Old Woman with a cane embraces the young woman: these two are in fact the same person. The young woman is dressed in bright colours and appears happy while the old woman dresses similarly but the colour of her dress is already faded due to time. Both are veiled. The young woman is holding the Quran.)

YOUNG WOMAN: *(Chants followed by the Zikir Group.)*
Assalamualaikum, greetings are given
 With the Quran we come here
 To make *hijrah*
 May ourselves be blessed in the radiant light.

We went through the age of youth
 Many paths we had to choose

We asked ourselves which one to take
The soul of *Hijrah* points to the tower.

OLD WOMAN : Don't be sad in the twilight
Don't let hope be killed
Don't let ambition fly
Don't let trouble be a worry.

YOUNG WOMAN: I look to the left, I look to the right
With *Bismillah* I start
Hijrah's soul strengthens my faith
Al-Quran guides my life.
(Zikir Group in silhouette. Both women exit. Siti Rahimah is seen on a beach. At times she throws flower petals when the waves come in. Sounds of waves.)

NARRATOR : It is said *(Can be echoed by other people.)*

When the sun is about to set
She is seen
When the yellow spirit arises
She is seen
The sad wind follows the waves
On the beach
She is seen *(Echoed)*.

It is said
She is there a long time
Hundreds of years
She is there a long time
Where is the unheard voice
She is there a long time *(Echoed)*
Where is the unseen face
Is she really hideous
She is there a long time.

It is said
 She suffers from leprosy
 Very ghastly
 None dares to go near
 Very ghastly
 None dares to look at her
 Said to be hideous
 Very ghastly (*Echoed*).

It is said
 None of the fishermen dare to
 Speak to her
 Grandpa forbids grandma restricts
 Speaking to her
 When passing ask permission
 It is not wise to
 Speak to her (*Echoed*).

It is said
 Siti Rahimah had leprosy
 The veiled Siti
 Scattering flowers on the beach
 The veiled Siti (*Echoed*)
 The flowers of hope
 For Dolah
 The veiled Siti.

It is said
 Siti the leper is loved by Dolah
 Dolah the lame (*Dolah passes
 across the stage*)
 Lost at sea holding the Quran
 Dolah the lame
 Siti waiting with flowers
 Should he return
 Dolah the lame (*Echoed*).

It is said.

(The many voices should be harmo-

nized with the above lines; echo and solo should be intertwined.)

II

(Night.)

- DOLAH : Soud, o, Soud.
- SOUND : Is that you, Dolah?
- DOLAH : Yes.
- SOUND : *(Shaking hand.)* When did you come back?
- DOLAH : Just now. It was terrible. Very terrible, Soud.
- SOUND : Was it successful?
- DOLAH : No.
- SOUND : No?
- DOLAH : No.
- SOUND : It was all for nothing?
- DOLAH : Not exactly.
- SOUND : But you said it was not successful?
- DOLAH : If it were, all would be gone.
- SOUND : How come?
- DOLAH : They wanted to destroy, to crush, to burn.
- SOUND : They are going that far?
- DOLAH : It was terrible. They were silent before. But once they started, I couldn't believe it. Not less than one hundred buses. Lucky it was not successful.

- SOUND : Why?
- DOLAH : Gas.
- SOUND : Gas?
- DOLAH : Gas.
- SOUND : Yes, gas.
- DOLAH : All scattered. The Guru, Haji Daud, all scattered. We should also use gas.
- SOUND : We shouldn't, Dolah. Gas isn't the solution. We must conduct meetings, have dialogues.
- DOLAH : If we wait for dialogues, we'll be waiting forever. In the meantime what would happen to us?
- SOUND : We must have a meeting.
- DOLAH : Meetings and dialogues are not the answer. We should find our own solutions.
- SOUND : Even our religion asks us to conduct meetings. Talk to one another. If we are hasty we will be used by other people. How many times do I have to tell you this.
- DOLAH : This is why I said it would be no use if we talk. No use. I want to do it my own way. I also want to be rich; if not much than a little. Sarip can do it, why can't I. What does Sarip have that I don't have?
- SOUND : Everybody knows Sarip. Dolah, we should earn an honest living.

- DOLAH : But they don't care what's right and what's wrong.
- SODU : Never mind them. Do you remember what the Guru said?
- DOLAH : I did not ask to be poor. I'm a pauper. Is it my mistake that I'm lame? God made it so and my situation worsened it. I couldn't get the Village Head's daughter's hand. I'm wretched.
- SODU : A man like you, Dolah, is honourable.
- DOLAH : What do I get for being honourable?
- SODU : You help people; Allah will help you.
- DOLAH : When?
- SODU : Dolah, where's your faith?
- DOLAH : You know, because of my leg, the committee didn't elect me as representative in the meeting? Some said, "Indeed Dolah has contributed a lot to the village but we shouldn't elect him. A lame representative will bring shame on us." Yes, they were ashamed but they were not ashamed to seek my help.
- SODU : We help because Allah requires us to, Dolah.
- DOLAH : Look at me. No one accepts my marriage proposals. I'm not only lame but also poor. I'm nothing, Soud. I help here and there, but when I need help nobody bothers.
- SODU : You pray, don't you?
- DOLAH : What has this got to do with prayers?

- SODU : Do you pray or not?
 DOLAH : I'll succeed by myself, Soud. You'll see.
 Dolah the lame? You'll see, Soud. You'll see.

III

(Zikir Group in a circle is listening to the Maulana who is standing in the centre of the circle, holding a cane. They are listening attentively to him.)

- MAULANA : Allah said that there is no God but Him who upholds justice and is witnessed by the angels and the learned.
(Maulana starts to chant followed by those around him. Starts softly, loudly, then softly again; the group can move around.)

- DOLAH : *(To himself.)*
 If the leg is not lame I can dance
 If the pocket is full of money I can enjoy
 If people respect I can smile
 But the tongue has no bone!

- MAULANA : To those who believe, ask help from Allah with patience and prayers, because Allah is with those who are patient.
(The Zikir Group chants as before.)

- DOLAH : They told me to be patient when I am lame
 They said it was fate when my mother got sick
 Talk, talk, talk, talk
 For the tongue has no bone!

- MAULANA : Say that truth is come, all which is false will be demolished, for falsehood will surely crumble.
- DOLAH : (*Loudly.*) Sir, open your eyes to what is happening now. Those who are false are getting stronger. Those who are false are moving faster. Those who are false are more successful. Open your eyes, look around.
- MAULANA : Do not look around, do not open your eyes. But look to the guidance of al-Quran, and open your hearts. Straighten your faith as you have been commanded; do not follow your base instincts. (*To Dolah.*) Allah is the guarantor to all those who believe and He takes them out of darkness into light. Verily for those who have faith in Allah, He will put enlightenment in their hearts.

IV

(Five figures covered in black sheets struggle to release themselves from the darkness all around them. Their movements are timed with the beat of a drum. The movements slowly stop. The figures breath loudly, still comfortable.)

NARRATOR

- (SITI RAHIMAH) : (*Singing.*)
 Look, search and ponder
 Where the darkness has gone to
 The first twilight brings brightness,
 this light

Who bestows?

O people

If you are struggling in darkness
Find water for ablution and prayer,
in the desert.

Do not stop until this deceiving
blackness

Has gone.

O people

The moving cloud, the rustling wind,
who is their master

The swimming fish, the crying eye,
who is their master

The crescent moon, melancholic
beauty,

Who owns, who is its master!

O Allah, O Allah.

(Music for a while.)

V

(Dolah at the witch-doctor's house.)

DOLAH : Sir, this is the amulet from my mother's waist, the one that you asked me to take. My mother just died.

(The witch-doctor takes the amulet and passes it over the benzoin smoke. He then calls the spirits, ghosts, and Jinns. The language he uses cannot be understood except for a few words here and there. The music gives the atmosphere, background voices also should help to create the atmosphere. Enter the Earth Jinni, a red-skinned creature, bringing an oil lamp or a torch

and the devil's fork. The witch-doctor asks a question to the Jinni while giving him the amulet. And in a pantomime, the Jinni gives information and instructs the witch-doctor. This pantomime should be accompanied by a drum. The Jinni exits, then the witch-doctor disappears; only Dolah is left on stage. Lightning, thunder; lightning, thunder. Strong winds. Shrieking sounds, long, forlorn, far away. The night is maddening. Dolah stands up and takes a shovel, walks out of his house. The music is maddening and deafening. The night is wild. Dolah is seen dragging his mother's corpse across the stage. The Jinni crosses the stage. Dolah crosses back. Then, Dolah enters the stage carrying a gold pot which is full of jewels et cetera.)

- DOLAH : Treasure, buried treasure. The witch-doctor was right, the Jinni was right. O Jinni, O anybody who cares to listen, now let the people see. I am no longer Dolah the lame. I am a new Dolah. Dolah the respected, the Honourable Dolah, who can save and who can create miracles. Here, kiss my hand, kiss my hand. Now only do you know who Dolah really is.

VI

(Day until end of structure IX. Dolah speaks with a slight English accent.)

- DOCTOR : Mr. Dolah; here are the legs that you

ordered; the best and the most expensive. These are what you want, right? I also bring the shoes to match the legs. Green, red, yellow.

DOLAH : The best and the most expensive. Can I put them on now?

DOCTOR : Or course, sir. *(The new legs are attached. Dolah stands up and walks, then tries to jump a few times. He looks very pleased.)*

DOLAH : Can I wear them all the time, without taking them off?

DOCTOR : Sure, sir. Except when you are going to pray because....

DOLAH : A-a, that's all right. No problem. Have you received the cheque?

DOCTOR : Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

TAILOR : Mr. Dolah?

DOLAH : Yes?

TAILOR : Here are the clothes that you ordered. The best and the most expensive. These are what you want, right?

DOLAH : Yes, the best and the most expensive. Can I try them now?

TAILOR : Sure, sir. They are splendid and they suit you well.

(Dolah puts on the pants, coat, tie, and waistcoat - three-piece suit. Different coloured pants, coat, et cetera.)

DOLAH : Nice, very nice.

TAILOR : Here, sir. Have this. *(Gives him a big*

cigar.) Now you have an identity.

- DOLAH : Identity?
- TAILOR : This is your image, sir.
- DOLAH : Thank you, thank you. I feel like I would never change my clothes again.
- TAILOR : You surely can do that, sir. Only when you want to pray....
- DOLAH : O, that's all right, no sweat. Thank you. Have you received your cheque?
- TAILOR : Yes, sir. Thank you. (*Dolah walks to and fro, smoking the unlighted cigar, shaking hands, et cetera.*)
- MAKE-UP ARTIST : Mr. Dolah. I bring make-up accessories which are the best and the most expensive, like you ordered.
- DOLAH : Can I try them now?
- MAKE-UP ARTIST : Sure you can. Let us start with your eyelashes. (*False eyelashes are put on.*) Let me work on your hair. (*Dolah's hair is combed and sprayed.*) Put on these glasses, sir. (*Grey tinted glasses are put on.*) Very nice, even I couldn't recognize you.
- (*A big mirror is placed in front of Dolah. He fawns in front of it. His actions look unnatural.*)
- DOLAH : This the new Dolah, not Dolah the lame anymore. Can I wear these eyelashes all the time?
- MAKE-UP ARTIST : Sure, sir. Except only when you want to pray because....
- DOLAH : A-a, it's all right. No problem. Thank

- ARCHITECT : Mr. Dolah, this is the replica of the house, a-a, palace; the best and most expensive. This is what you wanted, right? This house, a-a, palace will be built in the center of a lake.
- DOLAH : Do you like it, Doli?
- DOLI : I do.
- ARCHITECT : The marble is from Langkawi, the best in the world, sir.
- DOLI : Em-em. (*Shakes her head.*) Local, I don't want local goods. Italian, Italian.
- DOLAH : Finish it within a week.
- ARCHITECT : It's impossible, sir.
- DOLAH : One week.
- ARCHITECT : Very well, sir, very well.
- DOLAH : Have you received the cheque?
- ARCHITECT : All my associates have received cheques from Bank Dolah Bersendirian, but my cheque is from Bank Rakyat.
- DOLAH : It doesn't matter from which bank, as long as it has my signature.
- ARCHITECT : Very good, sir. I have received the cheque, sir. Thank you.
- DOLI : Where did you get so much money, Dolah?
- DOLAH : A-a, that's a secret.
- DOLI : Oh, so you don't trust me.
- DOLAH : Not that I don't trust you.

