

February comes with countless dreams of romance. Valentine's Day celebrations differ in terms of nations, culture and age. While one young couple has simple plans for the day, another septuagenarian couple hosts sizzling parties. For some the day is about flowers, food, cards, movies and kisses. And yet others say nothing at all and think love is eternal doesn't need an annual celebration. My Venezuelan friend, Pedro says,

"When we were dating, my wife Beatrice said she didn't care about Valentine cards or flowers. I knew she was the woman for me, I don't believe in superficial expressions of love." They are happily married for the last 23 years. On the other hand, Valerie, a young lady who waits through the year for Valentine's Day with dreams of how her boyfriend will celebrate the day with her.

Valentine's Day is a day to celebrate love no doubt, even if that is by giving it a thought or two. The day, also known as Feast of Saint Valentine became, first associated with romance in the High Middle Ages. In the 18th century it became the occasion for lovers to present flowers, confectionary and cards to each other. Symbols of key as a mean to open gateways to a heart, heart-lined-outlines, doves and cupid wings are used to celebrate Valentine's Day.

For the average Bangladeshi, it's the day for the young folks. Love has its magic and the day has found its place in society as *bhalobashar din* (the day of love). It is no longer bound to the elite or the literate people. Thanks to media, young people in villages are well versed with this special day. In Bangladesh, 14th February comes right after Pohela Falgun that officially brings in the spring. Spring and love uniting in a day makes the

celebration just irresistible as yellow and red toast each other. A rickshaw-puller confided to me recently,

Shamne bhalo bashar din, pola- pain Hasina ba Khaledare manbona, dheu boibo rastain, asha kori shedin amar labh bhaloi hoibo (Valentine's Day is near, the youth won't bother with Hasina or Khaleda, they will be like waves on the streets and I hope to make some money.)

With time and tide, romance has found countless ways to reach hearts. Valentine's Day greetings fly from one corner of the world to the other with Internet. Phones, Emails, Twitter, Facebook, Viber and other apps bring connections on the fingertips. You forget that oceans and mountains are in between lovers, Cupid flies on the Internet. But then soul mates are what they are, and may not need the remembrance of love on Valentine's.

However, when I think of my youth thirty years back, I reflect on romance existing in movies or books. To us, Uttam Kumar and Shuchitra Sen were people with rights to fall in love. When Uttam Kumar, with his lady-killer looks presented flowers to the heroine, the heart gave a lurch, *maybe it can happen in real life*. But there was always a guilty feeling with the idea because falling in love or *prem kora*, was not the norm of the day. So for me, stolen glances with a young man remained frozen in its time. Reading English romantic novels brought Valentine's Day.

When wedding bells rang for me with an arranged marriage when I was twenty-one, frozen dreams of romance defrosted with hopes of getting a Valentine's card or a rose from the first man in life. By then changes were in the air and many of my friends were dating.

TOUCHING THE HEART

TULIP CHOWDHURY

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However Valentine's greetings did reach me in a different way. I got hundreds of Valentine cards during the twenty years of my teaching life. My students were 7 and 8 year olds. On Valentine's Day, little girls and boys made my heart dance with handcrafted cards. Red, blue, purple hearts drawn with childish hands and the words, "Be my valentine" or "I love you Miss" brought happy tears to my eyes. Little voices would ask me, "Miss, what did your husband give for Valentine?" I would cross my fingers beneath the desk for lying and say, "Flowers, that is a beautiful way to say you love someone."

Just as flowers bloom in their seasons, my students found their own versions of Valentine's Day with

their loved ones say, "I love you." As human beings we need assurances of love, in words or deeds. As life becomes challenging in the modern world, the world out there at times seems to be cold and unknown. Circumstances at times threaten to uproot all that we believe in. Like a hidden panacea, hearing words of love at such times makes us hang on. Knowing, that there is someone to hold you when you fall or someone to join your laughter can make all the differences. Dr. Les Parrot in his article "The Importance of Saying, I love you" says,

"I love you. Three simple words. So critical to healthy relationships. We take these tender words for granted sometimes, but we have never known anyone



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

time. I knew the journey was on when one day, Maria, a third grader told me, "Teacher, Raj said he loved me." She was talking about the boy who sat next to her.

I looked at Maria, smiled and said, "But that is wonderful. We all love each other. Your parents love you, I love you."

"But Miss, this love is not that love." Came from Maria. Her eyes stared into mine, trying to clear the confusion.

But all confusions wash away when people fall in love. A mother instills peace and security in her child when she says those three magic words. Aging people, fearing the end find renewed strength when they hear

who got tired of hearing "I love you" ...before leaving the house ...after a quick message on the answering machine ...while working in the garden ...before dozing off in bed. These little words are like nutrients."

Marked days on calendars come as reminders to us of special days. Valentine's Day can have five stars on it for it comes with what matters most in relationships, *love*. Max Muller has said, "A flower cannot blossom without sunshine and a man cannot live without love." A flower, a song or a few words on a paper, just say it and touch the heart.

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