

Black-marketing of illiteracy

NURUL MOMEN

The above title black-marketing of illiteracy may appear to a reader not only as a title too absurd, but also as a proposition much too hard to swallow.

Still he may be inclined to believe, half-heartedly though, that cases of those sorts may turn up under proper circumstances, as in Bangladesh the genius of the people has been found to be so varied and versatile that if anything offers any scope for black-marketing some people will be always there to take advantage of it. They can even go further to create such an opportunity for black-marketing themselves to avail of it afterwards. This spirit of black-marketing is getting progressively realised day by day in all spheres of our life in new and novel ways.

In our old days we never came across anything like black-marketing of cinema tickets. What is almost a rule today, had never been even an exception in our younger days.

Three factors, I feel, are mainly responsible to open the opportunity for black-marketing of a thing. It must be made scarce for the persons who most eagerly look for it, a craze to get it by all means must be created in them, and there must be present a chain of dishonest, and highly avaricious persons from bottom upwards, and vice-versa, to take advantage of the situation to reap the highest pecuniary benefit out of its disposals.

The chain is such as could definitely be represented by the following piece of Augustus de Morgan:

"Great fleas have little fleas upon their back to bite them
And little fleas have lesser fleas, and so ad infinitum;
And great fleas themselves in turn have greater fleas to go on
While these again have greater still,"

and greater still and so on."

And on this ladder up and down moves the spirit of black-marketing. And once such conditions prevail, be whatever the field black-marketing goes galore; and nobody can help it, if the persons subjected to it do not help themselves; or the chain does not get snapped anywhere in the middle.

It is said we have always two reasons to do a thing, the good reason, and the real one. The spirit of black-marketing is present in almost everyone of us, for reasons which, we feel, are sometimes good, and sometimes real, but never feel them to be really good, honestly.

Take for an example. Suppose a person who is in possession of something he treats as a trifle, and is willing to dispose it off at any price. Suddenly he hears that the price of the thing has gone up several folds, he would invariably decide to hold it back to see what ceiling it might reach. And that though seems as a motive quite reasonable but never seems to be real for him, because on the last analysis it is likely to approximate to an attitude of mind parallel to that of a black-marketeer. Because it then helps black-marketing. If he would dispose it off without holding, that attitude would have been really reasonable.

It is no use multiplying instances, because we have been made to feel in our bones by the trading people around what really black-marketing is. Sky is the limit. The other day I was told by a friend that even the recording cards for playing housie are black-marketed like the cinema tickets are.

Now to come to the question of black-marketing in illiteracy. I base this statement on a couple of instances, reported by a friend of mine. They appeared actually as a result of a scheme

suggested to them to remove illiteracy in a very easy way: to give a good increment of pay to illiterates working in any house, after they have learnt to read and write. And black-marketing of illiteracy came as the result. I reacted to it so much that I put them in a drama staged on the occasion of first ever literary drive week, in 1967, and the audience enjoyed it immensely.

This sort of black-marketing of illiteracy is so novel and clever that it beats hollow the type that is resorted to by the sellers of text books published by the School Text Book Boards. To force to buy the note alongwith a text book is so old a game, as the old story about selling a camel at a scheduled price goes.

A person, having a contract with a farm to sell a camel for a scheduled low price, brought it to the market, with a monkey ridden on it. The seller proclaimed that he was going to sell the camel, say for one hundred taka. People gathered around were immediately ready to pay. But the seller said, "Gentlemen, you have to buy this monkey along with this camel. And he charged an exorbitant price for the monkey. And sold both together at as high a price as he would wish them to go for.

The sellers of text books, follow such ordinary methods, like the seller of the camel did. But the couple of instances I want to present to you, beat all anticipation for the cleverness and ingenuity involved.

And of course I was at fault for that.

I have a principle, which as a second nature, has become such a settled tendency with me that for more than three decades I am keeping it up, fair or foul. A boy or a girl, old or young, whoever comes to work in my house, is invariably taught to read and write, if unlettered. If the person is already literate he is to go for further studies. If he is unwilling to read, in-

centives are created for him. For instance, I have a boy now of about 11 years, Abul Khair, who was most unwilling to sit with books in his leisure time. I told him that for everyday's sitting for study for an hour at least, I would pay him 25 paisa. And that has encouraged him up so much that he keeps me more busy than I would have wished for. Before him I got a boy named Mannan of the same age, who appeared to me to be one of the most brilliant chaps of that age group.

He was not only eager to learn, but learnt in a manner unsurpassed. He learnt the whole alphabet in three days, and the multiplication table upto 12 in four days. I felt

for certain that he was a genius. So I got him admitted in a nearby school, and told his father that I would take charge of his education to see how far he could go.

In past, I took the charge of such education of a son of one and a daughter of another who used to cook in my house. Both the cooks being females deserted by their husbands, stayed in my house for more than ten years. And the result was that the boy passed from the Polytechnic Institution, and is now an Assistant Engineer in a government department, and the girl while preparing for SSC examination got married with a person who is now drawing about two thousand rupees as pay. Those two were just average, and could not go as far as I wanted them to. Therefore I jumped for joy at the idea to put in the best efforts of Mannan to see if surprising results may be achieved. But that was not to be because he went away after a week, just for nothing. We had been all very kind to him, but he felt much too much for his association with the street urchins who would very often meet him on the street, and coax him to play with them, the way he did before. It is about a year now that he had left. I still find him

on the streets collecting leaves for fuel, and I feel with regret that I missed a good chance to show to the people what could be made out of such street urchins. And it is my eagerness to see that alphabets are taught to the unlettered who come to work in private homes, like cooks, drivers, and bearers that unfortunately created the situation for black-marketing of illiteracy referred to above. To supply incentives for them to read a group of us decided to increase the pay as soon as the unlettered ones learnt to read. Then this was reported to have happened.

Mr X, one of our group, appointed a driver who was unlettered.

Mr Y, appointed a cook who was so also. And as per our programme those two persons started teaching them alphabet and when with great difficulty they picked up the knowledge to read and write, the driver was given fifty taka as increment and the cook ten taka, over their original pay.

It was learnt afterwards that both of them were literate, and posed to be illiterate only to get the increment as promised by us.

And that appeared to me clearly as black-marketing of illiteracy and I put them as such in my drama. Jolly good I did, because afterwards I came to learn that those two cases reported by my friend were fictitious conceived out of fun.

Be that as it may, it would certainly offer scope of black-marketing in our homes if my scheme would be accepted by people at large, because our people not only have the talent, that is the special aptitude for it, to follow the old course but some of them have the genius to find out new avenues for it, as it is said.

"Talk not of genius
Genius master of man."

Genius does what it must,
and talent what it can."