- DOLI : So?
- DOLAH : It's a little embarrassing to tell.
- DOLI : You're good at making excuses.
- DOLAH : Don't tell anybody else, all right?
- DOLI : Sure I won't.
- DOLAH : There's treasure under my mother's grave.
- DOLI : Treasure? What kind of treasure?
- DOLAH : Gold, jewels that are buried by people. The Earth Jinni always steals them and moves them about. He'll give them to whoever he likes. He came through the witch-doctor and asked me to do something.
- DOLI : What did he ask you to do?
- DOLAH : The Jinni said, if I wanted to be rich, I must be courageous. He asked for the amulet that my mother wore. Then he asked me to bury mother under this house. He said, next time I don't need to see the witch-doctor again for he will personally come to see me. All I have to do is wait. He also gave me a *mantra*. I can call him, if I want to.
- DOLI : So whenever we need the treasure, we can get it?
- DOLAH : Yes.
- DOLI : Can you introduce me to the Jinni?
- DOLAH : You're not afraid, are you?
- DOLI : You said he's kind.

- DOLAH : Yes, he's my friend, better than any man.
(*Music.*)

VII

(*In the middle of the stage, there is a group of people standing in a circle - a spiral. They are holding a rope or cloth or anything that shows the spiral. In the middle of the spiral and at the highest peak someone is waving a flag. Everybody is staring at the flag holder, while moving. They sing along.*)

- GROUP : *Subhanallah walthamdulillah walaila hailallah wallahu akbar. Ya Allahu ya Rahman. Ya Allahu ya Rahim.*

(*This song must be composed, there is a solo and its counterpoint, sung with 'obbligato' et cetera.*)

VIII

(*Wak Long and Pak Dogol enter singing. They may wear masks. Song entitled "Berjalan".*)

- WAK LONG : Lame Dolah is not Dolah the lame anymore, but Orang Di Kaya Pak Tuan Dolah (the Rich Mr. Tuan Dolah).
- PAK DOGOL : Even his name has become so long? That long?
- WAK LONG : Full of satisfaction, prosperity, admiration.
- PAK DOGOL : What is he doing?
- WAK LONG : He's not doing anything, just wandering around.

- PAK DOGOL : Where?
- WAK LONG : No where.
- PAK DOGOL : I heard that Dolah has married again?
- WAK LONG : They call her Intan Siti Rahimah.
- PAK DOGOL : Where's she from?
- WAK LONG : Pusat Tasik Pauh Janggi.
- PAK DOGOL : Wow!
- WAK LONG : The young Doli is now the old wife (first wife).
- PAK DOGOL : Wow!
- WAK LONG : Lame Dolah is not Dolah the lame anymore.
- PAK DOGOL : I heard that Dolah has bought all the village land?
- WAK LONG : As far as your eyes can see. The cliffs, valleys, mountains, hills: he bought everything.
- PAK DOGOL : Wow!
- WAK LONG : He has a broker, too.
- PAK DOGOL : Who?
- WAK LONG : Abu Lahab and his wife.
- PAK DOGOL : Is he one of the villagers?
- WAK LONG : Yes.
- PAK DOGOL : What a pity. Why are the villagers so ignorant?
- WAK LONG : The ancestors lands have now become a horse stable.
- PAK DOGOL : Horse stable?

- WAK LONG : Horse stable. Horses, horses, horses. Orang Di Kaya Pak Tuan Dolah's horses. Horses everywhere. Even in the river. The river is called the Horse River now.
- PAK DOGOL : That pure ancestors' river?
- WAK LONG : The horses' bathing place.
- PAK DOGOL : The very pure ancestors' river....
- WAK LONG : Full of faeces. There are no more prawns and fishes in the ancestors' river.
- PAK DOGOL : All new borns are not like the ancestors' grandchildren anymore. They're ugly, disfigured, horrible; stupid, idiot, it is said.
- WAK LONG : Disfigured? Idiot?
- PAK DOGOL : Because of the Horse River.
- WAK LONG : What's going to happen to the villagers' grandchildren!
- PAK DOGOL : Disfigured idiots. Disfigured race, idiot race.
- WAK LONG : I heard that Dolah likes hunting? What's being hunted?
- PAK DOGOL : Rats, cockroaches, lizards, frogs, women.
- WAK LONG : Aren't all the sheep frightened?
- PAK DOGOL : No, the sheep just smile, looking at the cockroaches' plight....
- WAK LONG : Wow!
- PAK DOGOL : We'll see when we work with him.

IX

- MAK SOM : (*To Intan Siti Rahimah.*) Pak Tuan has arrived.
- PAK TUAN : Intan, they will come back the day after
DOLAH : tomorrow.... This time the festival must be bigger than usual, important persons will be coming.
- INTAN : Intan went to the musolla today. The
SITI RAHIMAH : villagers are still talking about the stable contaminating the river. Their children are all sick.
- PAK TUAN : Haven't I told you not to go to their
DOLAH : musolla anymore, Intan? Why should you stain your feet by going there?
- INTAN : They invited me themselves. How could
SITI RAHIMAH : I not go?
- PAK TUAN : Just say that you're busy next time.
DOLAH :
- INTAN : But they're the wives and mothers of
SITI RAHIMAH : those who work for us. Even though they look rather afraid, still they're kind enough to invite me.
- PAK TUAN : Yes, they should be afraid of us. If not
DOLAH : they'll rebel against us. You, Intan should know with whom you should mingle.
- INTAN : I'm sad to look at their living condi-
SITI RAHIMAH : tions. Our dog food is better than their food.
- PAK TUAN : Whose fault is it?
DOLAH :
- INTAN : At least we should reduce the number

- SITI RAHIMAH : of our dogs a little.
- PAK TUAN : Those dogs are here to take care of
DOLAH : you, Intan, of our house, and the stables.
- INTAN : Even the horses are being taken care of
SITI RAHIMAH : and fed so nicely.
- PAK TUAN : If not, how could they run fast?
DOLAH :
- INTAN : I'm sad, ashamed.
SITI RAHIMAH :
- PAK TUAN : What more is lacking?
DOLAH :
- INTAN : Not lacking, but more than enough. I'm
SITI RAHIMAH : ashamed before Allah.
- PAK TUAN : Hmm, where do you get all this non-
DOLAH : sense? From the musolla maybe? Doesn't God ask us to get rich in the world too?
- INTAN SITI : For the cause of Allah. Not for wasting
RAHIMAH : it and abusing other people.
- PAK TUAN : We are the employers, right?
DOLAH :
- INTAN SITI : I want to ask your permission: starting
RAHIMAH : next week I'm going to teach their children.
- PAK TUAN : Teach? What for?
DOLAH :
- INTAN SITI : So that I'm doing something to help
RAHIMAH : them. I want to feel like a worthy person.

- PAK TUAN DOLAH : Are you going to waste your knowledge for work like this? Better not. It's better if you just stay home. See, if you have your own children, you don't have to teach other people's children.
- INTAN SITI RAHIMAH : Actually, we're going to have a baby.
- PAK TUAN DOLAH : What? Is it true?
- INTAN SITI RAHIMAH : Yes.
- PAK TUAN DOLAH : Listen and listen carefully. You Intan, should take care of yourself for this baby's sake, the child is the heir of the family. Just ask whatever you want. We'll employ more servants to comfort you. We'll increase the number of dogs so that you'll be more protected. Don't go to the musolla anymore.
- INTAN SITI RAHIMAH : Don't go to the musolla?
- PAK TUAN DOLAH : Don't accept anybody from the village. Don't see their faces. It's taboo.
- INTAN SITI RAHIMAH : Taboo?
- PAK TUAN DOLAH : And above all, don't eat fish, crab, prawn from the village river.
- INTAN SITI RAHIMAH : Why so?
- PAK TUAN DOLAH : Don't ask, just listen. You should eat good food only. We can order from overseas.

- INTAN SITI RAHIMAH : That's not necessary.
- PAK TUAN DOLAH : Preparations for this child have to be bought from overseas, too. We'll fly out tomorrow.
- INTAN SITI RAHIMAH : There's no need for all of that. We have a festival tomorrow, right?
- PAK TUAN DOLAH : Oh, yes. Never mind; we'll go after the festival. (*Pak Dolah goes out.*)
- INTAN SITI RAHIMAH : Mak Som.
- MAK SOM : Yes.
- INTAN SITI RAHIMAH : Where have you been just now?
- MAK SOM : Out to the village for a while.
- INTAN SITI RAHIMAH : I really want to eat lobster cooked with coconut milk.
- MAK SOM : Why didn't you tell me earlier, Lemah brought lobsters live from the river when I was in the village just now.
- INTAN SITI RAHIMAH : You didn't buy it, Mak Som?
- MAK SOM : You didn't ask me to. Let me go back and check now.
- INTAN SITI RAHIMAH : Eh, no need for that, Mak Som. There will be another time. But don't let the master know.
- MAK SOM : Master wants to give you all the good things. Fresh water fish, prawn and whatever.

- INTAN SITI : I like prawn; fresh water fish, tapioca
 RAHIMAH leaf.
- MAK SOM : You like them? Me, too. We'll just keep
 it quiet.

X

(The villagers are at a meeting. Different dialects are used.)

- PAK SUDIN : There's no need to blame ourselves. No
 need to blame others. No need to
 regret, we sold the land ourselves. Now
 it is his property. Whatever he does
 with it, we don't have any say in it.
- ROMLI : That's right, Pak Sudin. But we didn't
 know that it'll be like this. Those
 horses are bringing diseases.
- PAK SUDIN : What are we going to do now?
- KAMAR : We must go see Tuan Dolah. We'll tell
 him what happened.
- PAK SUDIN : What's there to tell?
- LEMAN : Just tell him that before his arrival here
 with those horses, the river wasn't like
 this. There were many fishes, prawns.
 Look what has happened now.
- ROMLI : His horses bathing, jumping every-
 where in the river and doing only God
 knows what.
- KAMAR : Our children are sick. Our wives are
 sick. We're not in good health either.
 What will happen to us?

- LEMAN : Strange diseases. Look at what happened to my son, Romli's son, Sudin's son. That kid's eyes are completely closed. Some are paralysed, deaf, dumb. There were no such things in the past. Sooner or later, what will happen to our community?
- PAK SUDIN : Who said that all these are the faults of Tuan Dolah's horses?
- ROMLI : Then, why was it never like this before?
- PAK SUDIN : This is all the fault of Abu Lahab. He's the one who persuaded the villagers to sell their lands. He gained much from it! Look how rich he's now. Even his wife is involved.
- PAK SUDIN : Don't blame Abu Lahab. If we didn't want to sell it in the first place, what could he do about it? We listened to him, our wives listened to his wife.
- ROMLI : I heard that it's not only our village that has become like this. Likewise Kampung Kuala, Kampung Kenanga. What will happen soon?
- LEMAN : How about if we go.... (*Mak Uyah enters hurriedly, shouting.*)
- MAK UYAH : Lemah, Lemah. Tipah has got it. Pak Sudin, come and take a look; she's getting it.
- (*Before they even get a chance to get out, Tipah arrives. Tipah is a young pregnant woman. Her hair is unkempt. She seems out of her mind.*)

She is dragging a big doll behind her. She is talking to the doll. Angry, sad et cetera.)

TIPAH : We eat tapioca leaf, we eat grey mullet. Horse eats us. Horse eats our children. Horse will eat my child. If it eats my child, I'll have no child. There's the Horse Ghost.

(The Horse Ghost enters, chasing and hitting Tipah. The ghost has a very horrible and frightening horse head. No one else can see this ghost.)

LEMAN : Where's the ghost? Where?

TIPAH : There. There it is.

LEMAN : Where?

TIPAH : Over here. Help. Help.

(The Horse Ghost strangles Tipah, a wrestling begins. Mak Uyah hugs Tipah. Tipah falls unconscious. She is brought out.)

LEMAN : You see, Pak Sudin. Tipah always talks about the Horse Ghost. Before Tuan Dolah came here, were there any horses in this village?

PAK SUDIN : What does it have to do with Tuan Dolah? Your wife is pregnant. Uncanny things can happen to a pregnant woman, you know that.

LEMAN : If anything happens to Tipah or my child, you'll see.

ROMLI : Don't you worry. I'm here.

