

*What they say about Growing Up in Trengganu
by Awang Goneng:*

‘The book that Hulaimi wrote has become
something of a phenomenon’
New Straits Times

‘Veteran journalist pens bestseller’
The Star

‘Reading Awang Goneng’s *Growing Up In Trengganu*
is a walk down memory lane’
New Straits Times

‘The book became a much sought after title in bookshops
in peninsular Malaysia soon after its debut’
Bernamea news agency

‘Awang Goneng does with words
what Lat does with pictures’
Annabel Teh Gallop, Head, Southeast Asia section, British Library

Awang Goneng was born at an early age in the house where he grew up in Kuala Trengganu. He was pushed into Sekolah Melayu Ladang where his father's teacher friend rather than his so-called precociousness got him a place as an underage pupil. This experience aged him quickly in time for proper school, first at the Sultan Sulaiman Primary School (SSPS)—where he nearly burned his class and classmates while trying to do a magic trick involving a box of Swedish *tandstickor* that were on sale in Trengganu at that time—and then later at the SSSecondaryS.



Then his parents moved to Kuala Lumpur and he to another school known as the Victoria Institution where he and a school friend (who later became a judge in Singapore) involuntarily broke the school's medium distance record while fleeing a gang from a rival school near the Merdeka Stadium.

With this newfound talent for power running, Awang Goneng proceeded swiftly into subsequent chapters of his life: first through the doors of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) where he took a Law degree (from the Academic Registrar's office one night when the door was left open), and then through an academic career (briefly) and journalism (less briefly) during which time he interviewed, among others, Anthony Burgess, Barbara Cartland and Adnan Khashoggi. He now lives in London as a freelance writer. This is his third book.

A MAP OF TRENGGANU

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Growing Up in Trengganu

Selangor: A Celebration

(by Wan A. Hulaimi with photographer K.C. Loo)

Awang Goneng



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*A writer needs support as a tree needs roots.
This is my family tree,
my shade in the sun, my shelter in the rain:*

*My beloved wife and children:
Zaharah Othman,
Hafiz, Rehana, Nur Hannah, Taufiq*

*My siblings:
Wan Muhammad (al-Fatihah),
the real writer in our family, he led me there,
Wan Abdul Rahim Kamil,
Wan Asma, Wan Nik Ahmad Mustafa*

*My extended family
in Trengganu, Kuala Lumpur, Alor Setar and Bangi*

with my love and gratitude

'Eiu pour ceux quis non jamais rien inventé'

Aimé Césaire

'... The glamour

Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast

*Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like the child for the
past'*

D. H. Lawrence, *Piano*

Introduction: Stepping Out of the Door

Very early one morning, as I was walking not a few yards from our house, trying to wear off jet lag and that gnawing pain that you normally experience after a prolonged period in the sunshine of family members and good friends, an oriental-looking couple approached me to ask for directions to the Underground station.

As I was just about heading in that general direction, I asked them to follow me, and it transpired in the ensuing conversation that one of them hailed from Trengganu and the other was married to a lady whose name rang distant bells, from the schoolyard of my alma mater. To my amazement, there appeared in my head just then a picture of the bespectacled Agnes Wee (whose name I have here disguised to preserve her anonymity), a person who I only knew by sight and name at school and whose husband was now shining some light on an obscure corner of that tapestry of my past, and telling me that they were now residents of Canada.

It was a funny thought to be holding in your head so early in the morning when the traffic was still sparse in the busy motorway that daily broke the silence in this nook where I lived. Even though Trengganu never quite faded from my mind – it was just a week after I had got off the express bus that pulled into its terminus in Kuala Terengganu – on the map it was physically on the other side of town, some 6,000 miles away. And as for Agnes Wee, her part was miniscule in my school life, but the fact that I could, as if at will, pull an image of her from my bank of memories truly astonished me. It was an experience that happened again and again when I was writing this book and *Growing Up in Trengganu* (referred to throughout this

book as *GUiT*) before that. The past was coming back to me in many ways, in both visualisation and sonorisation. It was as if my memory was urging me to write its story.

