

Pvt library stirs children's reading passion

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Eight-year-old Abdullah Al Shabit is so deeply engrossed in the text before him that he's barely heard the question. "I'm reading Neel Hati," he says, eventually looking up. "The Blue Elephant" is a children's book by renowned author Humayun Ahmed.

As with many youths in Uttar-Porbo Masimpur village of Pirojpur municipality, Shabit's enthusiasm for reading stems in large measure from the establishment of the Ahmed Ali Memorial Library just 1.5 kilometres from the centre of Pirojpur town.

Novels, poems, non-fiction and magazines: every day from 4:00 pm children begin to arrive to search the shelves for something of interest. They can read at the library until 8:00 pm.

"I visit the library every afternoon to read stories," says ten-year-old Zaed. When asked why he does so,

he says it's simply for pleasure.

"I like to read humorous stories," says class two student Shumiya, nearby.

The library is managed by M Shahidullah, 26, currently a master's degree student at a nearby college. "The library first opened in 2013," he explains, "with the help of local Ahmed Bin Reaz who nowadays resides in Portugal. The library is named after his late father."

With around 20 regular and 150 irregular readers of different ages, but for the most part between ages eight and twenty, the library of 200 books situated in a rented house isn't large. But the initiative of bringing access to the written word within easy reach of the public and especially local children is admirable. Developing healthy reading habits will surely help any child throughout the entirety of their lives.

Apart from the library's appreciative junior readers, many parents are also grateful. "The attitude of the guardians is very positive," says

Shahidullah. "They send their children regularly." The library stocks adult books too, and daily newspapers in Bangla and English to cater to the interests of parents.

Yet for any parent, a library's greatest attraction is always likely to be the witnessing of their son or daughter's growing enthusiasm for reading books.

"My son studies in class two," says one guardian, Ishak Ali Khan, "He is very attentive at reading books at home now too, thanks to the love for reading he found at this library."

"I'm really pleased to see my son enjoying the library," says another parent Abul Kalam Azad. "The library helps to build his character. Upon returning home of an evening he usually retells whatever story he read and we all enjoy that."

To further encourage its junior readers the library organises programmes on different occasions including drawing competitions and cultural events.

It has also enlisted the cooperation of local college students to work as volunteers to run a coaching centre which provides free tuition to children from struggling households. Library president, government school teacher Md Saiful Islam, meanwhile, donates his time to provide English classes at the coaching centre.

"Our plan is to include computer-based learning and internet in the library," explains Shahidullah. "But we also need more books and an instant power supply would help to keep things running when the electricity goes."

His hope is to find donations and new library patrons in Pirojpur in order to achieve these goals. In anticipation, two large, new shelves sit ready to house more books.

In the meantime, each afternoon the children return to find an old favourite or to discover something new: either way, they are soon enough absorbed, once again, in reading books.