The One-Day Love-bug

Last Friday so many fights were seen on the streets, in the parks, in public buses and shopping centres that one could easily work out how many divorces took place inside the four walls of a house; though we pray otherwise. For last Friday was unfortunately the day after 14 February, the day when young and old couples were caught on camera, both mechanical and human, in their loving ways; that view the nation gathered from newspaper and channel coverage wider than women empowerment in the forthcoming elections.

It became the common expression on that one particular day. Rickshawpullers pleading car drivers to give way shouted, 'bhalobasha... bhalobasha...' Vendors demanding more money from angry punters justified the price hike by meekly saying, 'bhalobasha... bhalobasha...' By contrast, only a judge had little *maya* on the day when he handed a 13-year not-so *bhalo basha* to a seasoned city politician despite the *meki* festive season.

The Indian sub-continent was never short of love look at our population. Take a look at the legends of Shiri-Farhad, Laila-Majnu, or for that matter heartthrob Kabori singing 'why he did not come and so everything seems glum', and debonair Razzak crooning L-O-V-E love means what? Or was it some other hero? It did not matter. By the way, Kabori's song was in Bangla, 'shey je keno elo na...'

The only thing that mattered then, and I am positive now too, was that mutual human adoration was the result of physics and chemistry between two souls, not prompted by commercial rallies, sponsored concerts or the printed poetry of card traders. I know some of you are thinking of biology too, and that is the problem it seems these days. It was also no different then.

It may make me sound old, but in those days (consider that I heard this from my Dadu) those who perceived there was love in the air (for Barishaillas, even water) exchanged letters pursed between the pages of an innocent novel, dropped accidentally on the corridor of Curzon Hall. That they did throughout the year. Those who were under ten (in class and age) were excellent and essential abetters, passing verbal information and written messages among the amorous. Yes indeed the real throb was the seemingly 'criminal' element in the relationship. It still is. But now some poor kids and the aged suffering from age-old *bhimroti* have to wait a whole year to sing L-O-V-E love maaney ki? Tch! Tch! Tch! It does not make sense to millions of others who are in love throughout the year.

When two persons are in love, they are supposed to be in that doting state every moment of their living, 24x7x60x60, or else the three words are just that, and not the essence of paradise that they are supposed to encompass.

The situation has improved from last year for, bewildered as they are in keeping pace with the 'progress', fewer guys sent out Valentine's Day wishes to guys this year. Some well-meaning gentlemen have included divinity in expressing their wishes on the day. There is total confusion.

Yet once again we Bangalee have fallen prey to the Western-style corporate machine of commercialising something which was very private, and supposed to be. You don't go out there peddling your 'beloved'. It is demeaning to both the partners. You don't need a hip-hip hurrah or a *zindabad* or a *michil* to ensure or assure that either is definitely in love.

Celebrate at home (yes even on Valentines Day) in private, in the company of your friends if you have to; not beside a giggling group of youths, who do not even have a partner in sight. Or, maybe they are the clever ones, hiding theirs at home.

This day was not 'celebrated' in Bangladesh even a few years back, say four-five. Was there no love then? Millions of people did not send any cards this year; the business people would wish otherwise. Are they not in love? I am.

In concluding, I would like to share a sombre event that took place in Chicago in 1929 on February 14. The Associated Press (AP) reported thus:

Chicago, Feb 14 (AP)Chicago gangsters, posing as policemen, invaded the North Side stronghold of the George (Bugs) Moran gang, lined up seven victims with their faces to a white brick wall and mowed them down with automatic pistols and machine guns. The wholesale execution was carried out at 10:30 a.m. with all the precision of an army firing squad.

Italian-American gangster Al Capone, also known as Scarface (gaal kata) because of a knife cut to his cheek, and his gang were blamed for the execution-style murders of members of the rival "Bugs" Moran gang. The hideous underworld murders came to be known as (would you believe?) the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre. Love! Huh!

Al Capone, like any modern day criminal, got away with the murders and was jailed for income tax evasion in 1931 for eleven years. He was involved in some sort of love and was crippled by syphilis. He spent the rest of his life in his mansion in Miami Beach, Florida.

Who said Dhaka is one hundred years behind Chicago?

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