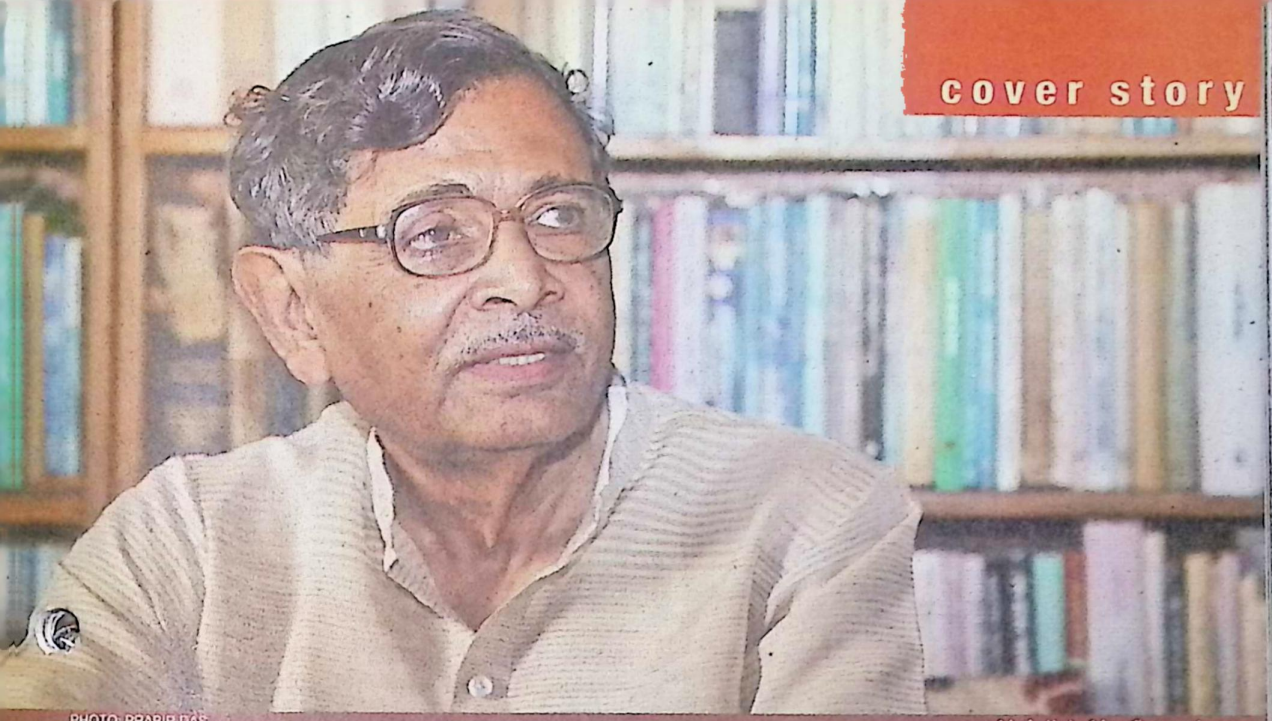


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Abdullah Abu Sayeed

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Reading is important. In fact, it may be the most human of all activities.

Your parents told you reading is good for you. Having a grounding in literature and a basic understanding of the sweep of human history and culture would provide a solid foundation for any future career you pursued— whether you went on to become a doctor, an engineer, a teacher, a business owner, or a stay-at-home mom, they argued. Now research—cited in the Harvard Business Review—shows that reading fiction helps you interact well with others and increases your emotional intelligence—your awareness of yourself and others. It seems that reading fiction improves your sensitivity to and appreciation of complex human situations; it provides a richer 'toolkit' of understanding from which to pull when making decisions and building relationships. Through reading we understand our friends, our colleagues, and most importantly, ourselves more deeply.

In other words, reading encourages empathy. We understand that different people look at the world at a given situation differently. We learn to respect the opinions of others even if we may not agree with them. We learn to be tolerant. We expand the universe with our mind.

Abdullah Abu Sayeed, founder of Bishwa Sahitya Kendra, has taken the responsibility of doing just that by developing a reading culture, cultivating in the youth a love for literature and its humanizing values through exposure to the literature of this country and the world. "When we study the ideas, opinions, values and philosophies of the great people, we aspire to pursue a life larger than ours. Books help us develop a sense of duty and make us aware of our struggles. It gives us a total awareness of our existence, our life, our country, ourselves. To read is to hold the human civilization in our heart."

> The thought of a great writer is like light in darkness. If we can be illuminated by this light, we can rise above our pettiness and achieve greatness. If we can somehow raise this awareness even little by little, maybe someday ours will be a country where free and rational thinking will reign and happiness be possible.

BSK's mobile libraries roam all around Bangladesh and lend books to young readers for a nominal fee of Tk 10 a month. "The thought of a great writer is like light in darkness. If we can be illuminated by this light, we can rise above our pettiness and achieve greatness. If we can somehow raise this awareness even little by little, maybe someday ours will be a country where free and rational thinking will reign and happiness be possible." ■