

the

by ME

# LITTLE

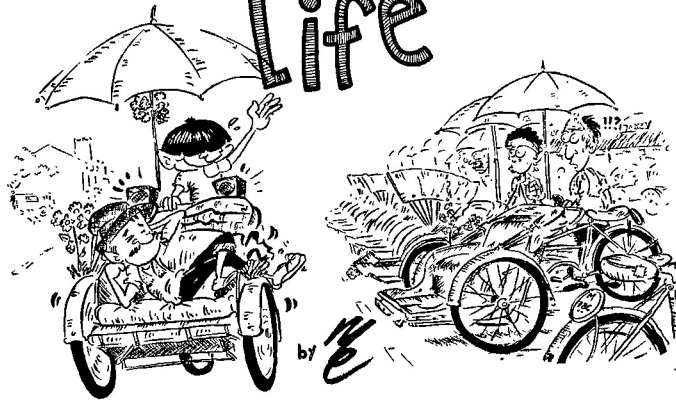
# mamak

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# tanjong Life



ALSO BY ME:

**TANJONG LIFE**

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## THE LITTLE MAMAK

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# the LITTLE mamak

PUSTAKA PERDANA



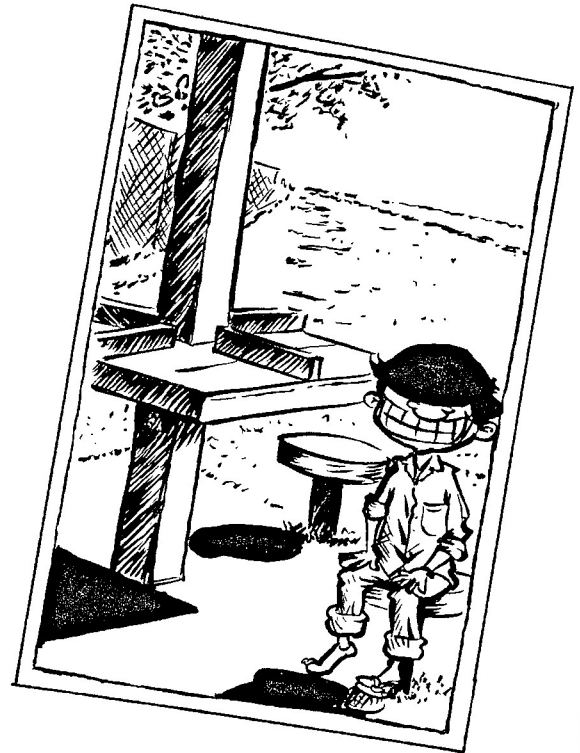
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*Tommy Ghassia*





LIKE MANY OTHER KIDS IN THIS WORLD,  
WHEN I WAS YOUNG I HAD NO IDEA ABOUT  
MY ROOTS.



ON MY FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL, I NOTICED THAT I WAS THE  
DARKEST KID IN THE SCHOOL.

SOME KIDS CALLED ME 'MAMAK'. WHAT DID THAT MEAN? I HAD  
NO IDEA.