- PAK SUDIN : We are the cucumbers....
- ROMLI : Enough, Pak Sudin. I'm tired of the cucumber - durian, durian story. As long as we think that way, we'll be victimized, enslaved by those who use their brains shamelessly.
- PAK SUDIN : You're young, what do you know?
- ROMLI : Pak Sudin, age has got nothing to do with this. What do I know? Pak Sudin wants to know what I know?
- PAK SUDIN : What do you know?
- ROMLI : I know that even though Pak Sudin is an elder in this village, you've become Tuan Dolah's informer.
(Pak Dolah and his follower become angry.)
- PAK SUDIN : What did you say? You... *(Wants to fight.)*
- HAJI SABRI : Wait; everybody wait.
- PAK SUDIN : Wait for what? Don't expect anything from me and my followers anymore. Let's part. Come on.
(Pak Sudin and his followers walk out.)
- HAJI SABRI : You're too harsh Romli. You cannot accuse Pak Sudin like that.
- ROMLI : Didn't Pak Sabri know? Just ask Leman.
- HAJI SABRI : We cannot be harsh, accusing like that.

Look, now our unity and family ties have been broken. What will happen?

LEMAN : But Pak Sabri, people like that are traitors.

HAJI SABRI : Allah says: "O, you who believe; hold to the religion of Allah. Don't be divided. Allah has united you in His religion. Strengthen this unity, and you will be guided." Try to remember Allah.

XI

(Tuan Dolah goes hunting: His followers are playing drums and knocking sticks, driving the animals away. Doli and her maids are there. Doli is shaded with a silk umbrella. Tuan Dolah spots an animal. He rushes to shoot but he is too late. Then he scolds the drummers. Then from no where an animal, looking like a wild boar rams Dolah down. Dolah falls. The animal disappears. Shouting everywhere. Dolah is carried home. At home, Dukun comes.)

XII

(Dukun in a trance, calling several ancestors. Three ancestors come with suitable sound effects. River Ancestor, Jungle Ancestor and Animal Ancestor.)

DUKUN : *(Chanting.)*
 Ha-a-a-a-i ancestors
 Listen and inspect, listen and look
 Orang Di Kaya Pak Tuan Dolah
 Isn't he the master of the village
 Isn't he the master of the estate
 Isn't he the master of the river
 Isn't he the master of the jungle

The ancestors are just squatting
 Listen and inspect, listen and look
 Which grandchild broke the norms
 Which grandchild has rebelled
 To cause the misfortune to Pak Tuan
 Say the people above the wind
 Pak Tuan does not have the power to
 produce offspring
 Luckily he got fortune
 The Ma'am Rahimah is pregnant
 If not
 The heirarchy of Pak Tuan ends at Pak
 Tuan.

XIII

(The Villagers' Open Court.)

OFFICER : The first defendant: Abu Lahab and his wife.

(Abu Lahab and wife are put into a sack; only their faces can be seen.)

OFFICER : Abu Lahab and wife are accused of persuading the villagers, especially those who care for themselves only, to sell their lands to Orang Di Kaya Tuan Dolah to build his horse stable. Abu Lahab and wife received a handsome payment. His wife participated with him. His wife persuaded the villagers' wives to use their womanly charms to seduce their husbands into selling the land to Orang Di Kaya Tuan Dolah. There are people who want to bury Abu Lahab and his wife alive up the neck in a mound.

- JUDGE : We are Muslims.
- ABU LAHAB : Your Honour, please let me say a few words. During our time in prison, my wife and I have realised how we cheated the villagers. We both regretted what we have done and repented wholeheartedly. To prove this, let all our fortunes, lands, houses, paintings, and expensive paintings from overseas be sold and the money gained be used to get back those lands we helped sell before. We shall live a modest life like the rest of the villagers.
- JUDGE : What is your job, Abu Lahab and wife?
- ABU LAHAB : We never did anything except be land brokers. And we're rich. But now we have repented, and we feel shame and regret. Even though we have so much money, we're really very poor. Ashamed before human beings, ashamed before Allah. We regret.
- ABU LAHAB'S WIFE : Ashamed before Allah, ashamed before human beings. We regret.
- JUDGE : If that's so, and judging that you truly repent, the court will not allow Abu Lahab and his wife to be buried alive; instead the court is setting both of you free. And because of your willingness to sell all your property to the villagers you have cheated, the court allows you to keep a piece of land for you to work. This pardon is granted after the court has considered your promise. The court has assumed that you have transformed, that you have ... migrated.

XIV

MAK SOM

: I have been a midwife for a long time; but never encountered such a thing like this. My God. Puan Siti Rahimah! Why? What power! Why such unimaginable things? Whose fault is it? Is this God's punishment? Punishing who? Intan Siti Rahimah is not an ordinary person. She's like an angel. Very rarely can we encounter such a person. Sincerely, I never had. The villagers love her. They brought many things for her to eat when she was pregnant. She ate with them. Salad, vegetables, fried fish, prawn, whatever they brought, she ate. To please them. All in all, they love her. Good conduct, polite, soft and so sincere. The villagers respect her; she mixes with them kindheartedly. Tuan Dolah told her once, when she meets with the villagers she must talk with style so that people will respect her status. But she didn't care. People spread mattresses for her to sit, but she just sat on a mat. People served her food in golden plates ... *Astaghfirullah*. When the time came Intan Siti Rahimah became delirious; what a pity. Restless. A pity. She delivered a child at midnight. Oh, God; *Astaghfirullah*! Why is this? Why her? She was such a beauty! Whose fault is it? What's her sin? What's the child's sin? How could such an ugly child be born to such a mother like Intan Rahimah? I didn't understand. There're ugly children, even dis-

figured children, but this child is not only ugly, not only disfigured; I don't know what to say. Is it human! Jinni! Phantom! What is he? He has a big head, long ears, tiny eyes, hairy body, frankly speaking, it's like ..., *Astaghfirullahalazim!* Mamat said the animal that rammed into Pak Tuan Dolah while he went hunting the other day looked like a wild boar. Intan Rahimah liked to eat lobsters from the forbidden river of Tuan Dolah. A river where the horses bathed, the place where the horses do only God knows what; is it because of the prawn? Or is it because of the animal that rammed into Tuan Dolah? When Tuan Dolah saw his child he screamed like a madman. He wanted to kill Intan. He wanted to kill me. A midwife. He wanted to kill all the villagers. The villagers heard about it. Tuan Dolah deserved it. He brought the horses there. The villagers have disfigured children, too. Tuan Dolah deserved it; but pity to Intan Siti Rahimah. Without Intan Rahimah's knowledge, that child was thrown out by Tuan Dolah. It just disappeared into thin air. Intan Siti Rahimah is delirious again. Tuan Dolah kicked her out from the house, from the village, too. There was a heavy rain that night. River is up to the banks. Maddening currents. In the morning, Intan Siti Rahimah was not at home. She disappeared into the jungle, dark night, the river almost reached its banks. Where would she

go? As holy and beautiful a person as she is! Where would she go? What happened!

XV

(Lightning, thunder, sound of the wind. Lightning, thunder, wind become stronger. Dolah is hallucinating. In his dream, he sees the Earth Jinni who gave him the treasure. Once in a while he sees lightning, thunder.)

MUSIC : Dolah awakens suddenly. Dumbfounded for a while. He wakes Doli up.

DOLAH : Doli, the Jinni has come. The treasure has surfaced. Come quickly, come.

(Dolah quickly gets his hoe, drags Doli and gets out. The music blasts for a moment, in the lightning, thunder and wind. Then Dolah and Doli enter with a golden pot, a treasure they just took. Dolah rubs off some dirt from the golden pot. They are so happy inspecting the treasure. The music is still on. Then suddenly, the music stops. Doli is still looking at the jewels. Dolah is hypnotised. Paralysed. His mother's corpse enters slowly. Doli is not aware and cannot see it.)

DOLAH : Mother, mother? Doli, this is my mother.

DOLI : Where is she? I cannot see her.

DOLAH : There she is. There.

DOLI : I can't see her.

DOLAH : Why are you crying, mother?

DOLAH'S MOTHER'S CORPSE : Dolah, my son; you buried me in a dirty place and my body cannot rot. My soul is crying. That land is contaminated. Dirty land. Bring me back to my fixed grave. There will be people passing by and reading Fatihah to me. Beg forgiveness to Allah. Repent. If this village is not suitable for you, then migrate my son. *Astaghfar*, son.

(Dolah is in such great shock that he does not realise that the corpse is no longer there. Drums. Dolah wakes up. Looking for his mother.)

DOLAH : *(Dumbfounded in the beginning, but suddenly he speaks.)* O God, forgive my sins. Bless me, dear God.

(Then Dolah recites surah al-Falak with a very high pitched voice. Doli and the golden pot are no longer there. Drums. Dolah exits. Then he carries in his mother's corpse passionately. Crying. A moment passes. He carries his mother's corpse and brings it out.)

XVI

(Dolah sits like a crazy man. He is drifting away in his mind. Two persons are holding hands and carrying sacks on their backs and holding canes, walking across the stage. One person carries a lamp. The wind breezes through their garments. They are like musafir. Silence. Only the sounds of wind is heard.)

XVII

ARCHITECT : Tuan Dolah. You gave me a false

cheque. Liar. (*He takes the model of the house and walks out.*)

DOLAH : Take it. I don't want that house.

MATCH-MAKER : Doli, Doli, come here. (*To Dolah.*) Rubbish. (*Dolah doesn't even look, he is brooding.*) Look at you, wanting to marry a minister's daughter! Wanting to be a minister's son-in-law. Look at yourself first! Doli, come. There's another place. Liar. You gave a false cheque. Dolah Bank Limited. Rubbish!

(*Match-maker and Doli walk out. Enter the make-up artist. Without any word, she takes out Dolah's false eye-lashes. His wig is messed up.*)

MAKE-UP ARTIST : False cheque. False! You are so phony. You are living a lie. Whatever you said, whatever you did; all are lies. You blinded people with lies.

(*Tailor and doctor just strip the cloth Dolah is wearing and dismantle his artificial legs.*)

TAILOR : Wear back your cloth. Don't forget your origins.

DOCTOR : Tuan Dolah, he said! Lame Dolah. Dolah the lame is more like it!

(*Dolah stands up and finds out that he can walk without any help anymore. Dolah is not lame anymore.*)

DOLAH : I can walk without being helped. Praise be to Allah. (*Raising his hands and prostrates.*)

YOUNG WOMAN: (*Hugged by Old Woman, crossing the stage.*)

Prepare yourself in your journey
Isyak time is coming
Pray for blessings from Allah
With *Bismillah*, knock at the door.

OLD WOMAN : Pray for blessings from Allah
With *Bismillah*, knock at the door

YOUNG WOMAN: When Israfil blows the trumpet
In *zikir* we stand
With hope of the hereafter preparations
Ready to accept *Qada* and *Qadar*
Don't walk alone and empty
Do something for yourself
Benefit your race, religion
Of holy wars, there are many kinds

OLD WOMAN : Of holy wars, there are many kinds
(*Both of them walk out.*)

XVIII

MAULANA : Finally, Dolah leaves his village. Before he leaves he sees Tuk Guru and in their conversation Tuk Guru finds that Dolah is so different. He is not the old Dolah. With the consciousness he has, Dolah is not only leaving one place to another. Tuk Guru says that Dolah has migrated.

XIX

(*Dolah now sells drinks. He can be seen walking all around the village. Coming and going. Not far from him, a woman sits selling mats. In the night, Dolah prays and reads the Quran and sees the woman also reading the Quran and teaching Islam. That woman is Siti Rahimah.*)

One evening, in a corner of the musolla, Dolah is seen talking with Pak Long.)

- DOLAH : Pak Long, how long has that woman stayed there?
- PAK LONG : Not so long actually.
- DOLAH : Why does she cover herself like that?
- PAK LONG : She said she is a leper. But she is cured, so she said.
- DOLAH : Who's daughter is she?
- PAK LONG : An adopted child to Tuk Imam who has done many deeds for the village. He is also a *silat teacher*. We remember his deeds.
- DOLAH : She's very good at weaving. I'm attracted to her work because it is based on Islamic aesthetic values. Where did she learn them?
- PAK LONG : I don't know. Whenever I help her at the market, everything is sold. What about you, Dolah? Is it enough just selling drinks?
- DOLAH : It's enough, Pak Long. I was hired to do some carvings for windows, doors and pillars.
- PAK LONG : Is that why you're interested in her work?
- DOLAH : Yes, Pak Long. That girl's work is so beautiful; I'd like to use it in my art, if possible.
- PAK LONG : Ask her yourself, if she wants to **talk**. Come to the house more often. **Mak**

Long always asks about you. Please come.

