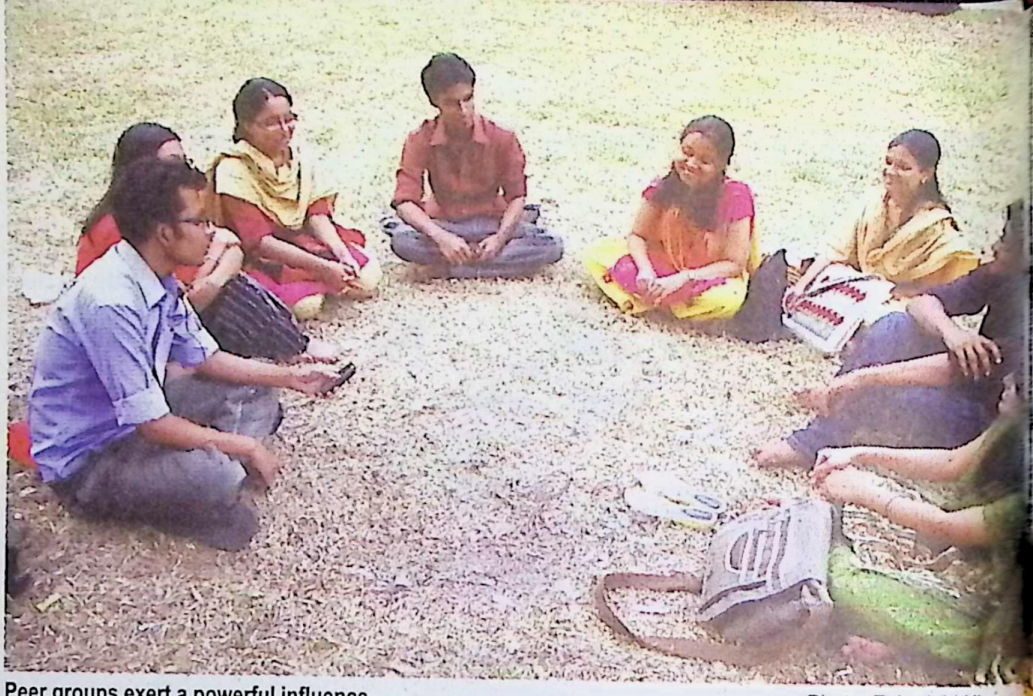


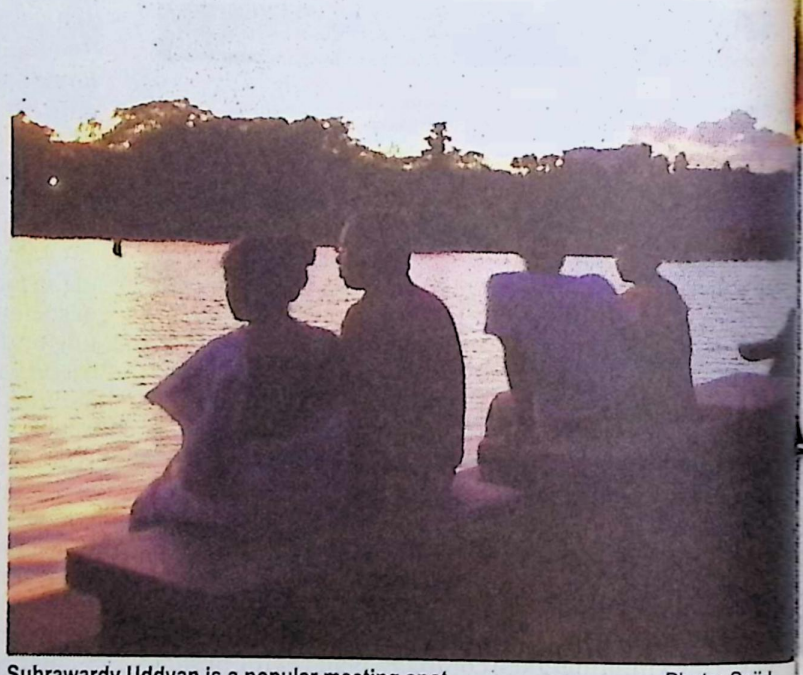
Peer groups exert a powerful influence. Photo: Zahedul I Khan

"In any case, you have to follow certain precautions. In fact, in the case of the internet you often have more information. You know a lot about a person before you even make the first contact, because so much is revealed in their online profile. In the case of social networking sites like Facebook, you know who their friends are, and even what books they read!"

Rahnuma, 29, who works at a private bank, has a different take. She thinks the technology and new social norms that allow us greater freedom also makes it easy to "shop around" and this has had the effect of making "love" cheap. "People have forgotten the real meaning of love," she says. "They are not in love, but maybe they're in love with the idea of love. People go from attraction to intimacy in the space of a few phone calls. It turns sexual fairly quickly, because the social inhibitions just are not there."

Certainly the media from movies to FM Radio -- has its fair share of blame for commercialising this basic human emotion. Whole movie industries are built around the idea of romantic love as part of an escapist fantasy. FM Radio channels have "Propose Programmes" where people can phone in and propose on air. There are shows where people are encouraged to talk about their crushes. The Radio Jockeys who preside over these shows have titillating titles such as "Love Guru" and "Romance Guru".

"If both parties have an understanding, that can be romantic," says Rahnuma. "But if someone is saying he has a crush on me with the whole world listening, and I don't have a clue, that can be annoying, not to say damaging."



Suhrawardy Uddyan is a popular meeting spot. Photo: Sajid

"Technology is simply a tool," says Prof. Mokaddem Hossain "and people will use it in whatever way they will. If they want to play around, they will find a way of doing it!"

Critics say in the current atmosphere, the mating ritual is losing its meaning. Dating means different things to different people. To some it is a way of getting to know someone with the intention of assessing their suitability as potential mates. To others, it is simply a way of getting some no-strings-attached fun.

Serial mobile phone dating has emerged as a new phenomenon. With dates available so easily, some people refuse to work on taking any relationship forward. At the first sign of incompatibility or a minor tiff, they would rather drop their "date" like a hot potato and start searching for partners again.

Serial daters exist among both men and women. "Many guys will date a lot of girls at a time," says Sania. "It would be Ok if they were open about it. But typically they will try to make each girl feel she is the one! Girls are sometimes guilty too. They will date several men simultaneously, and bask in the attention and gifts they shower on her. If they want to opt out, it's a simple matter of changing your SIM card."

So is this the state of true love in the mobile age? Or is it an illusion fueled by infatuation and lust? Young adults