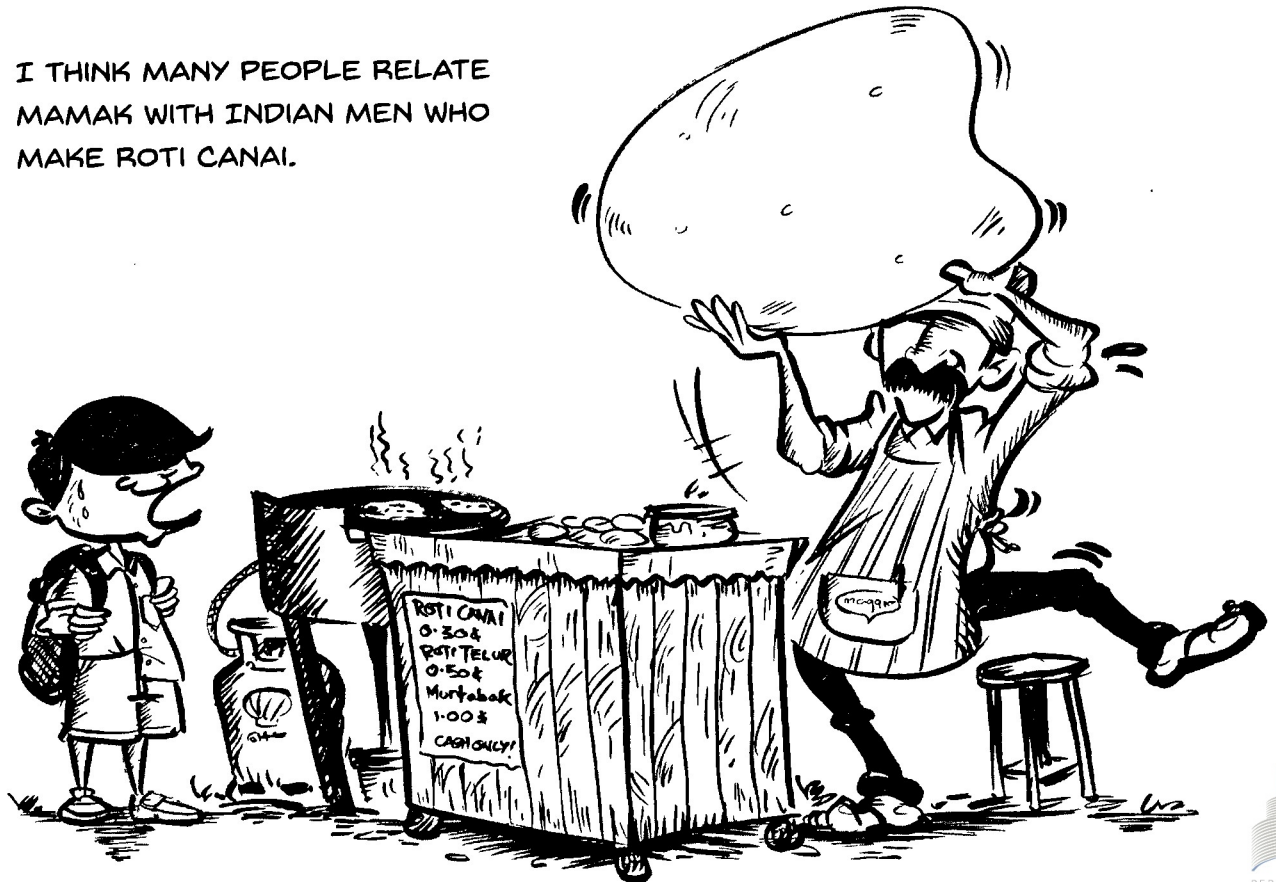
Hey Mamak!

MAMPA



MY TEACHER MADE ME SIT NEXT TO A GIRL CALLED WANI.  
SHE WAS FROM MY KAMPUNG AND WAS SO-O TALKATIVE. WE  
EVENTUALLY BECAME GOOD FRIENDS.

I THINK MANY PEOPLE RELATE  
MAMAK WITH INDIAN MEN WHO  
MAKE ROTI CANAI.






OR MEE MAMAK WHICH IS  
FRIED YELLOW NOODLES WITH  
BEAN CURD, POTATO AND SQUID.

DATUK ALI MAMAK WAS A LEGENDARY COMEDY ACTOR. HIS REAL NAME IS JANTAN OSMAN. I THOUGHT THEY CALLED HIM ALI MAMAK BECAUSE HE USUALLY ACTED AS A SHOPKEEPER OR ROTI CANAI MAKER - TWO TRADES OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH INDIAN MUSLIMS.

I STILL WONDERED ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD MAMAK, SO I ASKED MY GRANNY, NANI, ABOUT IT.






NANI, WHY DO  
PEOPLE CALL  
ME MAMAK?



WHAT DOES  
IT ACTUALLY  
MEAN?



NANI EXPLAINED THAT MAMAK WAS  
AN AFFECTIONATE TERM FOR INDIAN  
MUSLIMS. THE WORD CAME FROM  
MAMA, WHICH MEANS UNCLE IN TAMIL.