DOLAH : All right, Pak Long. Send my regards to Mak Long.

(Pak Long exits.)

DOLAH : *(Approaches Siti Rahimah.) Assalamualaikum (Peace be upon you.)*

SITI RAHIMAH : *Walaikumussalam (And on you).*

DOLAH : I hope I'm not bothering you if I ask a few questions. By the way, my name is Dolah.

People call me Dolah the lame.

SITI RAHIMAH : But in the village, nobody call you by that name. They call you Abang Dolah the Engraver.

(They are both silent for a while. Sounds of waves and wind can be clearly heard.)

DOLAH : This village is different; really different. In my old village, I was Abang Dolah the lame. It wasn't my playground. The only thing left there is just my mother's grave.

SITI RAHIMAH : I know.

DOLAH : What' your name?

SITI RAHIMAH : Siti Rahimah

DOLAH : What? *(Surprise.)*

SITI RAHIMAH : Siti Rahimah. Why?

DOLAH : Not Intan Siti Rahimah?

SITI RAHIMAH : No, just Siti Rahimah.

- DOLAH : Not Intan?
- SITI RAHIMAH : No, just Siti Rahimah.
- DOLAH : You feel lonely?
- SITI RAHIMAH : Not lonely, but sad sometimes.
- DOLAH : What do you do when you're sad?
- SITI RAHIMAH : I read the Quran, pray, weave.
- DOLAH : Have you ever been to the shore?
- SITI RAHIMAH : Yes, but only late in the evening, when the sun is setting before *Maghrib*, the evening prayer. During such times, the wind is so sad and the waves come undulating to the beach. The beach is not far.
- DOLAH : The leaves are motionless.
- SITI RAHIMAH : The sun is setting soon. *Maghrib* is coming.
(*They exit.*)

XX

- TRAVELLER I : The pillar stands, the sail unfurls
If the wind becomes stronger
Lose not one's faith
At sea have faith, day and night.
- TRAVELLER II : Go seek the true path
Dance not when satan claps
Love not the worldly throne
Nor mattress embroidered with golden
flowers.
- TRAVELLER I : Hold strong to the Quran
We are travellers on a journey

To reach our destined place
To Allah we offer our *Taqwa*

- TRAVELLER II : In the path of Allah we should serve
The ethnics of Islam, the enlightened
path of *rahmah*
Hold tight to the truth
The love of Allah is the ultimate.

XXI

- DOLAH : I think it's difficult for you to work
when you're covered like that. Here,
take this. (*Imah takes the parcel and
opens it. She finds a loose purdah-like
garment. She is silent for a while.*) I
have good news: a traveller is inviting
the villagers to build a mosque.
- SITI RAHIMAH : Where?
- DOLAH : Across the river.
- SITI RAHIMAH : A traveller building a mosque?
- DOLAH : He said he is chased by the enemy. He
took shelter in a cave. A spider made a
web at the entrance. The enemy
thought he was not in there. So they
left. And he was safe. Rather extra-
ordinary right?
- SITI RAHIMAH : It's like a miracle. And he's building a
mosque?
- DOLAH : Yes, he said that he'll continue his jour-
ney later.
- SITI RAHIMAH : You want to help him build the
mosque?
- DOLAH : I'll carve the doors and windows of the

mosque. That's my contribution. And your beautiful woven designs, I'll carve them on the doors and pillars and in other parts of the mosque.

SITI RAHIMAH : If you think they're suitable, you may use them.

DOLAH : Thank you. I'll go there every morning by boat. I'll be back before *Maghrib*. If you need anything please go to Pak Long.

SITI RAHIMAH : I have nothing to give but this Quran.

DOLAH : I'll take this Quran to the building site. In fact, I'll take it with me wherever I go.

XXII

DOA READER : (*Wearing the ihram.*) *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim. Allahumma. O God, guide us to the right path. Give us enlightenment and strengthen our faith so that our life will be meaningful and we're always with You. O God, You are the place we surrender ourselves. Give us forgiveness. Our presence here is just for You. O God. Rabbana, Atina ... azabannar. Walhamdulillahirabbilalamin.*

XXIII

(*Pak Long hurriedly searching for Siti Rahimah.*)

PAK LONG : Rahimah, Rahimah, (*Rahimah appears, wearing the purdah-like garment Dolah gave her.*) Rahimah, Dolah,

Rahimah, Dolah.

RAHIMAH : Why, Pak Long?

(Pak Long's shaken manner is countered by Rahimah's calm and cool manner.)

PAK LONG : Dolah sank. *(Siti Rahimah stunned, says not a word.)* Some people found his boat, sank. There was no sign of Dolah. *(Both of them fall into silence.)*
Rahimah, Rahimah.

(Siti Rahimah wakes up.)

SITI RAHIMAH : I'm sorry, Pak Long. *(Rahimah enters her room for a moment, and exits with a small bag.)*

PAK LONG : What are you doing?

SITI RAHIMAH : I'm going to find Abang Dolah.

PAK LONG : Where are you going to find him?

SITI RAHIMAH : I must find him. Maybe he's in pain and needs help. I'm sure he's not lost in the sea.

PAK LONG : You're a woman, Rahimah. Furthermore, you don't know where he is.

SITI RAHIMAH : I'm a servant of Allah, Pak Long. My heart is moved to find Abang Dolah. Pray for me, Pak Long. And leave the rest to Allah.

PAK LONG : Rahimah, I don't know where you came from, and now I don't know where you're going. In the darkness of the night, rain stamping the ground, suddenly you're here. Now, the sky is

bright and beautiful, and you're leaving.
Who are you, really?

SITI RAHIMAH : I'm a traveller, Pak Long. I stopped at this village just for a while, only for a glass of water. You, Pak Long has given me a place to shelter; Abang Dolah has given me that glass of water. There'll be no more rain. (*Pak Long wipes his eyes.*) Pak Long, I'm sorry and thank you for everything you're done for me. Just pray for my safety. (*Siti Rahimah kisses Pak Long's hand and exits.*)

PAK LONG : Who are you, my child? Who? (*After a while.*) O God, Most Knowledgeable. Help both of them, O God. Only to You I turn my prayers.

(*Two persons are holding hands; they have sacks behind their backs. Holding canes they walk across the stage. One holds a lamp. Wind breezes through their garments. They are travellers on a journey.*)

TRAVELLER I : Prepare yourself in your journey
Isyak time is coming
Pray for blessings from Allah
With *Bismillah*, knock at the door.

TRAVELLER II : Pray for blessings from Allah
With *Bismillah*, knock at the door.

TRAVELLER I : When Israfil blows the trumpet
In *zikir* we stand
Hopefully, you're prepared for the
Hereafter
Ready to accept *Qada* and *Qadar*
Don't walk alone and empty

Do something for yourself
And serve the Lord
Of holy wars, there are many kinds.

TRAVELLER II : Benefit your religion
Of holy wars there are many kinds.
(*In the blowing of the wind, they exit.*)

XXIV

(*Siti Rahimah is seen at the shore, throwing flowers when the waves sweep the shore. There is the faint and soft sounds of the waves. The girls are throwing flowers.*)

NARRATOR : (*Singing - the lyrics can be rhymed in group, duet, and Siti Rahimah, et cetera.*)

So it is said
When the sun is almost set
You can see her
When the afterglow turns amber
You can see her
The melancholy breeze
Causes ripples
At the water's edge
You can see her

So it is said
She's been standing there
A hundred years
Indeed, a hundred years
No one has heard her voice
A hundred years
No one has seen her face
A hundred years
Is she so disfigured?

So it is said
Not a fisherman

Dares greet her
The wise elders prohibit
Anyone approaching her
Passers-by, be warned
Say your prayers
Lest you too
Be like afflicted

Siti Rahimah is not unclean
Yet she veils herself
In search of Dolah
Siti sets off

(Siti stands up.)

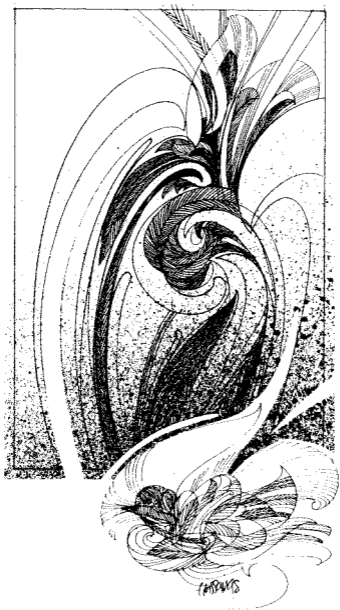
Still covering herself

(Siti starts walking out slowly.)

Dolah helps to decorate the mosque
Towards the House of God
Walks Siti in her veil.

(Music – sad.)

Translated by Faizal Yamimi Mustaffa & Ashfaq Ali





Abdullah Hussain

ABDULLAH HUSSAIN (1920 -), a writer, culturalist and political activist. He was born on 25 March 1920 in Sungai Limau, Yan, Kedah. In his writings, he uses a variety of pseudonyms, amongst them Iskandar Muda, Roslan Ashikin, Suryakanta and Zamroed. Abdullah received his early education at the *Sekolah Melayu Sungai Limau*, Yan, where he studied between 1927 and 1932 until Standard Five. In 1932, he enrolled at St. Michael's School, Alor Star, then moved on to Anglo-Chinese School, and was there until he completed his Standard Seven in 1937. During the Japanese Occupation, Abdullah who was in Aceh was sent to Singapore for three months to study at Syonan Koa Kunrenzo.

Abdullah did not get very far in his formal schooling as his secondary education was interrupted by numerous problems. However, he has a rich and wide experience in the fields of publishing, writing and voluntary work, and was involved in the struggle for the country's independence. Abdullah began working as assistant store clerk at the Ayer Hangat Tin Mines, Bentong, Pahang, in 1939. However, he did not stay long in this job as he contracted malaria and in 1940, left for Penang to work as assistant editor of the newspaper *Saudara*. Several months before the Pacific War broke out in 1941, he obtained a position at the Bakar Arang British Military Camp, Sungai Petani, Kedah. Abdullah became a member of the *Fujiwara Kikau* and found

his way into Sumatra before the Japanese army landed. He tried various occupations between 1942 and 1947; a *Gunseikanbu* clerk, Kotaraja (1942), a *Bunsebu* chief clerk, Langsa (1942), a *keibuho Gunseibu*, Langsa (1944), *Keisatsutyo*, Langsa (1944), *wedana*, *kedewanaan* Langsa (1945), representative of the *Ketua Penyelidik Aliran Masyarakat* (PAM) Police Headquarters, Aceh (1947) and Chief Police of Sabang (1947).

Later in 1948, he returned to Penang and this time worked as manager of the Cordova Trading Company. A year later, he became the manager of the Atjeh Trading Co. Ltd. in Phuket, Thailand, and in 1949, managing partner of South-Eastern Agency, Penang. In 1950, Abdullah left for Indonesia to run the magazine, *Puspa*, and to work as a freelance reporter. After several months in Jakarta, he returned to Aceh and not long after moved to Singapore.

In the 1950s, Abdullah resided in Singapore and got involved in the filming industry as well as journalism. In 1951, he was employed as a reporter of the newspapers *Merdeka*, *Berita Indonesia* and *Majalah Merdeka* (Jakarta) in Singapore. In 1952, he held the position of manager, Empiric Film Company and manager of an import-export firm, Hasbar & Company. Starting from 1955, he began to involve himself in magazine publishing and was appointed editor of the magazine *Bintang*. In 1957, he became editor of the magazine *Film* and *Mingguan Warta Masyarakat*. A year later, he was engaged as editor of the newspaper *Semenanjung*. In 1960, he became the manager of P. Ramlee Publications and editor of the magazine *Gelombang Film*.

In January 1961, Abdullah moved to Kuala Lumpur and worked as assistant senior editor at the Oxford University Press until December 1964. Subsequently, he was employed as editor of Franklin Book Programs-cum-editor of the magazine *Angkatan Baru*, and between March 1963 and 10 April 1978, he obtained the position of research officer at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP). He was transferred to

DBP, Sabah Branch, in Kota Kinabalu where he was made Head of the Language and Literary Unit. After his retirement, Abdullah became the Resident Writer of the Centre for Humanities, University of Science Malaysia, Penang, for two years (15 October 1979 to 15 October 1981). As Resident Writer he succeeded in publishing his autobiography, *Sebuah Perjumpaan*, in 1984. On 30 June 1982, Abdullah took up the post of Head of the Department of Language and Literary Development, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei, while looking after two magazines, *Bahana* and *Mekar*, until 2 October 1992.

