

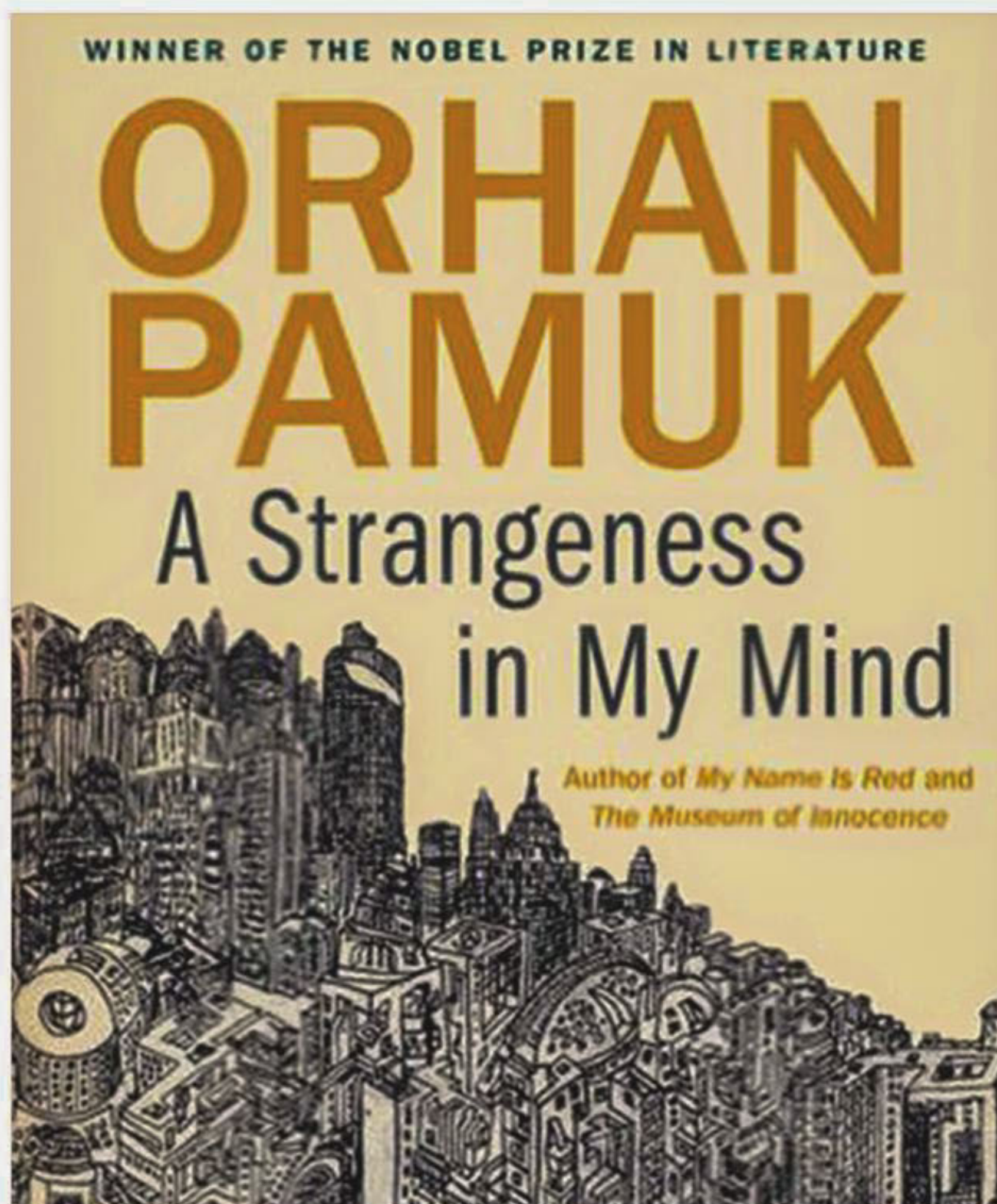
STORY OF A STREET VENDOR

AUTHOR: ORHAN PAMUK

REVIEWED BY DR. SHIBLI JABIR

ORHAN Pamuk is one of today's best-known novelists who writes in Turkish. He is also a screenwriter, academic, and Professor of the Humanities at Columbia University, USA. His earlier books "The Black Book", "Museum of Innocence" (reviewed in The Daily Star, September 24, 2011), "My Name is Red", "Snow" and "Silent House" have earned him the respect and a following of readers worldwide; for his unique style of storytelling, with narratives from modern and historical times covering the lives of the powerful and the man on the street, the cultural and social evolution of modern Turkey, and his unabashed empathy for the underdogs. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2006, and the award citation mentions that Pamuk has "in the quest for the melancholic soul of his native city has discovered new symbols for the clash and interlacing of cultures". In an interview following the announcement, Professor Horace Engdahl, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, states that Orhan Pamuk "renewed the contemporary novel in a remarkable way" and "crowded with admiration for Pamuk's ability to use his city of birth, Istanbul, as the anchor on his journey to become one of the finest writers of his time."

Translated from Turkish, by Ekin Oklap, "A Strangeness in My Mind" is the story of a street vendor named Mevlut and the loves of his life. He comes to Istanbul as a young boy, then enrolls in school but sells yogurt and boza (a traditional Turkish drink) on the street in the evening and night accompanied by his father. Pamuk himself characterizes the novel as "the adventures and dreams of Mevlut Karatas, a seller of Boza, and his friends, and also a portrait of life in Istanbul between 1969 and 2012 from many different points of view". Included with the Table of Contents is a family tree of two brothers, Hasan and



Mustafa and their children. Mustafa is two years younger than Hasan, and came to Istanbul from their village home in 1963 and six years later brings his son Mevlut to the city. There are many plots and themes but to me, in the ultimate analysis, it is a beautiful love story that has some similarities with Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "Love in the Time of Cholera" (reviewed in The Daily Star, December 22, 2014). Mevlut falls in love with a girl, named Samiha, and writes letters to her. In the novel he says, "I saw this girl at the wedding. I fell in love with her eyes. I wrote her

