



FICTION

DREAM-CATCHER

NADIA RAHMAN

The two-storeyed house stood lonesome with paddy fields behind it. A big pond lay on the opposite side of the narrow alley. Taltoli is still a quiet neighborhood, yet to be devoured by the urban landscape because of its situation.

Haji Din Mohammad Ali spat out betel leaf juice and walked hurriedly out of the house. He could hear the loud sound of music coming from the first floor where his wife, Nazma Begum, was watching a Hindi movie of Amitabh Bachhan. He could also hear the equally loud voice of Putul, his thirteen year old daughter, who was devouring the Hindi cinema with her mother and singing along whenever the opportunity came. Haji Din Mohammad Ali uttered some inaudible *ayats* in an attempt to seek help from Allah to mend these *bidat* activities. He needed to reach his rice mill quickly. He heard that the creditors were again creating problems. He needed to fix Kadam Hossain who had been paying back the money every month to clear the credits. He hailed a rickshaw and got on it with a worried look on his face.

Upstairs, Nazma Begum was quite irritated when the maid entered the room and reminded her that lunch was yet to be cooked. Nazma Begum called out loudly, "Putul, Putul."

Putul made a face at her mother's call and went to stand on the verandah and pretended not to hear Nazma Begum. From the ceiling a colorful wind-chime hung which tinkled in the breeze. Putul preferred to call this a dream-catcher which was given to her by her father from his last trip to the Bandarban. Nazma Begum did not like it, saying the sound gave her headache. Putul did not move from the verandah and continued to play with her dream catcher as her mother called again and again. Nazma Begum appeared at the door. "Putul, how many times have I told you not to stand here and play with that stupid thing! People will stare at you! Come inside!"

Putul again made a face and went inside to sit in front of the dresser. She started rummaging through the drawer and fumed. She screamed, "Lina, Lina!" The 7 year old younger sister gingerly came inside the room and stared at her.

"Yes, Apu?"
"Have you taken my compact again?"

Fumed Putul.

"Apu, it makes my dolls look pretty like you!"

Putul got up and slapped Lina across her face. Lina burst into tears and rushed out of the room to complain to the mother.

Putul felt better and decided to pester her father to buy a new one. The very thought of shopping excited her and she started listing all the others things she will need.

Nazma Begum ordered the maid to cook chicken and daal.

"Amma, there is no chicken in the freezer. You did not remind *shaheb* to do the bazaar in the morning. There is nothing except potatoes and lentils."

Nazma Begum quickly tried to think of a way. Her husband would be mad if he sees only daal and mashed potato on the

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table! She went to the backyard garden which had been newly weeded. On one side, she has started growing the seasonal vegetables and on the other side were rows of flower beds ending with a small water body. She quickly went to the vegetable garden, squatted beside the radishes and pulled some out. She looked around for other options, but saw none. The cauliflowers and cabbages were too young.

It was already *Duh* time. The nearby *muazzin's* call seemed too loud to Nazma Begum who quickly pulled the *orna* over her head and went to the kitchen with her radishes.

When Hazi Din Mohammad Ali entered the house, he wrinkled his nose at the smell of something unsavory. He yelled, "Putul's ma, why do I smell radish in the house? Don't I have enough money



to have chicken or fish?"

Nazma Begum came out of the kitchen saying, "Don't you see it on the TV how a vegetarian diet is good for your health?"

The master of the house said something under his breath and went to take a shower.

The next day, Putul went to the market with her mother and Lina after school. They shopped to their heart's content, ate biriyani and came back home by *Asr* prayer. This time Nazma Begum remembered to bring some chicken biriyani. This would take care of her husband's lunch. Then she looked at the clock in the dining room. It was 4.30 pm, and he had not come for his lunch yet.

Putul's day was not very good. She had again failed the half-yearly examination. Her father would be surely mad. But what could she do? Studying was so boring.

But then her mother said she would be married off when she gets older. She did not need to study so much, did she? She had just finished storing the newly bought make-up kit in a safe place away from Lina's hand and came to stand at the veranda when she saw Kadam Hossain, the manager of their mill, approaching in quick steps. Kadam Hossain ran up the stairs and called out to Nazma Begum, "Bhabi, Bhabi!" Nazma Begum became irritated at being disturbed during her movie time. Nevertheless, the urgency of the call drew her to the main entrance.

"What's wrong, Kadam?" an irritated

Nazma Begum asked standing near the main door of the house.

"Blood, blood, Bhabi. I tried to stop them, Bhabi!" Cried Kadam Hossain.

