



PROF. SERAJUL ISLAM CHOW. EDUCATION/RESEARCH

PROF. SERAJUL ISLAM CHOWDHURY, a renowned academic, author, critic and columnist, is a voice against injustice. Born on June 23, 1937 in Baroikhali village, Munishiganj, Prof. Choudhury has played a significant role in inspiring people to join the struggle for fundamental rights, justice and economic emancipation through his work as an academic and activist.

After completing his high school education, Prof. Choudhury expressed his desire to be a novelist but his father wanted him to get a degree in economics and join the civil service. Ultimately, on a note of compromise, he enrolled with the English Department at the University of Dhaka after obtaining an arts degree in 1952 from Notre Dame College. After receiving his Masters degree in 1956, Professor Choudhury worked briefly with Haraganga College in his home district, and Jagannath College in Dhaka. He later went on to obtain his PhD in English Studies from Leeds University, UK, and enrolled at Leicester University, UK, for his doctoral studies.

After deciding to not join the civil service to be a bureaucrat, Prof. Choudhury joined the Department of English, Dhaka University, as a lecturer in 1957. In the following four decades, he taught students, wrote essays and headed the department as its dean, while penning several academic and research papers. He was the first department head to offer PhD degrees in English at Dhaka University.

Popular among his students as SIC sir, Professor Choudhury has consistently spoken out against intolerance, autocracy, imperialism, land grabbing, river pollution and felling of trees in class and outside. He has in Bangla and English – the *Dhaka Bishyabidyalay Patrika* for 15 years and the *Dhaka University Studies* for 9 years.

He founded the University Book Centre in 1978 and the Centre for Advanced Research in Humanities in 1986. He followed this up with the Samaj Rupantar Adhyayan Kendra (Centre for Studies on Social Transformation), which works towards spreading awareness about democracy and equality of rights and opportunities.

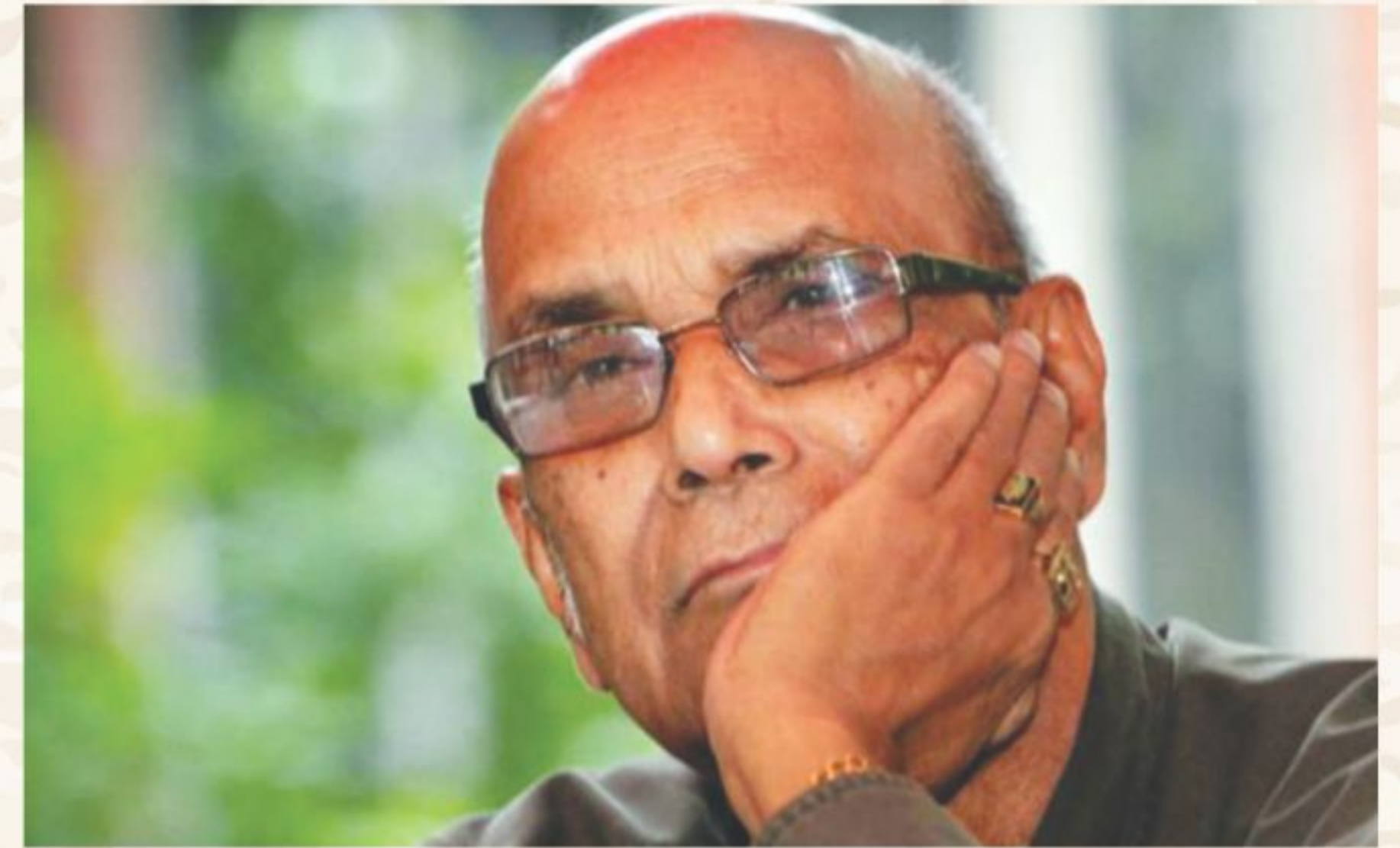
Professor Choudhury is the editor of *Notun Diganta*, a periodical on literature and culture that usually features thought-provoking articles on various human, environment and social issues. He was also a frontline leader of *Bangladesh Lekhak Shibir*, a