letter for three years." But the go-between delivered all the letters to the elder sister Rayiha; Mevlut unknowingly married Rayiha and developed a deep love for his wife. He becomes a dedicated husband and father, and forgets about the sister he really loved. Unfortunately, Mevlut became a widower after 20 years of marriage, and soon Samiha loses her husband, and family members encourage them to tie the knot with each other. But he still longs for his deceased wife, and it appears that he loves them both, one he has lived with and the other who

once lived in his dreams!

The title of the book comes from William Wordsworth's "The Prelude" where he wrote in Residence in Cambridge,

I had melancholy in my thoughts ... A strangeness in my mind, A feeling that I was not for that hour, Nor for that place.

This passage from Wordsworth captures the state of mind that Mevlut carried after he gains some experience, and a little knowledge of the larger world and the social structure of Istanbul. The strangeness in his mind emanates from the changes taking place in his surroundings as the city keeps growing and displacing older residents of humble origins. His cousins and relatives from the village migrated to Istanbul over time and made their fortunes, but Mevlut finds himself struggling in different jobs. Pamuk very subtly alludes to Mevlut's wandering in the following passage,

"Some nights the city seemed transformed into a more mysterious, menacing place, and Mevlut couldn't make out whether he felt this way because ... these streets had become imbued with signs and symbols he didn't recognize."

It appears that his luck bails him out, twice. First, after waiting for three years, while writing letters to Samiha, the girl he first saw, he embraces Rayiha, even though some pity him. "The man wrote to the younger sister, but got married to the older one instead." He had eloped and even though he realizes that he has married the elder sister Rayiha, he leaves no stone unturned to make her happy and leads the life of a hardworking family man. Admitted, once in a while, his frustration comes out. After his wife Rayiha dies, during an altercation between Suleyman, his cousin and him, Mevlut accuses Suleyman of giving the letter to Rayiha to get married to her. He rails, "they won't let anyone marry the third daughter until the second one's settled. You wanted

Samaha yourself."