When I stepped out of my house that morning I was, in a way, stepping out to come back home again. It is the one constant that I have found since gathering materials for *GUiT*, that each step I took made me realise even more that it was to become a continuation of the past, and events that happened in the present sometimes informed and extended on what took place many years before, sometimes in the most bizarre and surprising ways. It was astounding how, in the long process of writing, and in the afterglow that followed, events from the past, long forgotten, could re-emerge as clearly to you as the voice in the next room, and sometimes along with it, the shape, colour and sounds that twirled in a lively fandango.

Far from being in another country, or in a strange place, the past is always here. From the moment we stepped out of our house together for the last time as a family in Kuala Trengganu all those years ago it has remained in a continuum that extends to this place where I stand now; and in this way I can look back to that moment long ago as I do now to the moment when I stepped out of my house this morning as one continuous flow. And going back home again may be just retracing the steps you took as recently as that morning, but that morning, as I stepped out to the road with the intention of coming back again to continue my writing, how was I to know that the road was going to take me back on a journey far away?

Sooner or later we shall all long for home, and we'll want to go back there howsoever, either physically or anecdotally. You can go back to where you were born, as Thomas Wolfe didn't say, even if many insist that he did, but you can never, even for all that, go back home once more. I wrote *GUiT* principally as a gift to my children, as I said in my foreword to the book. It was a record of the places and the times and the people I knew as I was growing up, and of what had transpired there even before we came to be.

It was Trengganu as I saw it, signposts and people standing in the

streets, hills and familiar terrains and dragons there may be in certain nooks; and now that there's more of it here, they will both together serve as a map I hope, of Trengganu, some remembrance of things past, a guide for the perplexed and a guide too, for those who've been through there, of the roads that we – collectively – rode.

GUiT has brought me tremendous pleasures, of recollection, of meeting again with people I have long given up for lost, and of the kindness of strangers. Many people wrote to me to confirm that so and so and such and such was indeed there, and occasionally to put right what I had misstated. One day, out of the blue, I received an email from a man, now in his eighties, who said that he was the dee-dee-dit-dah-dah man who sat with father one night to brush up his Morse code (*GUiT*, p.110, at p.113, and p.107 in this book). It is a cause of further delight to know that *GUiT* has been so many things to so many people, but the one that stands out for me is the recognition that as children we grew up much in the same way. A truism it may be but people have written to me to say that what I have done is to describe *kampung* life, not just in Trengganu, but everywhere. 'I recognise this as my experience of growing up in Kubang Pasu,' wrote one. One morning I received an email, and subsequently a telephone call from a lady in Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire, England to tell me that her good friend from Malaysia was the great granddaughter of Datuk Mata Mata, a man I mentioned in *GUiT*. Someone from Brazil wrote to say that he had successfully controlled his straying dog using a method that was prescribed in *GUiT* as the Trengganu way with straying goats; and then a New Yorker emailed to give me the present whereabouts of that strange object (an incense burner) that I used to gaze at in admiration in the Masjid Abidin (*GUiT*, p. 219) of my childhood.

What gives me further satisfaction is how *GUiT* has travelled. A surprising number of people who had taken *GUiT* as their travelling companion wrote in to say how it had affected them. One reader in the subway in New York was told by another commuter that he too had read the book and enjoyed it; another was reading it while strap-

hanging in the London Tube during rush hour and was laughing to herself about something that tickled her when a fellow traveller, a complete stranger, told her that he too had read the book. Three people wrote in to say that they read *GUiT* high in the stratosphere: one, a self-confessed slow reader, said that she finished the book by journey's end, while another admitted to being so overcome by nostalgia and emotion while reading my description of Mother's preparatory work on the eve of Hari Raya that a flight stewardess came forward to ask if he was all right when tears started to roll. 'It was exactly what my late mother did,' he said, 'and my heart ached.' The most extraordinary use of *GUiT* came in a letter I received from an English lady now resident in Besut, Terengganu. She keeps *GUiT* as a companion and a talisman: 'I always take *GUiT* with me as a travelling companion, wherever I go,' she wrote.

Of this present book, my children will probably say in chorus, 'Oh no, not another!' for a father grows up endlessly. But was life better in the yesteryear than now? That I cannot say, for, of all the accusations against me, the one that I would certainly not lay claim to is that of the laudator temporis acti. This is just a map – of places and people – of the Trengganu that I knew, and I hope they will let me off lightly for that.