Nazma Begum and Putul did not know that he was talking about and stared at him dumbfounded.

"Bhabi, they just came in and hacked him to death. I must inform the police. We have taken him to Dhaka Medical. I have to go." Kadam Hossain again stormed out of the house.

With a shrill cry, Nazma Begum fell on the ground. Soon Nazma, Putul and Lina with their maid rushed to the Medical College Hospital and then to the morgue.

It was late night before they could bring him back to the house. The whole house was swarming with relatives. Putul did not hear the words of consolation, the *kalima* or the recitation of the Holy Quran. She stood in the verandah and just stared out. Suddenly, the tinkling sound drew her back to reality. She touched the dream catcher. She suddenly realized that her father was not coming back and nobody would scold her for failing the exams. Her mind went blank.

In the next few months, things changed rapidly. Apparently, Haji Din Mohammad Ali had taken a lot of credit from the market and failed to pay them. Kadam Hossain brought eager customers to sell the rice mill. The ground floor of the house was rented out to pay their bills. Nazma Begum tried very hard to understand these monetary dealings, but Kadam Hossain would intervene and say that she did not need to be concerned about these. He would find excuses to come into the house without prior notice and talk for hours of nothing with Nazma Begum. Putul did not understand any of these.

There was a singing competition at the school and Putul was participating. Nazma Begum and Lina were getting ready to go to the school. Putul stood at the verandah touching the dream catcher as if getting the blessing from her Abbu. A strong breeze blew and made the dream catcher tinkle. Putul smiled and went inside to see if her mother and sister were ready. She did not want to be late.

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POETRY

Dhaka Lives in My Backbone

DILRUBA Z. ARA

The chestnut tree in my courtyard is in full bloom, clusters of flowers scattered on the green beneath. Who said this is the time for designing summer dreams? For going home, to Dhaka, to my hometown.

Cranes are sailing over boundaries to attend Burials of their parents and friends. Covid 19 has set me in a cage — This spring of two thousand twenty.

Dhaka comes to me in random snapshots Via Messenger, Facebook entries And through flickering video clips on YouTube Dhaka lives in my backbone, in rice and curry stores.

And in frozen food departments. Ilsha fish lie cold with open eyes — Echo the face of an ancient fisherman carrying heat From my grandma's stove.

Now summer has left with its blackout dreams, The chestnut tree stands bare of its promising allure. Covid 19 still blowing in the wind Navigating boundaries. I breathe in my glass bowl. And in my head, Dhaka lives on.

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REVIEWS

Revisiting Karl Marx - Yet Again

REVIEWED BY SHAHID ALAM

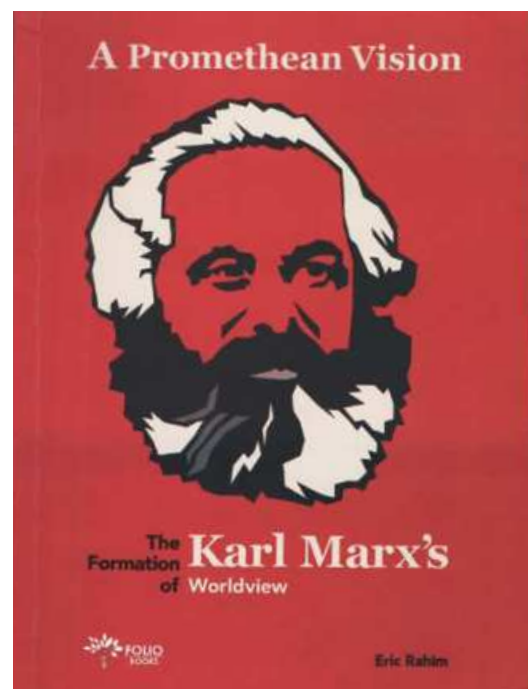
Eric Rahim, *A Promethean Vision: The Formation of Karl Marx's Worldview*. ISBN-10 : 1899155082. Lahore: Folio Books, 2020.

When Waqar A Khan, Founder, Bangladesh Forum for Heritage Studies, requested yours truly to take a look at a book written by a nonagenarian academic from the UK named Eric Rahim, born in 1928 in what later on became Pakistan, on Karl Marx, I was, to say the least, intrigued. I readily agreed to go through the slim volume of less than two hundred pages. Rahim was a journalist who worked for two quality newspapers of Pakistan, first *Dawn*, and then, *The Pakistan Times*, before embarking for doctoral studies in Economics in the UK, and landing a teaching job at Scotland's Strathclyde University.