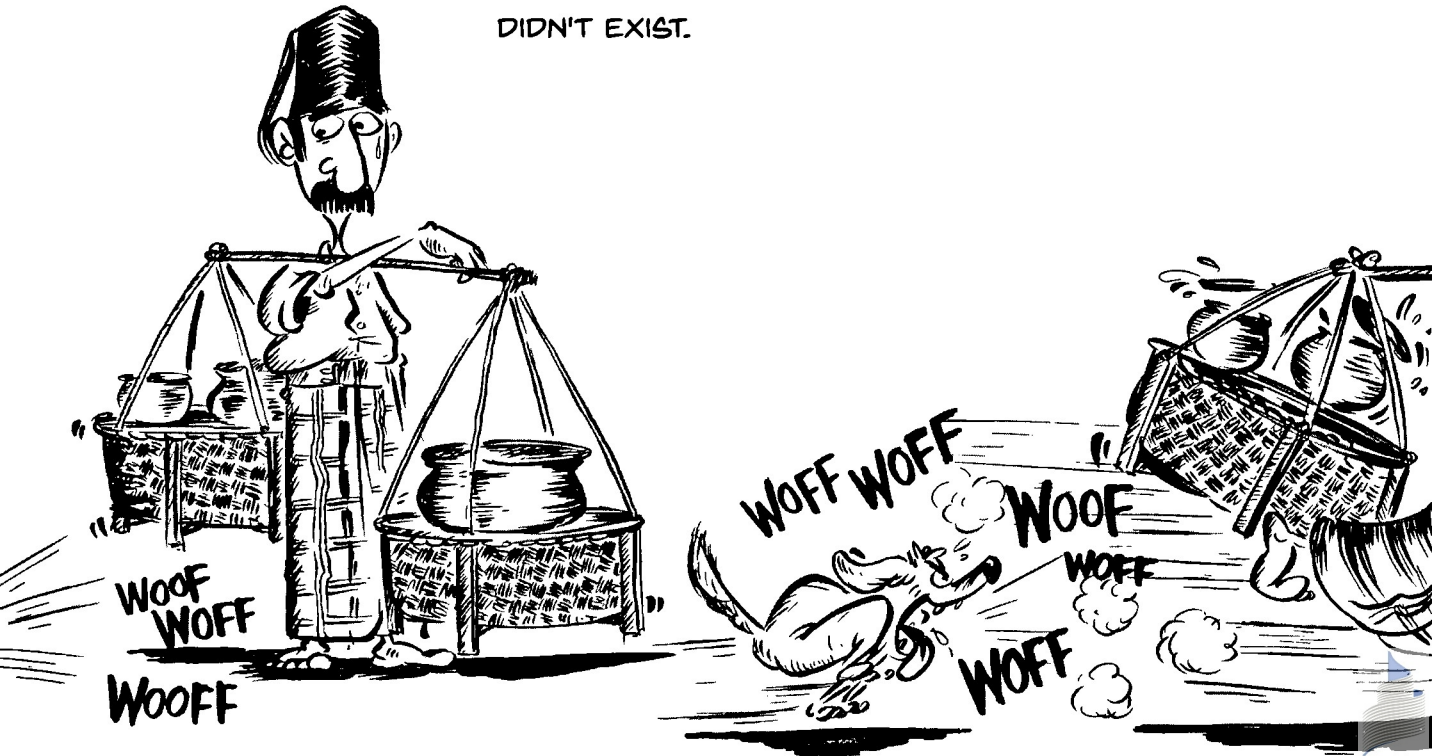
BUT I'M NOT  
AN UNCLE, I'M  
JUST A LITTLE  
BOY.