If you bought a copy of *GUiT* you are partly to blame for this new birth, for in doing so you have led me to another. A book cannot be written without taking there and borrowing here and being beholden for the help of many people. Some people sent me photographs, their family history, and precious old books about Trengganu from their own library. Others, like YM Tengku Paduka of Terengganu and his wife To' Puan Rosita and their son Tengku Zainal, entertained me lavishly in many gatherings with many Trengganu people I was pleased to meet in their very hospitable salon, as did Encik Mohammad Som who fed me and gave me many contacts and encouraged me to do writing workshops at a college run by his associates, and I am beholden to former classmates Madame Toh Swee Choo and To' Puan Khadijah who organised a very joyful reunion at the latter's

house in Kuala Terengganu where I was reunited with classmates I'd not seen for many, many years. Thank you to Louis Crespo, from New York, who wrote after reading *GUiT* and led me to the present location of that incense burner that was in our Masjid Abidin, and another from the Big Apple, the indefatigable Mekyam, whose help with philological mysteries shone a light in many areas. In Brazil I am indebted to Richard Berkenstat of Teresopolis, for permission to use pictures of Ze de pau. *Obrigadão!*

In Malaysia I am indebted to the following people: Tengku Ismail Tengku Su who gave me a beautiful facsimile edition of the handwritten Trengganu version of the Tuhfat an Nafis that has been kept by his family, Tengku Fatimah Hashim, who gave me her precious copy of the Syaer Tuan Humphreys, A. Karim Omar the 'Pizzaman', Chorkedaggarik for the photos from his family archives, the eminent Trengganu blogger Tengku Ali Bustaman (Pokku) once again for all his help and Selero Negeri meals, and to water engineer and fellow blogger Pak Adib for showing me the rudiments of project management. To Marina Emmanuel and the Paul family of Trengganu and Terengganu, thanks for your support, and to Sharon Bakar of the *Bibliobibli* blog for her many encouraging words and to fellow bloggers Jane Sunshine and the Lady Maya for having tolerated my diatribes and strange ways, and to Pak Zawi whose blogs have been both informative and delightful. I am also deeply indebted to Pak Daud Basikal in Kuala Terengganu for showing me things about my place of birth that I had not known before, and to Cikgu Mat of the Terengganu Historical Society and all the wonderful people at the Singgang Restaurant in Simpang Tok Ku for their culinary skills.

In London, my thanks to the good people at the restaurant Tukdin for the good food and a place to rest my soles, to the historian John Gullick for being patient and prompt with replies to my enquiries, to the British Library for being there; and once again to Annabel Teh Gallop for her invitation to twin *GUiT* with her father Christopher's like-minded work, *Wanderer in Malaysian Borneo*, at a combined launch at the Royal Asiatic Society, and to Atok aka Azam Ashari,

for waxing lyrical on YouTube on *GUiT*'s birthday.

My thanks also to all those who have visited my blog *Kecek-Kecek* where my first dabs with the paint were hung out to dry. I thank especially those who have contributed their comments there, however small.

A special thanks and a sad farewell to an Englishman-in-exile in New York and an acknowledged expert on World Music, John Storm Roberts – in memoriam. He contributed to my research on Besut for *GUiT* and sent me wonderful photos. And on the same note of sadness I record here too my gratitude to my old friend Tengku Ismail bin Tengku Mahmud whose copious notes on *GUiT* I valued greatly but who sadly passed on before this book could be put together.

I have decided to add as a prelude to the glossary in the end of this book a special catalogue of Trengganu dispositions and proclivities – the 'how to' bits in the back – that appeared intermittently in their raw state in my blogs. They are, as you may have suspected, much enlivened by hyperbole but I hope Trengganu people especially will take them all in good spirit.

To these people I owe special thanks: the staff and students of Sekolah Menengah Sultan Sulaiman (my alma mater) and to the same at the Chung Hwa Wei Sin, the Kolej Utara, Sepang Selangor and the Universiti Putra Malaysia where I would like to mention especially Puan Siti Raba'ah Hamzah. They have all invited me more than once to conduct writing workshops and I hope they have benefitted from them as much as I have gained joy and experience from the forays.

