What is interesting about Asif is he is self-taught. His books are a remarkable achievement in the visualization of the vastness of the universe. Dr M Ali Asgar, fellow, Bangladesh Academy of Sciences and ex-professor at BUET says, "He is well read, intelligent and efficient. How many people with PhDs in science write for common people? As a full time writer of popular science, he is doing a great job. I believe his works will have a great impact on the society in developing a scientific attitude. "

Asif politely states that he believes all professions can contribute to the development of the country. "I am just a traveller. I am trying to discover myself. I want to find out how far man can go in terms of scientific advancement."



Decoding scientific riddles.

He once said in a TV show that it is a crime to make students sit for tests before class six. "Children learn by themselves. The job of the education system is to create an environment for learning," says Asif. "I do not believe everyone must have degrees from universities. People can self-study. It will be good if universities start absorbing those who have self-studied and were home-schooled. And universities should not have an age limit for entering. What if someone at the age of 50 wants to study for a degree? Our universities should be more flexible." Leading educationalists in countries like the US are finding ways to reward curiosity over grades based on "knowing things". It is, after all, the people with curiosity who change the world.

Last year in August he organised the 'Blue Moon Festival' on the bank of Shitolokkha in Naranyanganj. Five thousand people, young and old showed up. Some brought their mini telescopes, while others played music---boys and girls hung out and laughed and talked about science or poetry. "They were not afraid of anything. Life happened on that day by the Shitolokkha," he says.

Many complain that people in our country are too conservative to learn about scientific matters outside academic requirements. Asif differs with that view. "If you can communicate to people that it is a scientific discussion, if you do not hurt their feelings, they become very receptive. The mistake all our progressive movements in this country have done is that they failed to understand how to communicate with people."

Once he was invited to deliver a lecture in Swandip. The residents of the island had lost electricity due to heavy flooding. The whole area was in ruins. And yet forty people came in a hired bus to pick him up. Three hundred people attended the lecture. "They acted like a king had arrived," reminisces Asif.

He is also the editor of *Mohabritto* (Great Circle), a science magazine and the founder of Discussion Project (www.discussionprojectbd.org) which has been his platform since 1992. He was the executive editor of the now-defunct Science World for three years. Mofidul Hoque, cultural activist and author says, "...Asif is a dreamer and all his work is done with a passion which has given birth to the unique programme of the Discussion Project. Here Asif as a Lecturer on Science addresses the audience on various issues of science in human development and inspires the audience to make their own journey, in quest of scientific ideals related to our everyday existence... the meaning of life gets a new perspective in his presentation and broadens the outlook of the person addressed."

Discussions about science occupy a shrinking wedge of a fast-growing pie of light-speed media in our country. This reality threatens to erode the already limited public appreciation of science. But the situation also presents a great opportunity – and responsibility – for scientists and their institutions to engage the public in discussions about science. Where ignorance lurks, so too do the frontiers of discovery and imagination. "Human beings have a curiosity to know. It is instinctive," says Asif.

Scientific literacy is like a vaccine against those who exploit ignorance of the common man. Carl Sagan once wrote, "It is far better to grasp the universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring." People deserve to have a better understanding of how the world works. "Will we just go about our daily lives without knowing our place in the universe?" asks Asif.