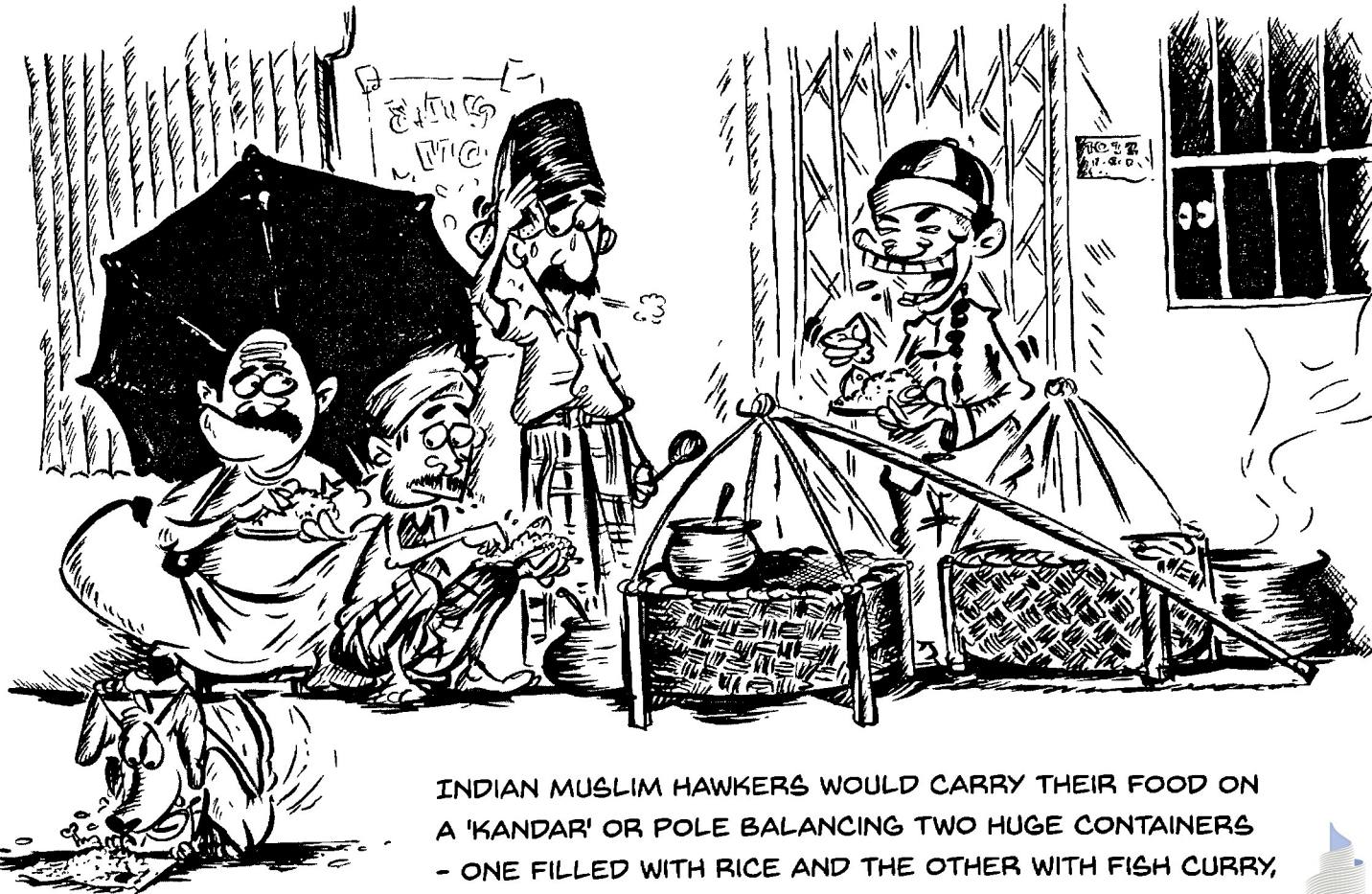
I THOUGHT IT WAS STRANGE TO BE CALLED UNCLE AND I KEPT ASKING NANI QUESTIONS. TO SET MY MIND AT EASE, NANI TOLD ME THE STORY OF HOW INDIAN MUSLIMS SAILED TO PENANG IN THE 18TH CENTURY TO SEEK THEIR FORTUNES.

THEY SETTLED DOWN IN THEIR NEW HOME AND ESTABLISHED CULTURAL AND COMMERCIAL LEGACIES WHICH ARE STILL VISIBLE IN GEORGE TOWN TODAY.



PENANG IS FAMOUS FOR ITS NASI KANDAR RESTAURANTS, BUT IN THE EARLY DAYS THESE DIDN'T EXIST.





INDIAN MUSLIM HAWKERS WOULD CARRY THEIR FOOD ON A 'KANDAR' OR POLE BALANCING TWO HUGE CONTAINERS - ONE FILLED WITH RICE AND THE OTHER WITH FISH CURRY, EGG AND LADIES FINGERS.