My deepest gratitude to my family members, starting from the closest, my dear wife Zaharah Othman for having endured many long periods as a writer's widow, and to the pearls of our life Hafiz, Rehana, Nur Hannah and Taufiq for their encouragement and support and special thanks to Nur Hannah for drawing the pictures at short notice. To my sister Wan Asma to whom I have been a constant nuisance, but she and her family bore with fortitude my long stays in Gombak; and to my brothers Wan Abdul Rahim Kamil for correcting my errors for stories do get embellished in the telling and memories

do gain a new patina and colour from the years, and Dr Wan Nik Mustafa who strolled into a KL shopping mall one day to discover to his consternation that his brother was there signing books. I thank their family members too for being unstinting with their help and kind words. To my cousin Wan Azmi and his family in Kuala Terengganu, thank you for being ever so hospitable, and to Abang Ngah and Kak Mah at al Manar and Nuri in Pengkalan Maras, may God bless you both for your sterling work there. A man is blessed with many kinsfolk, and there are many more family members, both immediate and extended, in Kuala Lumpur, Terengganu and in Bangi. I wish I could list them all here in a roll of gratitude.

Writing brings joys, serendipities and surprises. Many writers will tell you how stories come begging to be told, and the surreal ways they take to reach out to you. There's truth in the cliché of a story unfurling quite by itself, and characters taking over from the writer. Stories and memories will gravitate towards the author in bizarre ways as happened to me one day as I was out walking in the bright light of a summer's day in our neighbourhood, trying to exorcise a writer's block. A dark seed that used to float downstream to us from the upper reaches of the Trengganu river suddenly lay at my feet, not on the beach of Tanjong in the monsoon months, but among a tuft of grass in a nondescript London suburb. And then I was transported to another place, far away, and came back with another gaggle of words for the reader. (See 'A Long Way from the Shore', p55)

My thanks once again to Monsoon Books, to Phil Tatham who asked for another one, and to my editor Lindsay Davis for her patience, sharp eyes and valuable suggestions.

Awang Goneng,
London

Author's Note: Here Be Dragons

It was the practise in old maps to mark out terra incognita as lands populated by exotic beasts and winged animals. In the Lenox Globe (constructed probably in 1511), 'here be dragons' (*hic sunt dracones*) was specially marked out for regions in the eastern rim of Asia. That old Venetian spinner Marco Polo spoke not of dragons but Dagroians, corpse-eating, bone-gnashing people in the Kingdom of Dagroian, now thought to be Sumatra. In Trengganu we may have had dragons too, many years ago, long before it even became Trengganu.

Someone picked up something from the sand in a place between the rivers. 'What fang is this?' the picker asked of the other. 'Oh, *taring anu*,' came the reply, 'That's the fang of that thingymathing.' And so in subsequent references to that merry jaunt in that strange land it became known as the place where was found the '*taring anu*', syllables that were later compressed into Trengganu in hurried conversation as we Trengganuians are wont to do once we get our gabs a-going. I am inclined to lean, in this regard, towards the whims of fabulous historians, and my inclination is at one with the romance and presumptions of old cartographers. So I shall say that it wasn't just the fang of any *anu* but the dragon that dropped its tooth on our sand.

To make matters more perplexing, you'll find both Trengganu and Terengganu in the pages that follow. Trengganu as it was, dusty and moving so laggardly, with trishaw bells clanging and starched *bajus* gleaming white in the Friday sun at noon-time. This Trengganu had cycling men crowned with creepers painted on fading head cloths, trundling to afternoon markets with baskets of fish in their

rear, chasing time and traffic before the ice melted and the eyes of the fish turned red. And then there's Terengganu that stands over the remains of Trengganu past, displaced communities and decaying bones of the dragon, toothless now in all but name. There are men in Terengganu now, Armani-suited in tall buildings that watch over Trengganu, if it still stands on the other side of the river, hidden now behind the concrete wall on the waterfront and visible only to the builders of the towers and their denizens.