Abdullah has an exceptionally wide experience and involvement in the fields of writing and publishing. Between 1939 and 1988, he was assistant editor, editor and chief editor of no less than 20 newspapers and magazines in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam. Apart from having a lot of experience in a variety of fields, Abdullah's involvement in numerous societies, political organizations and communal activities cannot be equalled by any other Malaysian writer.

From 1940 till 1941, Abdullah became a member and Head of *Kumpulan Sahabat* in Penang. When the Japanese landed in Malaya in 1941, he was enlisted as a member of the *Fujiwara Kikan*. He was also involved in politics and was made a committee member of the *Angkatan Muda Indonesia* (AMI) for the District of Aceh in 1945. Two years later, he was appointed Leader of *Partai Sosialis Indonesia* (St. Sjahrir) for the province of Aceh.

When he moved to Singapore, he joined the *ASAS 50* and became its treasurer between 1957 and 1960. At the same time, he helped establish *Persatuan Wartawan Melayu Singapura* and became one of its committee members. He was at one time *Ketua Dua* (1977-1978) and committee member of *Persatuan Penulis Nasional* (PENA). For five years Abdullah became President of *Persatuan Iskandar Sani* which later changed its name to *Aceh Sepakat*. He was the treasurer of *Gabungan Persatuan Penulis*

Nasional (GAPENA) between 1972 and 1978. Abdullah was appointed Secretary of the Panel for the Literary Prize (1976) and was one of the founders of Malaysian Translators Association which was established in April 1978. For ten years between 1982 and 1993, he was advisor of *Persatuan Kebajikan Melayu Malaysia* in Brunei and between 1993 and 1994 Guest Writer of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. He won prizes in several writing competitions and was conferred the S.E.A. Write Awards in 1981.

Although Abdullah was actively involved in many fields, he is better known and more prominent as a creative writer, specifically a writer of short stories and novels. His writing career began before the Second World War. His anthology of poems titled *Menanti Kekasih*, which was published in 1948, is the earliest collection of Malay poems to be published in the Romanised alphabet. Abdullah has succeeded in translating nine novels by overseas writers, two books for general reading and 21 foreign short stories, all of which have been published.

Translated by Nor Azizah Abu Bakar

LIST OF WORKS

Novels

1. *Aku Tidak Minta*. Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 1967.
2. *Amin Pemuda Desa*. Penang: Angkatan Muda, 1947.
3. *Berenang di Lautan Madu*. Singapore: Geliga Limited, 1957.
4. *Buih di Atas Air*. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn. Bhd., 1980.
5. *Dia ... Kekasihku*. Johor Bahru: The Annies Printing Works, 1941.
6. *Imam*. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn. Bhd., 1995.
7. *Intan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1973.
8. *Interlok*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1973.
9. *Janganlah, Jangan ...!* Kuala Lumpur: Angkatan Baru, 1965.
10. *Kalau Tidak Kerana Tuan*. Singapore: Geliga Limited, 1957.
11. *Kasih Isteri*. Johor Bahru: The Annies Printing Works, 1941.
12. *Kuala Lumpur Kita Punya*. Kuala Lumpur: Syarikat Karyawan, 1978.
13. *Konserto Terakhir*. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn Bhd., 1980.
14. *Masuk ke Dalam Cahaya*. Kuala Terengganu: Yayasan Islam Terengganu, 1983.
15. *Noni*. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn. Bhd., 1976.
16. *Peristiwa*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1965.
17. *Peristiwa Kemerdekaan di Aceh*. Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1989.

18. *Rantau Selamat*. Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 1966.
19. *Terjebak*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1964.

Translations

1. *Angin Timur, Angin Barat* (Pearl S. Buck). Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1964.
2. *Bumi Bertuah*, (Pearl S. Buck). Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1962.
3. *Isabella* (Maulana Saeed Dehlvi). Shah Alam: Marwilis Publisher, 1988.
4. *Kuda Merah* (John Steinbeck). Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1964.
5. *Lorong Miday* (Naquib Mahfouz). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984.
6. *Mutiara* (John Steinbeck). Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1957.
7. *Orang Tua Dengan Laut* (Earnest Hemingway). Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1961.
8. *Pelayaran Gulliver* (Jonathan Swift). Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

Short Stories

1. *Cahaya Langit*. Johor Bahru: Penamas, 1987.
2. *Kota ke Kota*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1978.
3. *Sebuah Pekan Bernama Semporna*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1982.

Anthology

1. *Bunga Gunung*. Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, 1982.
2. *Cerpen-Cerpen Asean: Filipina, Indonesia, Malaysia*,

Singapura, Thailand. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1978.

3. *Dongeng Merdeka.* Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1985.
4. *Hadiah.* Kuala Lumpur: Fargoes, 1974.
5. *Hadiah: Antologi Cerpen Pilihan 1966-1970.* Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1967.
6. *Jejak Langkah.* Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1975.
7. *Koleksi Cerpen-Cerpen Malaysia.* Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 1977.
8. *Menunggu Ratu Adil.* Kuala Lumpur: Adabi, 1984.
9. *Sebuah Impian.* Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Pena, 1979.
10. *Tinta Pena.* Kuala Lumpur: Pena, 1981.

Autobiography

1. *Sebuah Perjalanan.* Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984.

Biography

1. *Gagak di Rimba: Suatu Kisah Hidup P. Ramlee.* Kuala Lumpur: Angkatan Baru, 1966.
2. *Harun Aminurrashid: Pembangkit Semangat Kebangsaan.* Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1982.
3. *P. Ramlee: Kisah Hidup Seniman Agung.* Kuala Lumpur: Pena, 1982.
4. *Pendita Za'ba Dalam Kenangan.* (With Khalid Hussain. Kuala Lumpur: Pena, 1974.
5. *Tun Datu Mustapha: Bapa Kemerdekaan Sabah, Sebuah Biografi.* Kota Kinabalu: Yayasan Sabah, 1976.

Drama

1. *Di Atas Pentas.* Kuala Lumpur: Tra-Tra Publishing, 1984.

Poems

1. *Menanti Kekasih*. Penang: Success Book Store, 1948.

Folk Literature

1. *Bayagong dan Lain-Lain Cerita*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1982.
2. *Balabatu dan Lain-Lain Cerita Rakyat Sabah*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1980.

Proverbs

1. *Kamus Istimewa Peribahasa Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1965.
2. *Kamus Simpulan Bahasa*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1990.

General Reading

1. *Bunga Rampai Sastera Melayu Brunei*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984.
2. *Pembimbing Surat Menyurat*. Johor Bahru: Penamas, 1970.
3. *Penulisan Cerpen: Kacitah dan Pengalaman*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1980.

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Religion Can Help Strengthen One's Religious Belief

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful
Read in the name of thy sustainer, who has created
Created man out of a germ - cell!
Read - for thy sustainer is the Most Bountiful One
Who has taught (man) the use of the pen
taught man what he did not know!

Al-Quran IXVI: 1-5

Praise be to Allah, for with his Blessings and Consent, I am able to be here tonight at Dewan Nirwana, Hilton for an award - presentation ceremony - the highest achievement given in the literary field. I would like to extend my good wishes and thanks to the Malaysian government for this great honour. At this moment in time, my mind travels back to the days sixty years ago when both my parents were clearly apprehensive that I was more inclined towards the field of writing. Their anxiety nonetheless propelled me to where I am today - hence, my presence here tonight. Sixty years ago the writing profession was not an encouraging, or even a lucrative field, whether indulged in part-time or full-time. At that time a writer

could not be assured of reaping a good harvest for his toils; on the other hand, the endeavour could bring bad luck either to him or to his family. Creative writing, or for that matter any other kinds of writing contained comments, opinions, criticisms, or even protests. No one like to be criticized, whether the criticism was well-meaning or otherwise. Criticisms aimed at, or pointed to an individual, a government agency, or a private institution would infallibly invite unwanted repercussions. To prevent such a thing happening, many writers wrote under a pen-name. They felt more comfortable concealed under an assumed personality.

I don't know why I chose writing as my profession. At that time it didn't cross my mind that I would persevere until today. But all is written in the will of Allah; little by little, the love for writing crept upon me and I could not shake it off! I tried my hands in all kinds of work, but it finally dawned upon me that writing is my calling. Writing is like an obsession that cannot be ignored.

Once upon a time, the field of writing was full of stumbling blocks; it was not a glamorous profession; it was also not something that you could be proud of, unlike the situation that it is today. The writing profession, likened to a flame, attracting a lot of moths towards it, is full of pitfalls; you can get into trouble not only with the colonial power, but also with the society around you, people who were not intellectually ready; and finally you can also get into trouble with your family and your own dear self. At that time (sixty years ago) writers were actually teachers in Malay schools, and students who had completed their schooling at religious schools and the *pondok*. Writers who were somewhat professional were the Indonesians who had migrated into this country either in search of a wider field in which to spread their ideology, or to escape the political pressures of the Indo-Dutch Occupation.

At that time the lives of the people in this country were not as complex as they are today. The society was a large

social unit then. The values highly regarded in society were religion, good upbringing and customs. Thus, in a big social unit, familiar ties were strong such that there existed an invisible string that controlled the members in society. Children were not only the responsibility of the parents who brought them up, but also the responsibility of the large extended family in society. Any member in society who went against the existing norms were unduly reprimanded. More so were behavioural taboos such as those acts that could bring humiliation upon the entire family. Whatever happened, especially those act which violated the morality at the time would immediately be noted. As the way of life then was not very complex, creative writers did not have many themes to choose from. Themes relating to differences in social classes or forced marriages were popular, and were regarded as local commodities, which could sell well. Even writers who were professionally teachers, (like graduates of the Sultan Idris Teachers' Training College, Tanjung Malim, in whom their nationalistic teachers had instilled a sense of nationalism), or even writers who graduated from the religious schools and the *pondok* system (who were thus exposed to the Islamic reformation writings of writers like Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Muhammad Rasyid Redha) still were not able to move away from themes of forced marriages and social differences in their short stories and novels. These themes were interwoven into stereotyped juvenile love stories in the forms of didactic advice. Themes pertaining to religion and nationalism slowly appeared in *Hikayat Faridah Hanum* written by Syed Sheikh al-Iladi, one of the pioneer Islamic reformist, and *Hikayat Dzul-Ruhain* translated by A. Rahim Kajai. Other adaptations include themes which were imported from outside the country especially from Egypt. This was done so as not to attract the attention of the colonial government at that time. Two years after the publication of *Hikayat Faridah Hanum*, a writer, born and bred in Penang, wrote a novel entitled *Kawan Benar*. He

was the first writer to use a local background in his writings. Later he went on to "shock" the readers with another theme in the novel *Iakah Salmah?* through the character, Salmah, a Malay girl, who was studying in an English School. Ahmad Rashid tried to introduce the emancipation of women, i.e. women who tried to dispose of their traditional values, namely that Malay girls are submissive and diffident. Through her acts which were then considered taboos, Salmah tried to change the way the Malays think. The publication of *Iakah Salmah?* brought about a change in the direction for Malay novels. Henceforth themes slowly developed and changed with the times.

The development in writing poetry was rather slow. Writers at that time were more interested in the writing of lengthy *pantuns*, *syair*, *gurindam* and *seloka* (different types of Malay poems) with a variety of themes ranging from love, humour, beauty of the homeland and advice. Modern poems first appeared during the Japanese Occupation when the Malay peninsula, including Singapore, were united with Sumatra under the same administrative rule of the Japanese. Indonesian writers from Sumatra who moved to Singapore brought with them the *Aliran Angkatan Pujangga Baru* in their *sajak* writings. After the end of World War II, this group of writers was replaced by the *Angkatan 45*, pioneered by Chairil Anwar.

In the beginning, when I first got involved in the world of writing, I was like an angry young man with no clear concept or direction; my only wish was to write and publish anything in magazines, papers or books and feel very happy about it all. Later, it became clear to me that there was truth in the saying by Kamal Ataturk, (leader of the young Turkish) who said that the pen is mightier than the sword. The mighty pen of Ishak Haji Muhammad in his essays, short stories and novel *Puteri Gunung Tahan* and *Anak Mat Lela Gila* left an indelible and profound effect on me. It enhanced nationalistic feelings in me; these gave birth to new directions in the aims for living and political

leanings through writing.