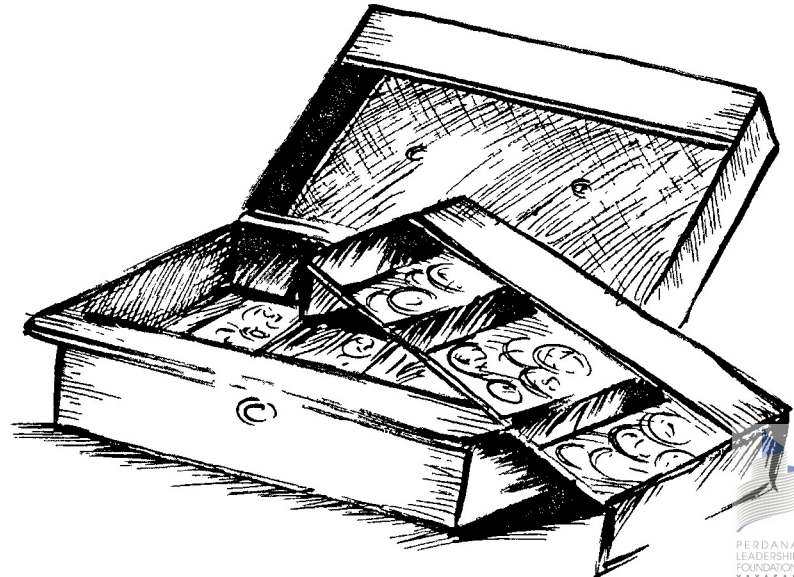


INDIAN MUSLIMS IN PENANG  
ALSO ESTABLISHED A REPUTATION  
FOR THEIR INTEGRITY AND  
PROFESSIONALISM AS MONEY  
CHANGERS.