Folk Who Live on the Shore

THE COASTAL EDGE OF OUR PART OF TOWN pushed flat against the sea, with strong winds blowing in our face for most of the hot season and then the long blasts of the monsoon gale during the end of year, that brought in lashes of spray and the roar of the sea in turmoil. Bukit Putri stood like a paperweight over the thin green of Padang Malaya, and distant coconut trees in Tanjong Mengabang waved and curled in the blowing wind, as the market of Kedai Payang became just a blur in the pouring rain, oblivious to the flashing beacon on the hilltop that winked to ships at sea.

Sometimes our tall house swayed a little in the incoming storm, when the *nipah* roof over our kitchen became entangled in the swoop of the wind to let in lightning flashes from the rumbling sky. We were all at the brink, a part known to us as Ujong Tanjong, the edge of land and the beginning of the sea. On calm days, folk stopped at the coffee shed of Köhéng and then later, Wang Ndok's, on the calm edge of the lagoon that stood between us and the shore. On calm days, Wang Ngöih Buloh sank his feet in the brackish mud, to make rafts of *sasök* split bamboo that were widely used in Tanjong as fencing material. Bamboo and mud and heaps of dark grit left by mud skippers in this playground of the *ikang ddukang* (*belukang* to posh folk from Western shores), a fish with a sharp needle standing proud on its dorsal; fish and bamboo and skippers and mud all worked together to give this part a peculiar pong that became the stenchmark of these bamboo weavers.

We had many artisans in our Tanjong, but Wang Ndok was our artiste who, one calm night just after Hari Raya, stood on the stage specially built on oil barrels on the shore and surprised us all with his performance of a modern homespun melodrama. Later in life, soon

after Köhéng had put all his thick tea cups and saucers into a box and into storage, Wang Ndok surprised us all again by exorcising the thespian spirit from his body and filling into the gap a penchant for tèh. He sold tèh tarik and pulut lepa and beleda set in little glasses, and kopi-oh and Milo in a steaming mix of condensed milk and sugar in his shed of corrugated iron on the shore.

This was the back end of Tanjong Pasar, which is no more, where our kinsman Kör played marathon matches of *dam* (draughts) with friends and complete strangers on the low verandah of his house and stopped only when the cockerels came out to crow and the fishermen were pushing their boats out into the red glow of dawn at sea. His younger brother Mat returned ashore there long before I became aware of anything, and then he was at sea not as a fisherman but as a recruit in the merchant navy. Much later in life, when he was still gadding about in the khaki shorts of his maritime life, he came to live under the front stairs of our tall house, a corner that he shared with Uncle Retnam, lime-pickle maker extraordinaire and retired linesman from Father's Telecoms Office near Jalan Banggol.

Che Ngöh and Kör and Mat and Retnam and Köhéng have long left us, and recently I heard that Wang Ndok too has been taken from this mortal coil. But bits of Tanjong are still there, flapping in the wind that is now blowing less fiercely, but still pinned to the earth, nevertheless, by the weight of Bukit Putri. A large chunk of Ujong Pasir had dropped into the sea aeons ago, and recently, when I was taken on a tour there by Cikgu Wan Chik, my school teacher from Sekölöh Ladang, I saw sad faces and derelict houses, and a society uncared for.

The Trengganu (now Terengganu) government that is flush with oil funds has no plans to improve their lot or keep them there and let them thrive where Wang Ndok once trod the boards, where Che Ngöh Buloh made his *pagör sasök* and Köhéng poured out cups and cups of tea. Where Mat the sailor came home to shore, where Pök kept his hardware shop, where Kör played *dam* till folk with goods came from the *ulu*.

They are even now awaiting the hour to pull down these houses and break down these folk on the shore and then move them all as far away as possible from the sea; and then let in Starbucks and megamalls and car parks and the rumble of 4WDs and tourists in their silly hats that will frighten away the ghouls that are still clinging to the ghostly roots of ancient trees.

The Triangle of Tanjong

YOU COULD DRAW A TRIANGLE in Tanjong to link the *surau*s. These were the semi-official prayer houses – or *musolla* – that were the foci of our daily lives, not just for the prayerful, but also for those who were looking for something to fill their time: a shirt to wash, some company to keep, some semi-dark place to rest their weary heads (normally on a dud coconut that we called *nyuur kömèng*, carved with a dip into its dead husk to hold the neck), or when it was time to visit the community well for a bath.