The title, *A Promethean Vision: The Formation of Karl Marx's Worldview*, says it all about its content, though probably not as comprehensively as one might expect in the exploration of a brilliant mind whose thoughts continue to have an influence on human minds and plans of action to this day. But what Rahim has provided is enlightening enough, if at times rather heavy going, like for yours truly, who are less than adequately informed on the vast subject. Modern political economy is usually traced back to Adam Smith who is generally recognized as

Rahim provides glimpses of other insights into the life of the young Marx. We learn that he enjoyed the company of the German poet Heinrich Heine, more than twenty years his senior, who "was a democrat and a mild kind of socialist who had no sympathy with communist ideas...." He was also on good terms with another German poet, Georg Herwegh.

the first philosopher of capitalism. The counterpoint to his philosophy was advanced by Karl Marx, who, in collaboration with Friedrich Engels, argued in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 that unplanned capitalism must inevitably collapse and should be replaced by planned production. His proposition is also known as dialectical materialism, the idea that all growth, social change, and economic



development are the outcome of opposing forces competing for economic survival.

It was this thought, along with a few related ones, that Rahim characterizes as promethean and, he explains, "This book is an exposition of Karl Marx's worldview, generally referred to as the materialist conception of history or historical materialism." After acknowledging that the concept of historical materialism is a combined outcome from Marx and Engels, the author proceeds to inform us that his focus in this book is exclusively on Marx. And so we are informed that Marx's worldview has already developed considerably before he had turned thirty, and that Rahim has concentrated on studying the evolution of his thought up to this point.

Rahim traces the development of Marx's political philosophy as a young Hegelian who had borrowed two ideas from that source and which would be

crucial to the development of his thought. In his view, "Marx's first, and momentous, breakthrough in the development of his worldview came in his comprehensive critique of Hegel's political philosophy, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law...written in 1843*." In 1844, he embarked on a serious study of several political economists. Rahim argues that "the work that had the most significant and lasting impact on Marx's thought was *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith." He further proposes that "the contribution from Adam Smith was of the same magnitude, in terms of the development of Marx's worldview, as the inversion of Hegel...."

Rahim asserts considerable independence of viewpoint in analyzing Marx: "I have rejected the conventional interpretation of Marx's conception in which a clear separation is made between the 'base' made up of the 'forces of production,' and the superstructure of thought, and in which the base is treated as an independent variable determining the character of the dependent variable, the superstructure. (It is this relationship that supposedly makes the conception 'materialist')." Rahim further asserts that neither is the materialist conception a description of reality, nor is it a scientific law. The author is categorical in his interpretation of a widely attributed philosophy of Marx: "He (Marx) specifically denied that his worldview was a 'general historical-philosophical theory.' By implication, in this conception, there is no room for the view ('evolutionism') that all societies are inevitably moving towards a final destination, a communist society. Such a view would be un-empirical, supra-historical and, therefore, contrary to Marx's thought." Strong assertion, this, and a possible forum for some intense debate!

Rahim provides glimpses of other insights into the life of the young Marx. We learn that he enjoyed the company of the German poet Heinrich Heine, more than twenty years his senior, who "was a democrat and a mild kind of socialist who had no

sympathy with communist ideas...." He was also on good terms with another German poet, Georg Herwegh. In Rahim's estimation, Marx believed that poets were exceptional people and should be judged by rules other than those appropriate to ordinary mortals.

The author is often very assertive about his own viewpoints regarding Marx, and he backs his writing up with erudite scholarship and much sound analysis. And so he comments, "Marx's own theory of political economy, taking the classical theory as its starting point, sought to identify forces within the capitalist economy that would provide the dynamic of historical development, that is, changes in the capitalist mode of production. The fundamental point here is that the capitalist society, like all earlier societies based on the division of society between property owners and those who work for them, is based on antagonism."

Eric Rahim sums up his narrative of Karl Marx's formative years and his evolution as a brilliant social thinker with some emphatic observations of his own, something that draws attention to his own scholarship on his subject and his ideas and breakthroughs: "In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx wrote that just as political economists were the 'scientific representatives' of the bourgeoisie, the communists were the 'theoreticians' of the working class. So long as the working class does not sufficiently develop in size and class consciousness, utopian thinking prevails. With the development of the working class, however, the communist theoreticians' science, which comes from the historical movement and conscious association with it, ceases to be doctrinaire and, instead, becomes revolutionary. This is the vision to which Marx's theory of political economy sought to give effect, to theoretically demonstrate the mechanism of transition from capitalism to communism."

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