**CHANGE  
MONEY!  
CHANGE  
MONEY!**

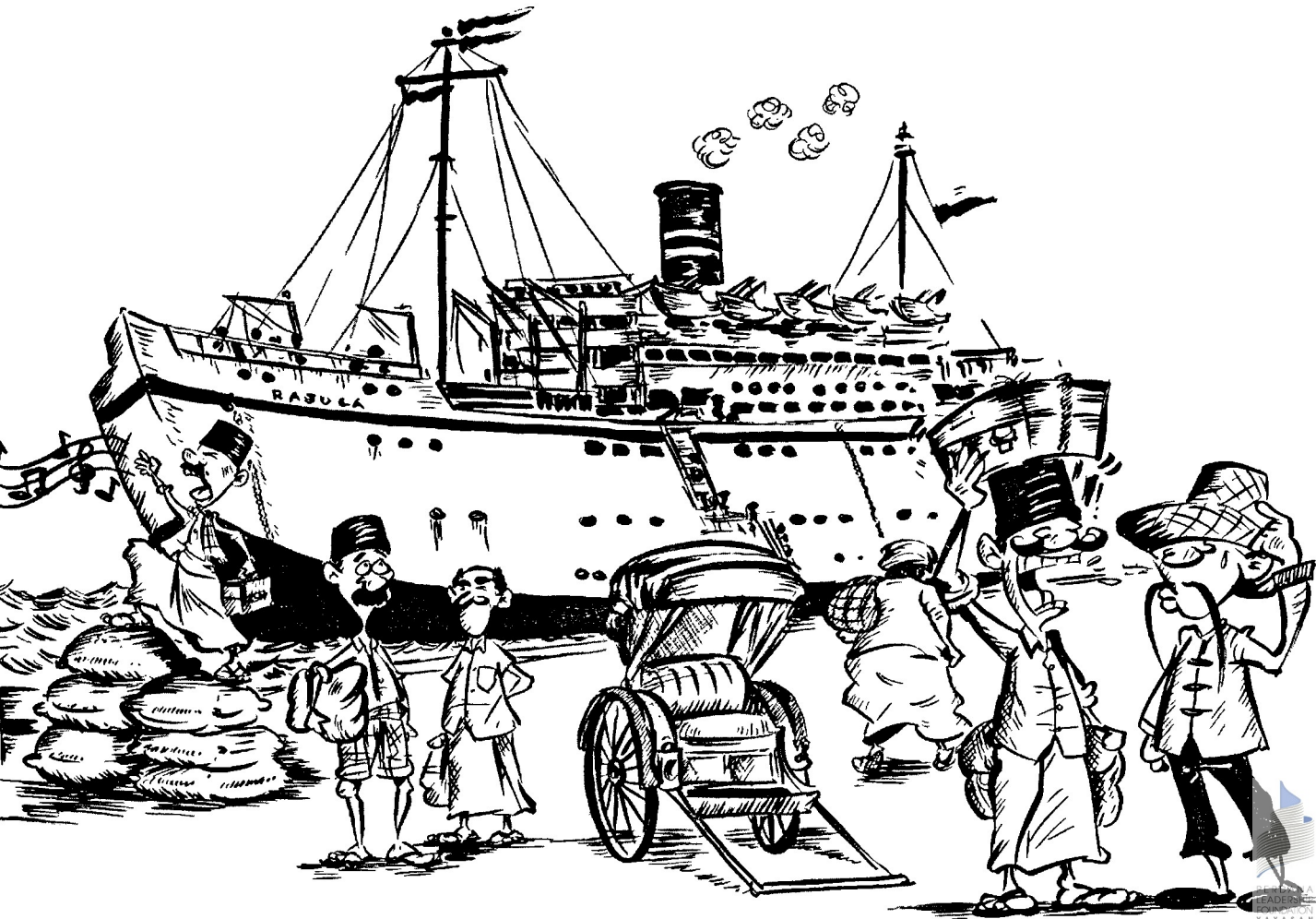


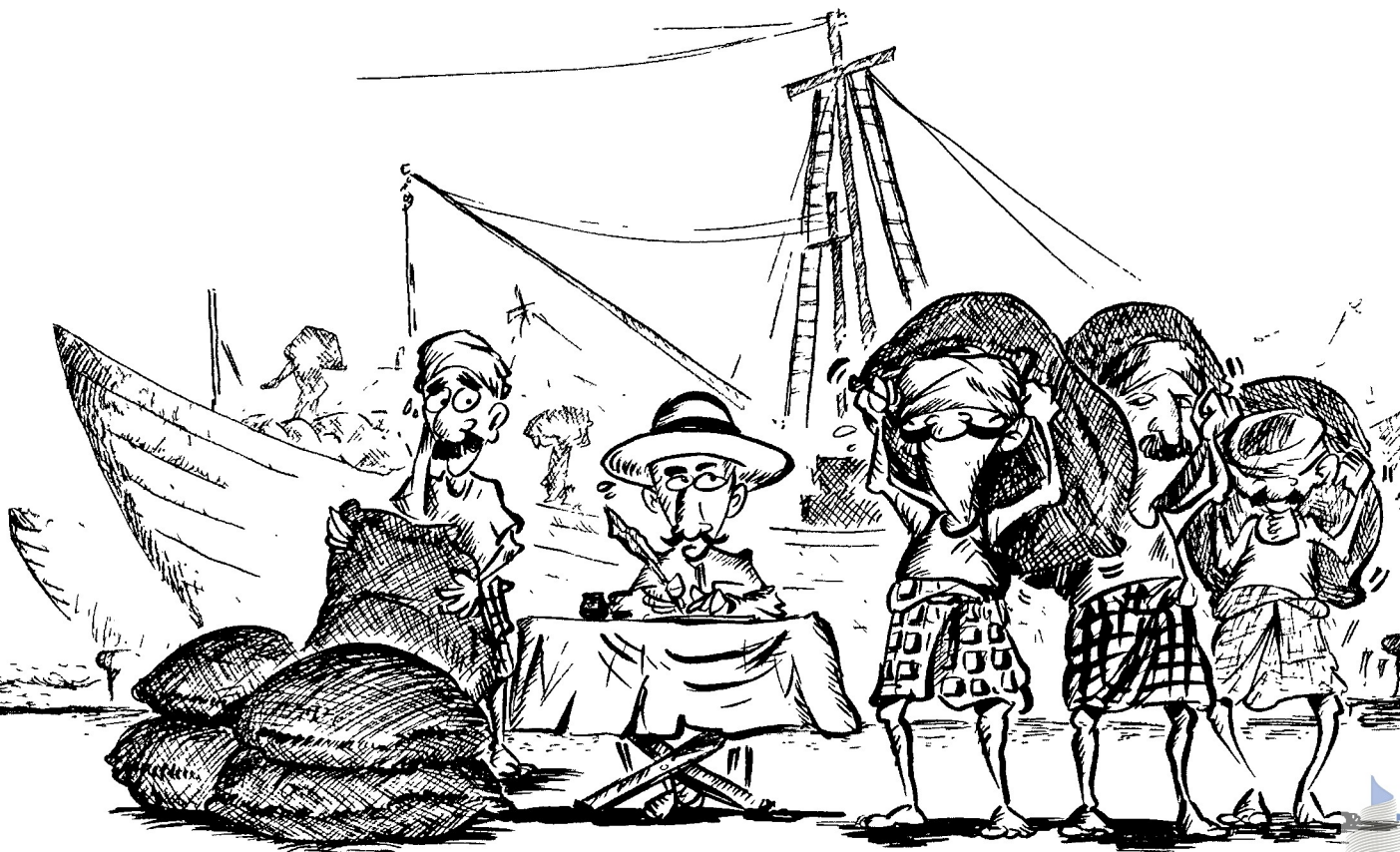
IN THE EARLY DAYS THEY WORKED ON THE STREETS NEAR THE HARBOUR AND WORE LONG WHITE COATS WITH DIFFERENT POCKETS FOR US DOLLARS, INDIAN RUPEES AND LOCAL CURRENCY. THEY'D SHOUT "CHANGE MONEY, CHANGE MONEY!" SO FOREIGNERS WOULD BE ABLE TO SPOT THEM EASILY. SOME OF THEM WOULD CARRY A STEEL BOX TO KEEP THEIR CASH SAFE.