Ours was the *surau*To' Sheikh Kadir, a prayer house made of ancient wood, carved and cracking in the rain and heat, with fretwork and lumber similar to those that made up the house of Pök Wè, whose front steps almost touched those of the Tok Sheikh's.

We didn't know who Tok Sheikh Kadir was, but from word of mouth we found out that a preacher from Patani who came to Tanjong long before Mök Nab started to roll her raw keropok to boil in the water from the well of his *surau*, and long before the youthful days of Ayöh Da Mang, a latter day regular in the place, whose wit was sharp as tales of his curmudgeonly nature were legion. It was Ayöh Da Mang who, one fine day when Mother's beleda kering in a tray dropped from the sun and the *surau*'s sloping roof during a heavy bout of the mosque's drum-beating, merely gave the sugar-encrusted

crystals of multi-colours, now glistening and disseminated into the ground, only the merest of his cursory looks. With a slight clearing of the throat he just walked back into the inner chamber of the *surau* to give thanks for another day, without looking again at the sky nor the wonders of this sudden downpour of glistening sweetmeat.

Ayöh Da Mang was rumoured to be a kinsman of us folks in the Wan household that was standing cheek by jowl with the *surau*, but any mention of his name and Mother would suddenly transport herself into that distant look reserved for some distant sounds that could be faintly disturbing and faintly amusing, like the thudding drop from a ladder of someone who'd been taunting you for nuts. He was, I remember, a man who knew where things belonged, and in it all, his rightful place. Once, on the day after the annual mawlidfest conducted and bank-rolled by our local Tamil Muslim community at the *surau*, there was some leftover sweets that Ayöh Da Mang wanted to take home to his family members who we never met. He asked Che Mang, his namesake and a local long-haired weirdo clown who sold textiles in the market, to give him a sheet from the newspaper to wrap his goods. Che Mang being a frugal man, tore half a page to hand to the curmudgeon, a gesture which brought a hurt look from Ayöh Da Mang, and a bizarre threat that his thingama-ding-a-ling, now safely hid beneath his fine *sarung*, would soon be wrapped in half a sheet of the day's news.

Walking from Tanjong, towards the beach, past the house of Wang Nawang, an avuncular pipe-smoking philatelist man and a Town Council worker whose children Wang Mukhtar and Wang Ripéng were our friends, past the house of Syed Jaafar, the Grammar School teacher, and turning right at the knick-knacks for sale in the verandah shop of Mèk Beledi, you are walking now in the deep Kampung of Tanjong Pantai, where Pök Kok made brassware in his shed, where Che Abas the fishmonger lived, and on you go, between fences of woven bamboo slats, to the community of Surau Pasir.

Surau Pasir (the *surau* on sand) again, was another lively centre, built, according to stories I recently heard, by refugees from Patani

who followed the eastern shoreline of the peninsula and landed on this friendly Trengganu beach. They placed mats on the sand and roofed the area and walled it with planks of local wood. This was Surau Pasir as it started, and the origin of the name by which it is still being talked about.

Going away from Surau Pasir, away from the tumult of people at the well and conversation noises from the verandahs and sweet radiogram sounds from the drawing rooms of the well-to-do, backing out from the banter of children at their game of hopscotch (*mmaing géng*, as we called it) or the more demanding routines of *wök*, we move away now from the lashing waves on the shore, we are going back to the busy road of Jalan Tanjong where it becomes known as Jalan Kelab Pantai. There is more than a whiff of satay sauce now in the air – peanuts with a dash of tamarind, with stalks of lemongrass thrown into the pot and sugar for added flavouring – wafting from the house factory of Che Muda, Kuala Trengganu's most famous satay man.

Going down the road, glancing quickly to your right at the closed door of the Kelab Pantai and listening to the faint clacks of billiard balls colliding over velvet, and the faint hurrahs of club members, you walk unperturbed by their whoops and jeers – not at you mind, but all restricted to the club's confines – and at a glance to your left you'd see Ibrahim the electrician, his name adorned in light bulbs over the entrance of his shop, and further still, the Jing bicycle shop opposite his counterpart and trading rival who we simply called Taukèh Luga.

