

Adios, *Asiatic*: A Journey that was Inspiring and Enriching

“Life is a journey, not a destination,” Emerson said; it’s a journey without a destination (unless, of course, we cynically conclude that death is the inevitable destination of life). We travel and travel and then suddenly run out of road. Any hope of destination is an illusion. But having that hope is critical. It is the hope that keeps us going. Although the journey does not take us to a specific place, the experience can be inspiring and edifying. The degree of the enrichment will depend on the individual’s level of commitment to the journey. There will be twists and turns along the road, bumps and treacherous corners, frustrations and despair, but we must keep steady and engage in the journey fervently. We must enjoy it but not in the spirit of a tourist, looking for scenic roads and diversions or trivial touristy experiences; then our life will turn into a curio shop, full of trinkets, or a wasteland condemned to endless tedium and nullity, like T.S. Eliot’s “hollow men.”

Life’s journey is not necessarily linear; it can be interwoven and multidirectional. Like riding multiple horses at the same time or carriages moving in different directions, all held together by the person’s ethos or consciousness. It could also be like taking a different mode of transport every so often, depending on the person’s wish, need or circumstance. But all these come together to define the totality of the person’s journey and its success or failure.

For me, an important part of my life’s journey has been initiating and running the *Asiatic* Journal for 14 years. I and my team started the Journal in 2007 and have successfully published as many as 26 issues during this period. It was no doubt a challenging, sometimes excruciating, but overall an exhilarating experience. I enjoyed producing every issue of the publication. It became a sort of a *nesha* – habit, inebriation, strong excitement – for me to work on it, often selflessly and single-mindedly. Perhaps one cannot run a journal, and for an extended period, without wholeheartedly immersing in it. We have produced several thematic issues and a few single-author issues as well. The thematic numbers include those on Twenty-first Century Malaysian Literature, Bangladeshi Literature in English, South Asian Diaspora Writers, South Asian Women’s Writing, Asian Drama, Contemporary Asian Englishes, Hong Kong Literature in English, Asian American Literature, and the latest in the series, the current issue on West Asian Englishes. The single author issues, on the other hand, include the ones on Rabindranath Tagore, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Edwin Thumboo, Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Dennis Haskell.

The Journal’s objective has been to promote Asian literatures, cultures and Englishes and we have tried to fulfil this objective as best as we could. The Journal’s success is reflective in its wide readership and inclusion in several international indexing databases, such as the MLA International Bibliography,

Scopus, EBSCO and Web of Science. When we began the journey, it was all collywobbles and trepidations arising from the project's uncertain future. I couldn't be sure how to carve out the best future for my new undertaking. Besides, given the explosion of online journals in the recent past, it was difficult to foresee how *Asiatic* would fare in such a crowded field. Would it be an attractive platform for scholars worldwide to consider it as an outlet for their research? Would book reviewers and creative writers consider it as a venue for their publication? Would it successfully fill the gap that existed for a serious discourse on Asian literatures, cultures and Englishes?

However, much to our pleasant surprise, the Journal picked up momentum fast and we started attracting articles from top scholars from around the world. The volume of submission also continued to increase at an accelerated pace, especially after the Journal was included in the Scopus database in 2012 and Web of Science in 2014. Of course, more submission ensures better quality but it also results in more work for the editorial team, as all submitted articles have to be vetted and given fair consideration. This became more difficult as the University decided not to extend any financial support to the Journal from 2016, owing to its budget cuts by the Malaysian Education Ministry. Nonetheless, we managed to cope with this changed circumstance by investing more time and energy into it. Sometimes we had to work day and night, frantically, almost non-stop, especially during the publication season, but it was all joy and no pain because to us it was essentially a labour of love.

Running the journal has sharpened some of my attributes. It has certainly made me more patient and disciplined as an academic and individual. Because I did the first round of screening of the hundreds of articles we received in a year before sending them out for review, I had to have the utmost discipline in me. I had to manage my time in such a way so that it would not interfere with my other responsibilities as an academic. No doubt it impinged on my own research and publications to an extent, but I had to accept that as a necessary sacrifice for the success of the Journal. The Journal also exposed me to areas beyond my research interests. For example, it introduced me to Hong Kong literature in English and West Asian discourses on English language and writings in English. In this way, it has broadened and deepened my intellectual orbit. Moreover, *Asiatic* has helped me to become meticulous in my own work. Editing requires constant vigilance and engrossed reading of every word, interrogating every sentence and scrutinising the structure and argument of an essay. After going through this routine over and over again as the Journal's editor-in-chief, it became my second nature to strive for perfection in my own academic work. Finally, it has helped me to know academics from different geographical locations whom perhaps otherwise I would have never known.

I ran the Journal through thick and thin, without ever giving a second thought. Even when I was holding administration posts such as Head of

Department (2006-2010), Deputy Dean (2016-2017) and Dean of Faculty (2017-2018) at the University, I remained equally committed to the Journal. *Asiatic* became very much a part of me, my daily routine. I nurtured it as I would nurture a child to grow up self-confident and strong. But after tending and fostering it for so many years, I have now run out of road and the journey has come to an end. It is time for me to say “adieu” to *Asiatic*, though hard it is to part with something so close to me for so long. The French writer and Nobel Laureate, Anatole France once said, “All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter another.” Melancholy is perhaps not the right word to capture the magnitude of my sentiment at this juncture, but I would agree that we must die to one life to reincarnate into a new one. So perhaps reaching the end of the road with *Asiatic* will only mean the start of a new journey. I remain hopeful about that, and as I said earlier, hope is critical to forging ahead with life’s journey.

On the other hand, I believe *Asiatic* has a great future ahead. If the leadership is right, it should be able to grow from strength to strength. It already has a strong network of scholars associated with it, and I believe the new team will tap on these resources and continue to build on it, so that the Journal’s reach extends beyond where it is now. *Asiatic*’s foundation is strong, its roots are deep and wide spread, so if it can get enough nourishment and sustenance – love, care, professionalism and selfless devotion – from the new team, then I believe it will become globally more reputable as a scholarly publication than it is now. *Asiatic* is an international journal and I hope it will remain that way and not be hijacked by vested interested groups to turn it into a local journal.

Let me take this opportunity to thank all the members of the editorial team for their constant support in running and managing the Journal. I should mention our book reviews editor, Professor Somdatta Mandal and copy-editor, Dr Susan Philip, in particular, in this context. They were always prompt and highly professional in carrying out their tasks. I should also recognise the many scholars who have helped us with vetting articles. Any journal is as good as its peer-reviewers. Therefore, if *Asiatic* has any claim to excellence, the acclaim should go to the peer-reviewers. I wish I could acknowledge them all by name in this editorial but, unfortunately, the list is just too long. Moreover, I should express my gratitude to those who have helped us with putting together the special issues of the Journal: Dr Andrew Hock Soon Ng (Monash University Malaysia), Dr Chingyen Yang Mayer (Siena College, USA), Dr Eddie Tay (The Chinese University of Hong Kong), Professor Fakrul Alam (University of Dhaka, Bangladesh), Professor Jasbir Jain (University of Rajasthan, India), Dr Maskanah M. Lotfie (International Islamic University Malaysia), Dr Md. Mahmudul Hasan (International Islamic University Malaysia), Dr Normala Othman (King Saud

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