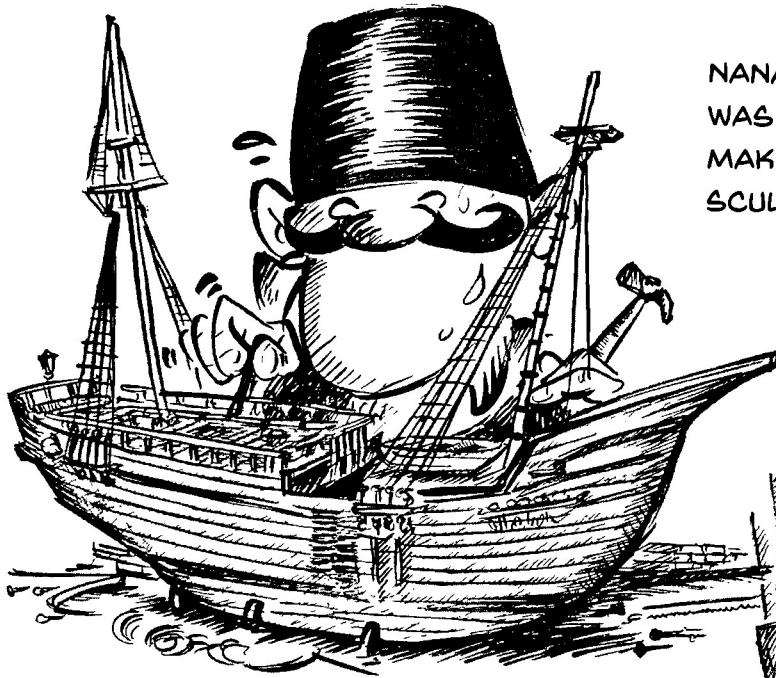
ACCORDING TO NANI, MY GRANDFATHER OR NANA CAME TO MALAYA IN THE LATE 1950s, ALL THE WAY FROM SOUTH INDIA ON AN OCEAN LINER CALLED THE S.S. RAJULA. THE JOURNEY FROM MADRAS TO PENANG WOULD HAVE TAKEN ABOUT A WEEK OR SO.





NANA WORKED AS A WATERFRONT LABOURER AT THE PORT.  
EVERYDAY HE WORKED HARD, LOADING AND UNLOADING HEAVY  
GUNNY SACKS ON HIS SHOULDERS.





NANA HAD HIS OWN PASSION. HE WAS SO CREATIVE AND COULD MAKE INCREDIBLY DETAILED SHIP SCULPTURES AND MODELS.

I MUST HAVE INHERITED MY ARTISTIC TALENT FROM HIM.



MY FATHER - WHO I CALLED ATTA - WAS ALSO AN IMMIGRANT FROM TAMIL NADU, INDIA. HE JOINED GRANDFATHER LATER ON AND STARTED OUT AS A KUEH SELLER BEFORE HE SET UP HIS OWN COFFEE STALL AT KAMPUNG BENGALI, BUTTERWORTH.





IN 1971, ATTA AND MY MUM  
GOT MARRIED. IT WAS AN  
ARRANGED MARRIAGE SET UP  
BY BOTH FAMILIES WHO KNEW  
EACH OTHER WELL.

AT THE TIME, ATTA WAS 40  
AND MUM WAS ONLY 22.



I WAS BORN IN BUTTERWORTH HOSPITAL,  
THE YOUNGEST OF THREE KIDS.





**ME** RETURNS TO HIS CHILDHOOD GROWING UP AS THE ONLY LITTLE MAMAK IN THE VILLAGE. WITH HIS GRANDMOTHER'S HELP, **ME** EXPLORES HIS ROOTS IN THIS GENTLE TALE OF CHILDHOOD AND BELONGING.

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