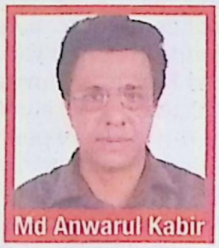
Consumerism, corruption, and the corporate hegemony


Md Anwarul Kabir

To live on the earth, for survival, we must consume foods, essential products or services. Nothing is wrong in it and this is not consumerism. In fact, the working definition of consumerism is the consumption of products or services for fulfilling the artificial demands created in the human psyche. In the myth of consumerism, by consuming products and services the individual perceives that eventually he/she will be gratified and integrated. Unfortunately, consumerism offers only short term ego-gratification for those who can afford the luxury and frustration for those who can not. Take an example, many youngsters from the lower middle class and onward dream of owning the latest model mobile sets. However, a few of them can afford to buy them and many cannot. Those who cannot afford to buy suffer utmost frustration. Even the fortunate ones, who could afford to own it, albeit satisfy temporarily, fall again in frustration as within a shortest span of time this 'latest' model will not be the latest anymore as new model mobiles will be channelled into the market by the manufacturers. So, the phenomenon of such consumerism is never ending.

If we objectively analyse, then it will be revealed that the consumerism, indeed, is the bi-product of the free market economy, the basis of corporate culture and neo-capitalism of this post modern era. The driving force of neo-capitalism has paved the way for the rapid expansion of corporate culture by exploring the advantage of globalisation.

The implications of consumerism are manifold and this short article has no scope to discuss in detail. However, in a brief some implications are cited below:

a) Extensive environmental damage: Excessive production and use of refrigeration, especially by the first world have generated CFC (chlorofluorocarbon) which causes the depletion of the Ozone layers of the atmosphere. This, in turn, will lead the planet earth in an un-repairable devastating situation. Besides due to consumerism Factories become enrooted and forests cannot be rebuilt

b) Distance between the rich and the poor: Globally, the 20% of the world's people in the highest-income countries account for 86% of total private consumption expenditures the poorest 20% a minuscule 1.3%. Multinational companies, mostly owned by the richest countries will expand their business establishment worldwide leaving no opportunity for the manufacturers of the lone third world countries. This eventually, enhances the further gap between the rich and the poor.

c) Advertisement controlled market: In consumer driven society, people buy commodities/services on the basis of advertisement rather than assessing real qualities of the products. Besides, the prime deciding factor for buying many of the products is based on advertisement-- not on the actual needs of the individuals.

d) Impact on culture: Indigenous or traditional culture of the countries will be replaced by the corporate culture due to consumerism. For instance, McDonald culture has changed to a greater extent the indigenous food habits. Even in Bangladesh, to the members of the urban younger generation fast food (e.g. Burger, pizza) has the more appeal than traditional pithas, chira/muri, doi etc.

e) Decaying of morality: In the consumer driven society, a person's worth is determined by his/her buying capacity. Moral values, honesty, wisdom etc. are the least determinant factors in a consumer driven society.

f) Social alienation: In a consumer driven society, people has to work for longer time to meet up his artificial demands. This eventually will socially isolate the people. This is very common in the USA and in other developed countries. To some extent, in the urban area of our country, especially in Dhaka this phenomenon has already been initiated.

There is a strong correlation between consumerism and the all pervasive corruption worldwide. In developed countries, especially in the USA and the countries of West Europe some ethical corruption are legalised as most of the governments in those countries are indirectly controlled by the profit monger corporate or in other word multinational companies who have their own agenda following the free market economy.

He who has the gold makes the rulesthis theory is quite applicable in the capitalist world. Take the USA as an example. Both the two major parties Republic and Democrat are patronised by the big multinational companies. As the other political parties who stand against capitalism and who campaign for the working class including 13% of the people who are under poverty line cannot succeed in the election, mainly due to crisis in party funds. It may be noted here, like our country in the developed countries also money