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literary and cultural organisation, and has written over 25 books which reflect the kind of objectivity that has always endeared him to his readers. Currently professor emeritus of Dhaka University, Professor Choudhury was recognised with the Ekushey Padak Award and the Bangla Academy Award for his contribution to language and literature.

His commitment to bring an end to the injustices of the world, and protect nature from the intrusion of human activities, continues to inspire generations of Bangladeshis.



SYED SHAMSUL HAQ LITERATURE

WITH words. Syed Shamsul Haq can take the dark out of the night as well as paint the daytime black. He writes magical verse plays, straight-from-the-heart poems and novels and stories with a deepened awareness of time in the depiction of the human condition. Born on December 1935, Haq has written prolifically about love and honour, pity and pride, compassion and sacrifice and peace and war. Bangla literature has not seen a polymath of his equal in ages. His work is studied at schools, colleges and universities.

Despite all the accolades Syed Haq is quite unmoved by the fanfare. What motivates him to keep on writing? "If I don't write, I don't feel well," he once said. "I write poetry, stories, novels, plays and essays. I do not consider them separate mediums. They all accomplish the same thing—expression through language. They all stem from the same source—language which is the only material I have, just like a painter with his colour."

His poems reveal a deep inspiration, and in a mysterious way appeal to the reader's own feelings and stimulate their imagination. He believes that poetry gives shape to our experience and unformulated words. It gives us wings to fly—we understand ourselves and the world a little better. Or, we get another perspective of looking at things.

He is known for his lyrical flow of voices and counter-voices in novels and plays that force entry into oppression's closed rooms. His plays and novels about the Liberation War delve into the psychological state of the people and their inner conflicts in a war torn country. *Payer Awaj Paoa Jai* (1976) which aptly articulates ignorance and misuse of religion is even more relevant today. His prose is rich, and highlights a challenging vision of man's vulnerability. In *Pronito Jibon*, he talks

about how from a very religious but progressive family he became what he is today.

His plays *Nuruliner Shara Jibon* (*The entire life of Nurul Din*), *Judhha ebong Judhha* (*War and war*), *Ekhane Ekhon* (*Here, now*) and novels *Neel Dangshon* (*The Blue Sting*, 1981), *Smritimedh* (*Massacre of Memory*, 1986), *Ek Mutho Janmabhumi* (*A Fistful of Motherland*) and *Megh O Machine* (*Cloud and Machine*, 1991) among others have inspired generations. A voracious reader of linguistics and colonial history of Bengal, he reads detective stories to let off steam when he feels like his brain is clogged up with complex plots.

He loves to paint when he is not writing or thinking about writing. He likes to listen to western classical music, Nazrul Geeti and Rabindra Sangeet. Bob Dylan's poetry and songs inspire him.

He has won every major award there is in the field of literature in the country, among them, the Bangla Academy Award (1966), Ekushey Padak (1984), Independence Day Award (2000), National Poetry Award (1997) and National Poetry Honour (2001).

Syed Shamsul Haq leaves no room in his heart for anything but the old verities of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any work of art is ephemeral and doomed. Until a writer does so, he is wasting everyone's time by writing about lust, not love; victory that has no hope and defeats in which no one loses anything that matters.