Before Ishak Haji Muhammad there were a few other English-educated Malay writers, but their presence were not obvious. Ishak was the exemplary Malay College student, from the royal prestigious college, who later became a magistrate. With works that depicted a local background and local characters, the literary direction he took was more innovative, realistic, and more aggressive. His novels *Putera Gunung Tahan* and *Anak Mat Lela Gila* brought nationalistic themes that were more intellectual, modern and fresh. Since then, a new era of Malay writings brought about by the new blood of English-educated Malay writers blossomed forth. Thus appeared Abdullah Sani Raja Kechil, A. Samad Ismail, Kassim Ahmad, A. Samad Said, Shahnnon Ahmad, Muhammad Haji Salleh, Baha Zain, and many others whose writings were more vociferous, introducing themes that were more colourful and relevant with nationalistic, political, economic, and social settings. Nonetheless, the roles played by Keris Mas, Usman Awang, Hamzah, Asraf, Mahsuri S.N., Awam-il-Sarkam, MAS and others were crucial and important. They started the *Angkatan Sastrawan '50* (ASAS 50, the Generation of 50's writers) with the slogan "Literature for the People". They became the landmark demarcating the old and the new. ASAS 50 was given the opportunity by history to mould the language and literary endeavours of that time.

Malaysia is now undergoing a massive and dynamic economic and political revolution; thus our daily needs change to suit this new transformation. Although today's needs inevitably differ from tomorrow's, the moral and cultural needs remain unchanged. In a newly country developed, norms are usually blurred. Society has difficulty in choosing the truth from the bogus, fact from falsehood. It is as if society has lost its sense of direction. Although there is no compunction in doing unworthy acts, one tends to think more of oneself, with a total disregard of the ways and means so long as the ends justify these deeds.

Thus we will be daily informed through the papers, television or radio about breaches of promises, frauds, thefts, murders, abandoned babies and even rapes of daughters by their own parents. Cases of incests such as these are strong indications of the rapid changes in the social behaviour in society. Members of society have been reduced to smaller social units. Social values that should be maintained and upheld are disregarded, and people become more individualistic. Values that encourage unity and togetherness have been neglected. Members of society do not consider themselves to be part of a bigger whole; likewise they no longer have concern for one another. Everyone looks after his own affairs, everyone thinks only of himself, everyone feels free to do whatever he wishes to do. People have lost the fine values such as sympathy, empathy, sorrow, remorse and regret. Their values have deteriorated and become callous because of materialism.

But we can never turn the clock back, we cannot stop midway. The nation must be developed. Small though we may be, we must nevertheless be strong and brave so that our voices can be heard by the world outside our own. Our actions today determine our survival tomorrow and the future of our nation. Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, our Prime Minister has laid the vision for us to follow, with a strong unity among the various races, with a strict discipline and sufficient knowledge, and with *Allah* blessing this vision can be achieved, provided there exists a balance in our personal lives – the balance between our external and internal achievements. We can probably achieve success in the materialistic world through science and technology, even earlier than the dateline 2020, but if we are not strong enough to withstand the side effects of the rat-race for materialism, we may go down into moral decadence as is happening in the developed nations of today.

We will fall before reaching our target. Human beings are idealistic creatures, who are never satisfied with all that has been achieved and who will always strive to transform

objects into something more sophisticated; to realise ideas into actualities. Progress happens very fast and sometimes we are not even ready to accept all the changes. Now we are thrown into the very sophisticated information super-highway, INTERNET, and satellite, and all these know no boundary. Five hundred years from now the world can still expect to exploit electrical energy and electromagnetic power founded by Michael Faraday and James Clark Maxwell for all kinds of scientific and technological endeavours; in the final analysis we cannot really predict what will actually happen in the future. The urgent and realistic thing that we need to do is to strengthen our emotional and psychological selves, as suggested by our Prime Minister, Dato Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. He reminded the *rakyat* to be strong morally and culturally to confront the burst of information technology, for it is beyond the governments' power to stop the flow. Information from all over the world will enter the country through INTERNET.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The meaning of the Quranic verses at the beginning of this text is "Read". *Iqra'* is the first verse brought by the divine messenger (Gabriel) to Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) thirteen years before *Hijrah*. Gabriel asked the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) who was illiterate to repeat after him. That was the beginning of worldly moral knowledge in our modern times; knowledge or direct revelation from Allah (S.W.T.) to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). The ability to read and to write are two abilities that represent a very important achievement in our human life; they enable us to obtain knowledge unknown to us. After the Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) there is no other prophet that we can refer to except for the Quran and *Hadith*. Human kind today possess great intelligence and high intellect, who can write and read. Through the *qalam*, Allah (S.W.T.) revealed to us mankind's uniqueness to transmit, through his writ-

ings, his thoughts, his experiences and his visions from one individual to another, from one generation to the next, and from one culture to another.

In verse "Asy-Syu'araa" Allah (*S.W.T.*) reveals the constant weakness of man's character and innate ability to cheat himself. Allah (*S.W.T.*) proclaims that the majority of people throughout the ages and in all communities are ever ready to turn their backs on truth, whether it be revealed truth or its moral value had been attested. Man's weakness in character makes him ever-ready to worship power, wealth, and other forms of glory; simultaneously man is ever-willing to believe all kinds of slogans, dogmas and stereotyped ways of thinking.

Generally, in the context of culture, literature is considered to be a form of expression shaped by experience. Literature presents these experiences through the medium of human language in a way that a reader can understand and empathize with. An individual could gain an extensive and enriching experience for his own benefit through his understanding of humankind by reading literary works. Literature, theatre, and art are dynamic living portraits. Literary works mirror the lives of people of a certain age; likewise they are also portrayals of man's deepest understanding about life and living. Through reading and studying the literary works of a people or race, one can get a mental picture of all the things that were thought, felt, and experienced by the race in a certain century or age. Good literary works can help refine man's behaviour and radiate superior human values. Literature can help strengthen one's belief in religion with the refining of values such as truth, frankness, sincerity, love, sympathy and solicitude.

The more involved I am in my writing, and the longer I persevere in this field, I realised that it is a divine duty to spread the revelations of Allah (*S.W.T.*). A writer fulfills a divine duty (*fardhu kifayah*.)

Unfortunately not many people value the writing profession because the status of writers in society does not

parallel with other ranks of society like politicians who have power, corporate leaders who have money, film actors and their glamour, singers with their ardent fans; or athletes with their gold medals earned in the international sports arena. Although power, money, glamour, fans may disappear anytime, and gold medals become tarnished – people nevertheless approve and value tangible material objects, which can be seen and touched. Literature is not attractive as it is abstract, and it is related to the heart and feelings, honour and prestige. None of these can assure one of good returns. The Europeans and Russians were acquainted with Malaysian civilisation and culture not because of her oil palm, rubber or at one time her tin; rather it was because of *Sejarah Melayu*, and *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. People learn about the English culture and civilisation because of Shakespeare's works; they learn about American culture and civilisation because of Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, and they know about the Russians from Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, and Boris Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*. In *The Adventure of Learning* (1608) Francis Bacon said:

“... wit and learning are more durable than the monuments of power or of the hands. For have not the verses of Homer continued twenty-five hundred years or more, without the loss of a syllable or letter; during which time infinite palaces, temples, castles, cities, have been decayed and demolished?”

The well-known Malacca Sultanate collapsed a long time ago, but people still read *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and *Sejarah Melayu*, which are still analysed and researched at national and international levels.

Praise be to Allah (S.W.T.) for the development and success of our literary field today. Although in a way its status does not equal other fields of arts in terms of popularity and audience, or sports in terms of monetary grants and moral support, there are various associations of writers and literary enthusiasts participating in various acti-

vities locally, regionally, and internationally in this unique country of ours. We are indeed honoured and grateful that with such a limited audience, the government deems it worthy to grant the highest accolade in the literary field: the National Literary Award.

Nonetheless the field of writing cannot as yet assure a writer of a livelihood, nor of a full-time job or a hobby during leisure hours, dabble in a range of jobs from labourers, housewives, teachers, policemen, army personnel, state government personnel to academician. What can we benefit from such jobs and leisure-time activities?

We cannot expect a masterpiece/magnum opus from brain and body overtaxed with weariness. We cannot ever expect a masterpiece as a candidate for the Nobel Prize.

We provide generous incentives and motivation to attract writers. We have countless contests and competitions, but it becomes an established practice or convention and the results are stereotyped. It is rather difficult to get quality work/writing when themes have been allocated in advance or a time frame has been allotted. We can witness the result today. Each time a competition was held, only the same handful of writers received the prizes. In actual fact, even before the results were announced, the literary fraternity could already predict the winners. While it is true that no one doubts the personality of the winners as they are prolific writers, why is it that their distinction can only be recognised through competitions? Can a writing contest reveal the talent of a real writer, a writer whom one hopes can one day produce a magnum opus? It is undeniable that new writers have emerged and excelled far beyond the talent of the experienced writers. Unfortunately, not many of them will continue to write. After producing a few good works these writers vanished without a trace. Writing, with the aim of winning prizes, in a competition, is like praying to God in the hope of *pahala*. Whatever forms of endeavour done in the hope of being compensated will inevitably lead to frustration.

Furthermore, competitions have a negative effect on writers who do not win any prizes in a novel-writing competition. What becomes of the manuscript when the writer has spent time and energy on it? A poorly written novel may have its weaknesses and drawbacks, but, nonetheless, the manuscript can be salvaged and published after constructive discussions and negotiations with the publisher.

As a writer myself, I feel sad and disappointed when a work on which I have spent countless hours is rejected.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this auspicious occasion I would like to suggest that literature be upgraded through a more proactive effort. I would like to propose one common award for all creative works like the Pulitzer Prize in the United States, founded by the editor and publisher Joseph Pulitzer. The award is for journalistic work, literature and music in an effort to encourage the accomplishment of a great work of art which can raise the morality and customs of traditional American values. The Booker Prize in Britain was created to acknowledge works produced, which can raise the status of writers in the eyes of the public. These two prizes and fifty-eight others in Britain are given every year to the best work written. The candidate is chosen from the many based on works that were published in the mass media or in the form of books, not from contests or competitions. This will hopefully be more challenging to the writers. A big prestigious prize can be allocated to each genre in the literary field. I would also like to propose a paradigm shift, that is, all awards for all kinds of contests and competitions from all agencies or institutions, whether government or private, be grouped in one single fund. The donor's name for each category should be included. With such a big reserve, we can establish a permanent panel to evaluate all works, and thus, choose the most suitable for final evaluation. This proposal was originally put forward by the late

Dato' Hussein Onn, our third Prime Minister in his speech on 11 November 1977 when the national literary prize was to be discontinued.

Translated by Fudilah Jasmani

Surrender*

HE was overcome with joy upon receiving the letter from his comrade.

He stood in front of the mosque, his back to the cinema across the street, watching the men who shaped the *mihrab*, carving it from out the rock which formed the wall of the original building, curved as the arch of a Moorish window, as his comrade stepped off the bus which had brought him from Rantau. He didn't pay any particular attention to the vehicle - in the small village of Kota Langsa, they stopped anywhere, disgorging their passengers willy-nilly. A sweeping glance, and his gaze returned to the workmen who carved the *mihrab* from the outside, lovingly shaping it into a thing of beauty. It was the domain of the *imam*, who led the prayer, and it was only fitting that this place of honour should be fair to look upon, within and without. He had to be sure, though, that it did not exceed the bounds of good taste by becoming ostentatious, mode-

* First published in the anthology *Seulawah* with the title "Pertemuan di Langsa" ("Meeting in Langsa").

ration, that's what it should embody, moderation in all things....

"Peace be upon you!"

Startled, he whirled in the direction whence came the voice - a voice he knew well. Ten years had brought little change in his comrade; a little fuller, perhaps, but that was all. He recognised him instantly, and eagerly grasped the hand held out to him.

"And upon you, peace!"

They embraced, each pressing his lips to the other's temples.

Ten years. Ten years had passed, and it seemed the Will of God that they should meet but once in ten years.

He didn't know if his comrade was aware of the passing of his wife, one year ago; or of the loss of his eldest child ... his eyes blurred.