Mevlut finds that his income from selling boza decreases as tastes change and boza is increasingly marketed in pre-packed containers, and he takes a second job during the day. He tries in his own mind to reconcile the different world he inhabits: the inner world where he tries to find peace and harmony with the reality of rapid growth and failed dreams. He does find happiness in his nocturnal routine of walking and connecting with the city that he spent most of his life in. Pamuk writes "Walking fueled his imagination and reminded him that there was another realm within our world, hidden away" a feeling influenced by a religious sect and its magazine, "Righteous Path". Here Pamuk draws on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "Confessions" where he wrote, "I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think; my mind only works with my legs".

His luck turns again, after his wife passes away suddenly in 1995 and following a massive earthquake in 1999 which devastates the city, particularly the section that housed the poor urban workers. He and his relatives land a good deal for apartments in a high-rise, as happens in most growing cities including Bangladesh. Mevlut and his extended family are given allotments in the same building.

Some of the most endearing moments of this novel are buried in the little anecdotes and snippets that touch on Mevlut's lifelong journey of love. In one of his letters he compared Samiha's eyes to a daffodil. Pamuk reminds the reader that daffodils had traditionally been used to represent the eye in Ottoman literature. He had also likened her eyes to "bandits cutting across the path". The last sentence, notwithstanding its simplicity, proclaims boldly, "I have loved Rayiha more than anything in this world".

The reviewer is a frequent contributor to this section.

Edge of Eternity: Fiction and Geopolitics Integrated

Published in 2014 by New American Library, USA

TOTAL PAGES: 1104

PRICE: 19.44 US DOLLARS (PAPERBACK)

MAHFUZ UL HASIB CHOWDHURY

AUTHOR: KEN FOLLETT

KEN Follett, an eminent Welsh author of our time, has a superb knack for blending political events with the personal lives of people through his fictional works. There were plenty of discourses with a fictional flavour on global geopolitical issues in his books like Fall of Giants and Winter of the World. In 2014 he came back with another sensational story Edge of Eternity, a voluminous novel and no surprise that this one also tells personal stories of its characters with underpinnings of political impacts.

Ken Follett has trailed the destinies of five interlinked families hailing from America, Germany, Russia, England and Wales in this novel and outstandingly sketched the way these families lived through the vicissitudes of the twentieth century.

The civil rights movement of America, assassinations of Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy, impeachment of Richard Nixon from the US presidential post, the Vietnam War, the Cold War smokescreen, the US military tussles with Cuba, the fall of Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism in former Soviet Union—all these decisive events have been addressed in Edge of Eternity. So, Edge of Eternity is a full-blown historic novel covering a broad range of incidents that have turned a lot of things upside down around the globe since World War II.

The plight of the East German people has been illustrated through the life of Rebecca Hoffman in this novel. The widespread cobwebs of Soviet-sponsored espionage that entangled people living in East Europe during the Cold War period is depicted with a nail-biting description through the struggle of Rebecca Hoffman. George Jakes, an American citizen finds himself virtually in the pliers of a crab having been brought up by cross-race parents. Dmitry Dvorkin, a young secretary to Nikita Khrushchev witnesses with blood-chilling alarm the nuclear race between the USA and Soviet Union while his twin sister Tania travels from Russia to Cuba to Poland and to Czechoslovakia (present day Czech Republic) as a journalist. Edge of Eternity is a substantial and