Perhaps you'd hire a child's bicycle from there, at twenty cents for the hour – and my instincts would take me to Taukèh Jing for he was the more genial man of the two – and ride your way, wobbling slightly from lack of practise and avoiding the speeding trishaws pedalled probably by Che Kalèh, happy-go-merry as the day was young, or the clinking of trishaw bells probably came from the more down-to-earth Pök Mat under his conical *terendak*, or if it is your unlucky day, you'd hear a tintinnabulation of bells worked by the impatient thumb of Wang Ndok the pith-helmeted trishaw man,

scourge of stray dogs and straying children.

There were two further *suraus* you will want to reach: one stood behind Bhiku café, after a row of shops that flanked the right side of Jalan Tanjong, a *sarau* with a *kölöh* (water tank) where you will wash your feet before going up the steep steps into the interior of this prayer house of Haji Mat Kerinchi opposite the baking shed of Pak Mat Senani the beluda man. The Haji Mat Kerinchi stood parallel with the road where buses stopped for baggage-laden passengers for Marang, Dungun and the further reaches of Kemaman. The school shuttle also stopped there for school children in their morning trip to the Sultan Sulaiman beyond Batu Buruk if passenger load permitted, but passenger load being not permitting on most mornings, they just trundled past, settling dust on Tanjong schoolkids.

At the further end of this road, if you walked towards the town centre, through the *shabbandar* area and past the *benteng* wavebreaker in the harbour on your right, a curve will take you to the historic Kampung Datuk on your left but your eyes will be fixed on the quaint unearthly time in the dials of the clock tower and the Kedai Payang market now bustling with people, but these are areas outside our triangle, so you will have to backtrack to Padang Malaya, through the sales patter of Ustaz Léh with his array of twigs and sticks. Stay on the waterside until you see between the coffee shop and the buildings that come up again on the further side; opposite the yard parked with lorries of the Pahang Mail, if I can still get it right, and there now that we are back again in Tanjong, is a little *sarau* that has a fierce old fish in its *kölöh*.

This is a hidden place, unknown to hurrying passers-by and enmeshed in its own thoughts under the dark shade of the Indian jujube. Like most old *suraus* it had an open apron that you reached by going up a few steps of its verandah, and inside it was all dark and quiet. A shaft of light shines perhaps from a break in the roof tiles, dust gathering in the corners of the *mengkuang* mat, an old Qur'an resting on the opened x-shape of the *ribal*, and jujube leaves strewn about, plucked from its branches by powerful winds in the night, and

a shadowy mosaic of the tree's canopy painting the front porch in gloom and darkening the ground and mottling the area around the *kölöh* with sunlight.

This is the mystery of our Tanjong, this is the edge of a *kampung* where people seldom peek out, but you hear noises of mortar on pestle, mothers chiding little children deep in houses, but outside things were very still and quiet. We sometimes make the hairpin turn from the mainstream into this dark inroad to gape at the fish and wonder what thoughts it is trying to impart with jaws opening and shutting in the deep, dark water tinged green by moss and decaying leaves floating on the water top.

The hill of Bukit Puteri is just there, behind the permanently shut shophouse of an elderly Peranakan Chinese couple, the man always wearing an old-fashioned T-shirt that buttoned midway down the chest, and below this a *sarung pelikat*; and the lady has a huge bun hanging over the back of her neck, and always in *sarung kebaya* she is clad. I know them well, as the elderly man is the *tokki* (grandfather) of my school friend Lim who goes to school with me in a *tèksi* (it is a trishaw actually, but we call them *tèksi* in Trengganu) that is pedalled by Pök Mat. And the lady is his grandma or *tok*. From the coffee shop next door to their house, if you sit there on their hard-bottomed stool waiting for their cup of kopi thickened and sweetened with condensed milk you will be able to see the shape of Bukit Puteri and the beacon on its edge.

Little Old Town

WALTER WILLIAM SKEAT, an anthropologist who visited Kuala Trengganu in 1899, was impressed by Sultan Zainal Abidin III's urbane humour. From his library the Sultan produced Wood's