The December rain had fallen heavily that night, huge drops hammering the thatched roof, the wind dashing itself against the walls, the noise muffling the ringing of the telephone in the parlour. The house had been sunk in slumber; the rain which fell in sheets, the ferocious roar of the wind, the biting air, had made bed the safest place to be. He had been tormented by a fear he couldn't identify, which had mounted with the departure of his eldest son, who was returning to the pineapple plantation, some 200 kilometres away; he had begun there, as an engineer, upon completing his studies, and had been there two years. He had left the house under lowering skies, his father attempting to calm himself by counting his beads in remembrance of God, repeating His name and seeking His forgiveness for his sins.

As the rain had lessened, the ringing of the telephone had become increasingly insistent, as though pleading for someone to lift the receiver. He had been about to rise, but his daughter in the next room had been swifter; he sat on his bed, waiting.

"Father!" Panic in her voice. "Father!"

He was beside her, lunging for the telephone, "Hello! Hello!"

The rain, pelting down with renewed vigour, obscured the voice at the other end.

"Hello! Hello!" Faintly, as though from far away, it reached him through the steady roar; perhaps it was raining over there, too.

"Yes?" he shouted. "Who is it? What's the matter?"

"Hello!" More clearly, then, he heard the uncertainty in the tone.

"Yes!"

His son, and the friend who had been travelling with him, had met with an accident, said the voice; their jeep had plunged into a river hard by the pineapple plantation.

"How are they ... their condition?"

They had not been able to save them, the voice told him; the current had been strong, the river swelled by the rain falling relentlessly all evening, answered the voice. They had been pulled inexorably downstream.

Two months later, his wife had followed their son. He wiped his eyes on the edge of his sleeve.

When his son was little, his comrade had loved to dandle him on his knee during his visits; his son had been tremendously fond of this uncle who spoiled him so. Theirs was more than an ordinary friendship; they were brothers, almost. In the days, long past, of political upheaval, they had lived under the same roof. He had been childless at the time, and had sent his wife to the country for safety. He and his comrade, who had likewise thought it safer to send his wife to her parents' for a time, had stayed at the Information Centre, which had been turned into a makeshift dormitory, and housed several other young idealists besides themselves.

He smiled.

They were of an age, he and this dear friend; his comrade, however, and the other boys of their age with whom they were acquainted, did not observe the daily prayer.

They affected not to hear the call, which sounded five times each day, of the muezzin. He had attended the village school, and had from there continued his education at a religious institution, his parents hoping to see him discover a vocation for the religious teaching which had become a tradition in his family - his grandfather, and his own father after him, had been religious teachers. Upon the completion of his formal religious education, he had been sent to Minangkabau, in Indonesia, to the Muslim College of Padang. The Second World War had interrupted his studies; he had returned to the village before the coming of the Japanese, and had been wedded to his cousin, daughter of an uncle who traded cloth in Langsa.

His comrade would come, he assured himself. He would stop on his way home from the Third Cultural Convention in Aceh. He had made his daughter write a letter to his comrade, informing him of his condition.

At their last meeting, ten years ago, he had brought his comrade and a group of their friends to the rubber and pepper plantations he owned. As a youth, his interest in farming had been aroused, to the chagrin of his in-laws, who had wished him to trade. His father-in-law, though a pious man, had demonstrated a canny gift for trading, and, in time, had acquired a large textile establishment. He had been his father-in-law's apprentice, but, in his heart of hearts, had nursed a secret fascination for tiling the land and tending the growing shoots his green fingers coaxed lovingly from out the generous earth. The village of his birth had been surrounded by rice plantations, and his earliest memories were of the plant, a startling emerald green, gently undulating and rustling softly in the tender breeze, stretching as far as the eye could see and fading to blue and then to purple in the distance, the horizon seeming to melt into the sky. Before the classroom claimed him, his parents were wont to bring him with them to the fields, and while they busied themselves at the weeding, he followed behind, perched atop the broad haunches of the faithful workhorse,

the water-buffalo, which dragged a roller to flatten the cut grass for fertilizer; the roller often ran over a few plump specimens of the small fish of the rice paddies, stunning them; and the young boy astride the buffalo eagerly appropriated all these. When the day was done, his shirt and shorts, and yes, often his face, too, were liberally splattered with mud. Yet how he loved the intoxicating smell of fresh-cut grass! The harvest was his favourite time of year, when he and his parents took themselves off the fields, he tiring himself out chasing grasshoppers, then flinging himself down in the comparative shade of the watcher's hut to await the noon meal. Although he worked less than any, he ate more than most! On occasion, he fell asleep amid the tall, friendly stalks of rice, waking, giggling, to his parents' flustered calls that it was time to go home....

Perhaps because of these youthful memories, he found himself drawn towards growing things, seeing the wondrous bounty with which God had, in His compassion and munificence, endowed nature. Living now in the city, only rarely returning to the village, his interest was piqued by gardening, and in this he was encouraged by several of the friends who traded in the city, who urged him to make an offer for land on which to farm. The government, which had but just emerged, bloodied but victorious, from the rolling cauldron of revolution, had been eager to oblige with plots of untouched forest, anxious that the country progress economically; it was surely in need of raw materials to bolster the foreign credit it intended to establish.

His rubber plants had matured, as had his pepper, which twined boisterously along its wooden frames; higher and higher it climbed, resembling from afar the beauty of a stand of pine in a park. His comrade had last seen them as seedlings, the rubber but knee-high. He had brought his comrade and their friends to admire the progress which had been made since last they saw his little plantation; they had entered the forest often, for his comrade had loved to see things grow, to walk amid the dense foliage which car-

peted the forest floor, listening to the excited twitter of birds in the wild. Atop the summit of a small hillock which crowned his lands, he had built a watcher's hut, from which stretched a vista of unsurpassed beauty, green until it met the thin blue line of the Straits of Malacca in the west, while out of the east loomed the blue immensity of Bukit Barisan.

He had given instructions to his daughter that his friends of bygone days, all who yet remained in the city, should be told of the coming of his comrade; the comrade who was their comrade, too. They were invited to his house on that day, and he would tell his comrade of those of their friends who yet lived. Sad it was that Datuk, who had lived at the end of the road, had passed away just the month before. Truly, time waited for none....

His forehead creased in concentration, and he recalled the meaning of the first line of a chapter of the Holy Quran, the chapter known as "Al-Asyr" - 'In the name of Time, verily is man in a state of loss.' He was deeply disturbed, remembering; his mind raced. He had urged his friends at the Information Centre to accompany him in performing the daily prayers, and they had answered.

"But we have no clothes in which to pray!"

It was true. During the Japanese Occupation, cloth, which was imported from India, was extremely scarce; but for his comrade, all their friends wore the most pitiful rags imaginable, of an indeterminate colour, long since faded to an unrecognizable uniformity, which served but to ensure that the bounds of decency and propriety were observed, and their bodies decently clad - just! Patches abounded, for, in such times, men prefer rice to cloth; new trousers could wait, but an empty belly will not be denied!

Upon the declaration of independence, aside from the obligatory anti-imperialist slogans, the leaders of the fledgling nation were wont to promise that "In our sovereign nation, when the political situation has stabilized and the

economy is assured, the people shall have food and clothing!"

He could have said that a sarong is not essential to the performance of prayer, that trousers were sufficient, if they covered the most important areas; but he held his peace. The shirts and trousers they wore were never changed, and when they were absent for a time from the Information Centre, he knew they had returned home to wash their clothes.

One evening, he had returned to the Information Centre with a small package tucked under his arm. He had rummaged about in the storeroom of his father-in-law's shop, and had found several torn sarong. How on earth had they been torn, he wondered, and why had no one spotted them during the Japanese Occupation?

"Praise be to God," he said slowly.

With a few remnants of cloth, he had patched the rents in the garments, smiling the while; upon his return, he placed the package triumphantly upon the coffee-table, declaiming in dramatic tones, "Gather round! Gather round, all!" and was speedily surrounded.

"What is it?"

"Open it and see!"

"Sarong?" they echoed each other, the single word reverberating gleefully.

"For whom?" Achmid, plump and fair, with peach fuzz above the lip.

"For each of you, to wear to the daily prayer," he answered.

"For us?" This from Toraja Abdullah, a young writer of Indian descent, tall and slender.

"Take one each."

Hands outstretched, they halted as Yusuf, who had held himself aloof, asked, "How much did they cost?"

Yusuf, gangly and long-necked, monitored the radio at the Information Centre.

"They come cheap. You shall gain, not lose, in the

paying of them," he answered mysteriously.

They looked at him quizzically, eaten up with curiosity, impatient, the unanswered question in their eyes.

"How?" asked Achmid.

"With the takings from our drama?"

Achmid was the playwright of the Information Centre. He had grinned in delicious anticipation.

Now, automatically, he swivelled to gaze at the wall to his left, where hung a group photograph, taken during the staging of one of their plays; they had use the profit's from this to send five from amongst them to the Gajah Mada University in Jogjakarta.

Achmid stood to the right, hands behind his back; now in Jakarta, he had not once returned. Marsita behind him must now be a grandmother. In their plays of yesteryear, she had always played the female lead. Where was she now, he wondered. Alimuddin had passed away in Jakarta two years ago, and Matrisyad, too, whose children had all made successes of themselves. Usman had promised to visit when his comrade arrived, his comrade who was the only one amongst them from far afield, from the Land across the Straits. Between Toraja and Salleh peeped Datuk; Baharum, the mischievous one, had long since moved to Jakarta.

"No, not with the money from the drama," he had answered their inquisition on that day so long ago. "You shall pay for the sarong by praying five times daily, without missing a single prayer."

"Golly! That'll be difficult!" said Salleh, taken by surprise.

"Not if you're sincere," he countered quickly.

"But if don't know how to pray!" wailed Toraja.

"Beginning tonight, we'll all learn; after supper, we'll meet in the library," he said lightly; he meant what he said, though, and they knew it.

As a boy, he had been taught his prayers by his parents. Praise be to God, the habit had grown upon him until, as an adult, he continued to prostrate himself daily,

no matter in what condition he found himself. While living at the dormitory, if he were unable to attend the evening, night, and dawn prayers at the mosque, he would perform them alone in his room. His friends looked with indulgence upon this industry and piety, but evinced no inclination to join him. After receiving their sarong, however, the boarders of the Information Centre blossomed into a small group of devout young men, Toraja acting as muezzin, sounding the call to prayers. His dark skin reminded them all of Bilal, the muezzin of the Prophet of Islam (p.b.u.h.).

In two week, God willing his comrade would arrive; he had asked that Junid send his wife over to help with the cooking, for his comrade must fortify himself with a meal before resuming his journey.

Upon his comrade's previous visit, he had accompanied him to Medan, to send him on his way. Now, though, he could not attempt such a trip... The thought saddened him.

He instructed his youngest, who was on holiday from the IAIN in Medan, to fetch the radio from his room; he placed it on the bookcase, a cassette beside it - the recording of the Governor's address on the occasion of his visit to the area, and of his own speech of welcome.

"Listen to this!" he had told his comrade excitedly upon his last visit; in his welcoming speech, he had told of the raising of the flag and the proclamation of Independence in their city, and had several times mentioned the name of his comrade.

"And this is the Governor's reply."

He had seen his dear friend, upon hearing the two speeches, bow his head, touched.

They had never forgotten that day. On that morning, after the dawn prayer, they had scattered throughout the village which encircled the city, urging its inhabitants to gather in the square in front of the railway station, for there was to be a Declaration of Independence; the country was

free! He had not returned home, but had made his way straight to the square. In the gunmetal light of the false dawn, the villagers had thronged to the centre of town, by the railway station, more and still more of them, until by eight o'clock they had swelled to such numbers that they spilled out into the road.

The *Seinendan*, a youthful brigade formed by the Japanese for use in times of war, now turned its back on its former master, becoming the backbone of Indonesian independence. He, too, had become an active member of the brigade. Consternation then spread amongst that vast gathering, for they had not realized the square had been denuded of its flagpoles, which had stood, proud and tall, during the occupation. From the taller had flown the *Hinomaru*, and from the other, the Red-and-White had fluttered gaily; Indonesia had been promised independence, but as long as this freedom did not in reality exist, the twin flags of Imperial Japan were daily unfurled and run up the flagpoles. Now these massive pillars were gone, stolen for firewood, or for beams to shore up a house. The crown had gathered there out of habit.

Of a sudden, a bright idea struck him: "Let's just move to the park," he suggested to his friend, and there, beside a tiny fountain, stood an unused flagpole, legacy - as were the park and the fountain - of the Dutch in Indonesia. Slowly, the shout was taken up: "The park! Move to the park!"