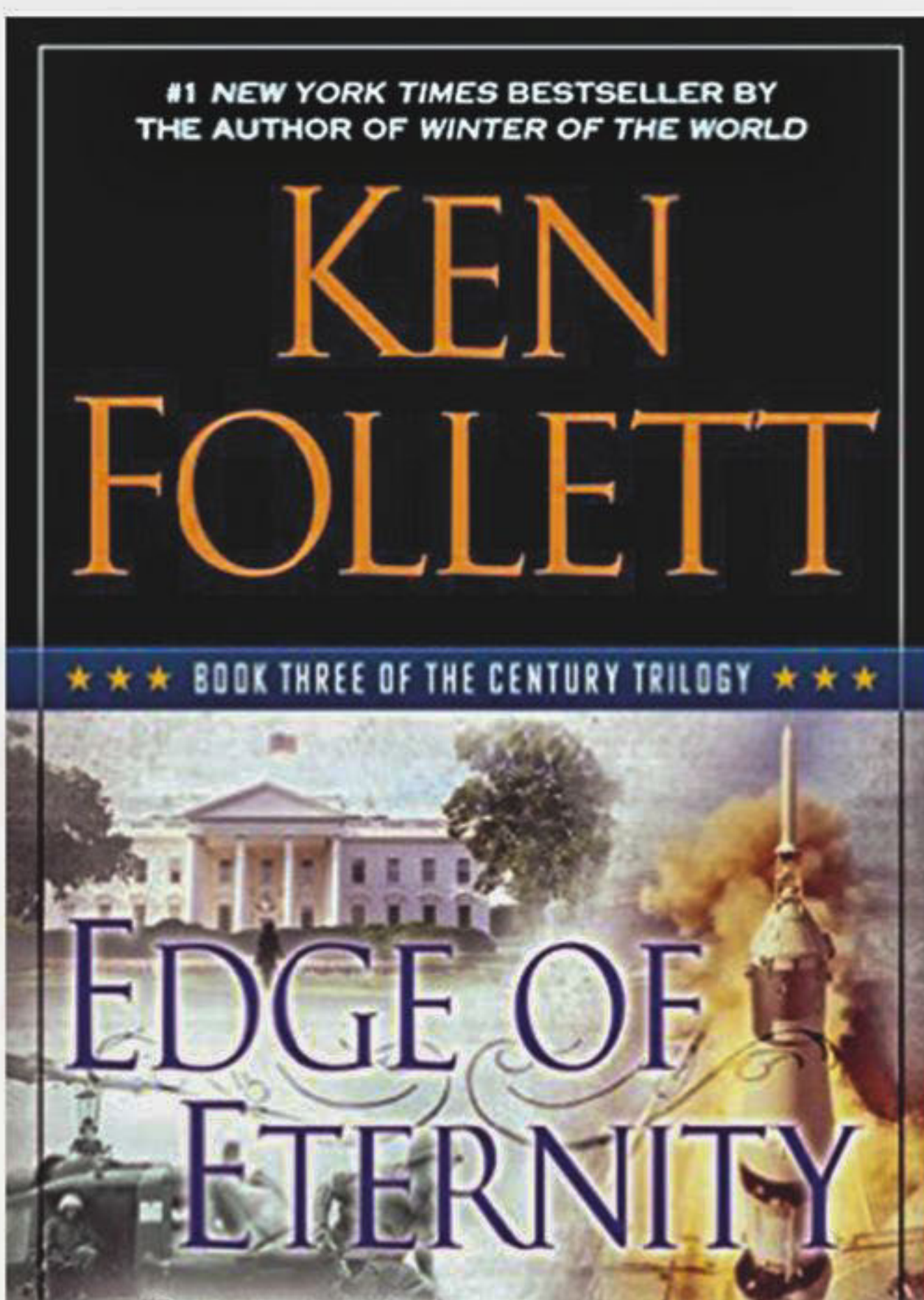
highly evidential book for a deeper understanding of the global phenomena that prevailed during the time the NATO and Warsaw troops looked into each other's eyeballs with their fingers fixed on the triggers. That was an era of uncertainty, suspicions, worries and intrigues that spread out a tapestry of puzzles from the White House to Kremlin, from Washington to Hanoi, from Moscow to Beijing like a convoluted chessboard. It was the time while Martin Luther King was delivering fiery speeches against rac-

mations of the world, the storyline of Edge of Eternity undergoes changes too. East and West Germany merged in the wake of the fall of Berlin Wall. Millions of Russians poured out on to the streets of Moscow, St. Petersburg and other parts of Russia yelling watchwords against socialism leading to the decline of communist regime in their country and the disintegration of the USSR. Lots of Russian families migrated from Russia to western states following the fall of USSR succumbing to the disillusionment caused by the failure of communism to survive and to avoid the sociopolitical disorder that gripped Russia during 90s. So, the fall of socialism in Russia was not just the closing episode of an ideology, but a tale of dispersion of thousands of Russian citizens from their motherland to England and to USA, an unprecedented form of diaspora they had never imagined that would sweep across their lives.