The park was actually situated just behind them, across the road from the railway station, so they didn't have far to walk; had they turned in a body, like a regiment on parade, they would have been facing the flagpole. There were so many of them, though, that they became infected with the irrationality of the herd, and milled about aimlessly, until, hearing the order to head for the park, they streamed towards the little fountain by the post, filling the small park to bursting and prolonging the confusion!

More confusion and consternation attended the arrival

of the Deputy Resident, and a commotion ensued with the raising of the flag. It had been stitched by Japanese hands, for use during the signing of the Declaration; it had been kept by his comrade, and fortunately, too, for red cloth was then scarce. The *Sang Saka* which had been flown before the auditorium of Eastern Bronze on the occasion of the Jakarta Proclamation had, it was said, been made the same night by Fatmawati, and had been kept as a relic. But the flag which fluttered above the little fountain, what had become of it now?

As the flag was run up the pole, a hush descended upon that vast multitude; a silence so profound, it was as though a giant hand had been clapped over their mouths.

"Wait!"

As a bolt of lighting from a clear sky, the voice rang out, shattering the stillness and deafening the company; a thousand heads turned as one, seeking the owner of the voice; it belonged to Khalil, who was known to all as Sandung.

"Before the flag is unfurled, we demand proof of Indonesia's independence!" he said loudly, suddenly catapulted into the role of representative of the multitude.

"Yes," they nodded, "yes, that is so."

"Yes," the whisper went round, and the chaos began anew.

"Anyone can say Indonesia is independent," declared Sandung with renewed vigour, sensing the support of the crowd.

He had looked at his comrade standing beside him. Was there any proof they could give? He himself had received the news at dawn, roused from his sleep. Sandung, or Khalil, was a force to be reckoned with in town, for he had influence; a warrior, a freedom-fighter, a rebel, he was an outcast of Digoel. Despite his slight build and normally self-effacing mien, he was possessed of an inner core of steel. He was but newly returned to the village, having arrive soon after the coming of the Japanese.

His comrade strode up to the dry bowl of the fountain and stepped up onto it.

"We can give you no proof, for we have none," he said calmly. "We heard the news on the radio, the three of us." And he beckoned the other two to him. "Here we are, for you to see; you know us well. For the moment, until tonight when we hear further news on the radio, we shall be witnesses before you!"

A mighty cheer went up, drowning out the voice of Sandung; later, he told us he had answered us thus: "We accept your explanation with gladness in our hearts; we believe, for you are true witnesses."

Thank God, all had run smoothly. The flag was run up the staff to the strains of 'Indonesia Raya', which swelled from a thousand throats rusty with disuse. He thought suddenly of Van Mook in Australia, waiting to come to Indonesia as Holland's Governor-General. Did his ears catch the prophetic strains of 'Indonesia Raya' sung so far away, heralding a new age?

That is what he had told the Governor in his speech.

He had seen the emotion his words caused in his comrade; his heart leapt with happiness. And he had told, instead, of the village, of its industry; he had bitterly regretted not being able to show his comrade his orchard, which had begun to bear fruit. Why, he himself had yet to see it, all had been under the solicitous eye of his son. Of their acquaintances who yet lived, many had moved to Jakarta or Medan, first to start new businesses, and later seduced by the fast paced, exciting bustle of big city life, until, if they returned to Langsa, they were made restless by the unchanging lassitude, the soporific quality, of existence there. They rarely returned.

The longed-for day drew ever closer, and he began to be anxious, afraid.

He woke to a drizzle, beneath a slate-grey sky; it had rained remorselessly since the night before, and he had been kept awake by the rattle of drops on the thatched

roof. His heart constricted – how would his comrade react upon seeing what he had become? Would he accept him? He felt like screaming, sometimes, filling his lungs and screaming as loudly as he could, to rid himself of the lump in his throat, the icy fear in his heart; but that would be sinful. He could not gainsay fate, and would not fall prey to the evil whisperings and temptations of the Devil. He would not surrender to prolonged self-pity either, for that would be tantamount to losing all hope. God was Omniscient and All-Powerful, and he would meet whatever destiny had been written for him.

Suddenly he was in tears, keening so piteously that his wife stirred beside him.

"What is it?" she asked sleepily, only half-awake.

"Nothing," he said, or meant to say. Garbled sounds issued from his throat, and his wife leaned close, uncomprehending. Something was wrong, but what?

"Are you ill?"

Her husband shook his head and gestured with his right hand, signaling her to go back to sleep. But the fears which had plagued her for the past month and more filled her mind, and she was not appeased. She lay in the darkness, eyes wide, alert, tasting her loneliness like a living thing in her mouth.

The shrill ring of the telephone, indecently loud, split the stillness of the night and the servant lifted the receiver; "Hello?" her voice, muffled by the wall which stood between them, "Wait a moment."

She knock on the door. "Sir, there's a call for you."

It must be his comrade. Oh, why did he ask to speak to me? He wondered in despair. His wife, rising, turned on the light and gazed at him beseechingly for guidance. All of a sudden, he felt like weeping, but controlled himself to gesture to his wife to answer the telephone.

"Hello?" He craned his neck, leaning forward to catch her words, which floated to him through the open door. "The master? Oh, he can't talk now – he's ill."

She reentered their room to inform him. "They'll be here any minute; they're already in town."

Her words caused a mighty tumult within his breast; his heart thumped against his ribs, and he signalled to her, that he could swiftly bathe and dress, instructing her to fetch the shirt and sarong which had been laid out many days ago, just for this occasion. They would be here within minutes. They were already here. They must've arrived last night. Why hadn't they come straight to the house? Perhaps they'd arrived too late at night. Where had they been staying? His wife should've asked where they were; then he'd have been able to calculate how long it'd take them to arrive.

"Hurry!" he begged her anxiously. "hurry!"

His wife became slightly flustered at all the rush, and he asked her to go to the kitchen to prepare a meal. They probably haven't eaten yet, he thought to himself, as his eyes were drawn towards the clock on the wall. Even if they had already supped, he wished them to eat again with him, and again at luncheon. They had too much to talk about, so much to catch up on, he thought, there must be enough time to ready a worthy repast. He no longer remembered his comrade's favourite food, although he recalled that they had been wont to sally forth, of a morning, in search of it.

As he was shrugging into his shirt with the help of his wife, he heard the crunch of gravel outside as a heavy vehicle was gunned through the gates and up the driveway; a car door slammed – his comrade, doubtless, who must now be heading for the stairs. In a few second, he would be at the door.... He hurried out to greet him.

"Peace Be Upon Thee!"

His comrade stood framed in the doorway, erect as of old; at the sight of him, this dear friend stood transfixed, but, faster than he could think, his comrade launched himself at him, bending to fling his arms about his shoulders in a fiercely affectionate bear-hug. The suddenness of it all

was his undoing, and, dazed he sobbed piteously as a child.

"Praise be to God," he choked, "that we meet again!"

He knew his comrade couldn't possibly understand his words; for the past month, he had been capable only of sounds, but not of the words and vocal gymnastics taken for granted by most people.

Releasing him, his comrade gazed long into his eyes, scarcely believing what he saw there: the change was so great. His friend had been lithe and energetic, eloquent of speech, his words when arguing religion or politics, beautifully crafted. And look at him now - robbed of his power, he lacked the vocabulary of even the youngest child.

His heart shrivelled under the piercing gaze of his comrade, and he wanted to shout, "No! Don't pity me! I accept this test from God, for it is His Will!" But, as he saw the tears glisten in his comrade's eyes, he softened.

"When did this happen?"

He was startled by the question: hadn't he known? It had been a year, and he had asked that a letter be written to his comrade.

His daughter answered, "It's been a year; but he lost his speech only last month, at the death of my uncle."

He signed to them to sit, and swiftly stifled the wave of emotion which threatened to engulf him when his comrade's wife and children stepped forward to kiss his hand. With his good left hand, he stroked the children's hair.

He tried to speak, made guttural sounds in his mouth, sounds which left them puzzled. Perhaps his wife and daughter, who had been with him this past month, were used to his attempts, and understood them. He hoped they could help him speak to his comrade.

"Father wants to know when you arrived last night, Uncle," explained his daughter.

"Close to eleven; we stopped in Idi to eat, since it would've been too late when we arrived," his comrade answered.

He nodded.

His wife and children were deep in conversation with his comrade's family', hearing their lively chatter, an unbearable desire arose within him to join in, to be a part of this merry gathering. Forgetting that he could manage only sounds, and that speech was beyond him, he opened his mouth and cut in; they fell suddenly silent, looking at him. No one answered him – perhaps they hadn't understood? He felt like a criminal.

Oh, how wonderful to be able to speak as before! How much he would have to say to his friend – they had so much catching-up to do! They had shared so much, especially during the fight for Independence!

After having received his comrade's letter, he had laid many plans; in his mind's eye, he saw again the many adventures they had had, and which they would ever lovingly recall again and again. When he heard of his comrade's journey to Jakarta three months ago, to attend a small reunion of their comrades in-arms in the struggle of 1945. ... He wanted so much to hear about those who are still living!

How ironic it was that in this modern age, surrounded by every convenience one could desire, contact and communication had become so scarce; without frequent reunions, the joy of a wedding or the sorrow of a funeral, one might go from one year to the next without ever setting eyes on one's old friends!

Fruit of the Jakarta reunion. He had been sent a book, chronicling the adventures of two Javanese youths, who had come to the area to bring the news of the Proclamation of Independence. There must've been many of them present at the reunion – Achmid and his wife, Yusuf, Zakaria – yes; Karim, whom all called 'uncle', in deference to his age – surely he must be in good health? His wife, so they said, had passed away, and his daughter had become a grandmother. Dr. Bagiastra, too, was gone, and his wife would not leave off her widow's weeds. Praise be to Allah, the

Omnipotent. Long ago, he and his comrade, with Abdoessoeki, had earnestly gone about their missionary work, preaching to Dr. Bagiastra from Bali, inviting him to embrace Islam. The worthy doctor had, however, passed away before seeing the light - he had been a good man. Abu Talib, the uncle of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.), had been a good man, also, though he clung, on his deathbed, to the religion of his fathers, despite the pleading of the Prophet of God. Verily, those to whom is granted enlightenment will be easy in their hearts; but for those to whom it is denied, their chests will feel constricted, as of lack of air.

But - how he digressed! His thoughts were running away with him, and he hadn't heard a word of what they were! And - they, too, seemed no longer to notice him.

He wanted to avoid speech, but found it impossible. Whenever a subject about which he knew was introduced, he longed to participate.

Occasionally, the loss of his ability to speak wounded him, especially in these, the last years of his life. He recalled an age, filled with the happiness of youth, now lost to him in a fathomless well of sorrow and regret. He could no longer speak, he who had once been so eloquent. This seemed to him harder to bear than had he been dumb at birth, for he would not then have known the heady power, the intoxicating joy, the wonder of speech. They could not feel the loss of that which they had not possessed. He was as the blind man who had once been sighted, the have who fell, and became the have-not. His lack made him feel invisible.

"From God do we come, and to Him do we return."

They turned as one, to stare at him in bewilderment. His wife and children frowned worriedly, foreheads creased with the effort of trying to make sense of his nameless sounds. He had never been so, they thought. Seeing their puzzlement, he propelled his wheelchair to the bookcase and took down a translation of the Holy Quran. This he opened to Chapter Two, indicating to his comrade

Verses 155 and 156. He gestured to him urgently – read. His comrade's eyes moved across the page; he nodded in understanding, relief and joy showing in his face.

After the noon meal, his comrade excused himself, for he was to continue his journey to Medan. The time of parting drew near, a parting he faced with heavy heart, but unflinchingly.

He savoured the moment, for there was piercing sweetness in regarding the face of this well-loved friend, who was to leave. Would he see him again? Perhaps these would be their last moments together, for only God knew their destinies; he was mindful of the Prophet Noah, upon whom be peace, who had set sail into that fearful storm; being at a loss, God had commanded him to pray: "Oh God, grant that I may land in a place of Your choosing, for You are the Giver of Succour."

His comrade had departed, he had let him go with sadness; although he tried fiercely to hide it, a solitary tear was squeezed out of his heart, to trickle from the corner of his eye. The moment he had been released from a hug, this dear friend had gotten into the car, waiting with engine running. The vehicle moved away and his comrade turned back, once, to look at him. Then, he gazed unseeingly ahead.

From his wheelchair, framed in the doorway, he waved his one good hand, bidding him adieu ...

"Ah! Ah".

Translated by Sharifah Faizah al-Attas