Ken Follett's scrutiny with history through his exclusive fictional dexterity almost reaches the height of the story-telling quality of Sir Walter Scott, Ted Allbeury and Margaret Mitchell as far as their art of synthesizing history with literature is concerned, particularly recalling their novels Ivanhoe, The Other Side of Silence and Gone with the Wind respectively. Ken Follett's novels including Edge of Eternity give trustworthy details about the way political upheavals rampage people's fates, pull them away from their roots and land them under unforeseen circumstances. Wars, revolutions, financial doldrums, territorial turbulence have all along disarrayed people's lives and dreams. History of human civilization bears plenty of such evidences.

The families we find in Edge of Eternity speak of the predicaments of millions of families worldwide living under constant threats of perils and anarchy. Simultaneously, Edge of Eternity tells a story of resilience of human beings by means of which human race survives through untoward situations like wars, violence and other cataclysms.

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ism and segregation. It was the time while thousands of Americans demonstrated on the streets of major US cities deploring America's role in the Vietnam War. And it was the time while an almost impervious iron curtain blocked the east from the west and the antagonism between the US-led nations and the countries submissive to Soviet Union loomed large. Moreover, Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan during the same time and the Soviet-Afghan war went on for nearly a decade. However, like the geopolitical transfor-



The ruler every nation desires to have

AUTHOR: NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI

REVIEWED BY LAMIA ISLAM

THE prince', written by Italian political theorist Niccolo Machiavelli, is one of the leading works of modern political philosophy. The book, written in first quarter of the 16th century, was dedicated by the author to Lorenzo de' Medici who was a de facto ruler of Florence. He wrote this book after a meticulous study based on the analysis of erstwhile political affairs and ancient history. The book contains 26 chapters in which he describes practical knowledge and ways of winning power and retaining that power as well.

In the very beginning of the book, the author alludes that the form of all states and governments is either republics or monarchies whereas 'The Prince' addresses merely 'monarchies'. He refers to two types of monarchies namely hereditary and new. The former one exists in that state where ruler inherits power from predecessors and the latter one where ruler holds power over either absolutely new state or a new territory added to the old existing state (the latter situation is called mixed monarchy). In author's opinion, states of new or mixed monarchies are conquered by the rulers' own power or gained through help of others, or resorting to criminal acts and among these the first option makes the ruler more secure to rule. But among all monarchies, rulers in hereditary states face less trouble in holding power as subjects are accustomed to their family than in new states as subjects here expect more from the new rulers.

Moreover, Machiavelli refers to another kind of monarchy where a private citizen becomes ruler either with the support of the nobles or common people. In that case, the ruler, coming to power with public support, rules more safely as noble people deem themselves equal to the ruler and possibly rebel. In addition, the author mentions another kind of state called 'church state' which is governed by ancient religious institutions. It is very hard for a citi-

zen to climb to power of this state but whenever one becomes ruler it is easy and safe to maintain.

The book suggests that power will be sustained if good laws and good armed forces exist. Good laws cannot be ensured without strong armed forces. In doing so, author points out three kinds of troops namely mercenary, auxiliary and ruler's own troops, and among these the last one is highly dependable, loyal, disciplined and trustworthy.

Although in the initial chapters of 'The Prince', the author narrates how to grab power, in the later chapters the author describes about the virtues of rulers to main-

tain the power. In author's view, rulers should have some good qualities like benevolence, loyalty, and courage etc, but if needed he must forsake these virtues for the sake of power, even he may have to be cruel. He should be able to act like a fox to identify the trap and a lion to frighten the rebels for holding power. In addition, he has to know about the strategies of war, and should study history and action of great men as well. Moreover, a ruler has to choose capable, loyal and intelligent people as ministers and he should check their credibility whether they are reliable or not, because for utter selfishness, they can

betray, and he should also avoid the flatters as his position may become risky for them. The ruler must give the right only to the ministers to tell the truth and discuss with them about the matters and listen to their opinions, but decide on his own.

In the last chapters of the book, Machiavelli points out some reasons for which rulers in Italy lost their states and he tries to convince Medici ruler by saying that Medici family should take the power of Italy by rooting out the barbarians from this country.

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