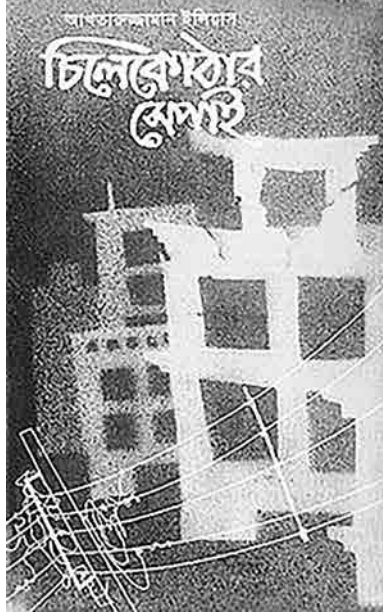


বাংলা থেকে ইংরেজি অনুবাদ
চিলেকোঠার সেপাই : অষ্টম অধ্যায়
আখতারুজ্জামান ইলিয়াস
অনুবাদ : ম্যাথিউ ডি. রিচ



চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের প্রচ্ছদচিত্র

Translation
Bangla to English
Rooftop Soldier : Chapter 8
Akhtaruzzaman Elias
Translated by Matthew D. Rich

Abstract

Chilekothar Sepai is one of the best Bangla novels written by Akhtaruzzaman Elias. It is based on the political and historical consequences of the Agartala's Conspiracy Litigation in 1969. Besides drawing the living picture of pre-seventies' mass agitation in the then East Pakistan, the novel became a classic narrative of the traditional cultural and socio-economic daily and occasional life of the Bengali population. The novel reflects on the real 'mass' character of that movement which does not limit itself to a regime change only but seeks to empower the mass people through the radical change of socio-economic structure. The following piece is the English translation of 8th Chapter of the novel, Elias depicted discriminated distorted class distinctive life and urbanism in the Old Dhaka in the pre-liberation time. Inside this unique narrative, there is distinct nationalistic discourse submerged every other discourse of socio-economic context of the ordinary working class people's political views. The relations and interactions among the driving characters Khijir, Jummon's Ma, Bozlu's wife, Mohajon, Alauddin and the other minor characters give the readers both literary and historic taste of life in Old Dhaka and the transformation of nationalist outlook of a nation. The translation work of Matthew D. Rich feels very close to Akhteruzzaman Elias' narrative style, old Dhaka's dialect and detailing and so apposite for soothing the global readers' interests in the masterpiece of the modern Bangala literature of the independent Bangladesh.

Just at the entrance to the slum, Khijir's foot nearly landed in some poop. It makes him angry, "I can't figure it, 'is mess is some animal's doin' or som'un's baby's! There's a big 'ol gutter sittin' right there, ya can't grab the kid's hand and si'em down?"

In the doorway of the first house in the slum, Bozlu's wife is washing a naked four-year old boy's behind. Bozlu's profession is scalping cinema tickets, with the possibility of her husband earning a fat sum on Eid day, Bozlu's wife displays a different sort of gravity today, she squawks, "Childless lady-boy, 'ow's he gonna understand the little un's troubles, huh? When the kid falls in the gutter, who's gonna pull 'im out?"

Without answering, Khijir lowers his head to enter the house, right then Jummon's Ma peeks out from inside. At a glance, his wife's face looks fresh, like she'd scrubbed it well with soap and applied Snow powder. It really changed the outline of her sunken cheeks, a faint, ashen glimmer upon the black hue of her skin; but the sharp and piercing voice of Jummon's Ma forces the enchantment of the image into hiding, "The itch in that thieving whore's ass is gettin' worse, I'm thinkin'. Won't it tho? Why wouldn't it?" Then she proceeds to specify the cause of Fozlu's wife's sudden yearning to express herself, "Today's them thieves's scalpin' day! If she aint gettin' fucked by the police rat-a-tat-tat, whacha think, she aint gonna get a blister right up 'er thievin' arse? If she ain't fuckin' down at ta the lock-up 'is wife can't feed the little 'uns--I'd piss in that thievin' bastard's mouth I would!"

His wife stood up in fact for his honor, that's why Khijir suddenly felt a bit choked up looking at her. He lay down slowly on the quilt strewn across the bedstead. While sitting down next to him Jummon's Ma says, "Oof, move over!" Khijir puts one hand on his wife's waist. How about taking Jummon's Ma to see a movie at the matinee today! Khijir watches so many movies, but he had never taken Jummon's Ma along with him. *Hira Aur Patthar* is playing at the Star, a Muhammad Ali-Zeba film, Nirala plays Challi. But how should he say it to his wife? Even after watching so many movies, Khijir was still not able to quite adopt that stylish way of speaking. His long, hard fingers tapped along his wife's back like some clumsy musician; if only he could make this lassie thrum like that! But before that could happen,

the clamor of Bozlu's wife's voice rang out, "A thief might he be, a bit 'o scalpin' too might he do. But at least me man is just the one! We don' take our man like he's some damn signboard to be hung round our necks only to go 'bout fuckin' whomever we please anyhow." Bozlu's wife is heading to work, in the afternoon she has two houses where she washes dishes, and at another house she delivers water. Right now her son is in her lap. Because Khijir called him beast-boy, today he was able to climb into her lap.

In front of the small mirror hanging from the fence Jummon's Ma keeps on arranging her hair. As she takes the faded ribbon from her pursed lips with her hand she listens to Bozlu's wife's final sentence, "We don' work at others' houses, is 'at it? What is it then, we spread on all that Snow powder like a whore and go to the mahajon's house, huh?"

Khijir flinched: again with that bloody mahajon! He must get Jummon's Ma out from working at Rohmotulla mahajon's house. Listening to all of this talk from Bozlu's wife he just wants to, wants to... But what it is that he wants to do he can't seem to think clearly about. When he grabs her arm at the shoulder with his iron grip Jummon's Ma says, "Let go!" But she doesn't take back her arm. She just says, "Young guy, laying around home middle o' the day. Not ashamed o' yurself?"

This time her voice is a bit soft. Khijir comes a bit closer, "Who's it told ya you can't lie 'bout, huh?"

Ah, how lavish! I don' have me work, is that it? How many people are comin' to eat today! Allah, oh Allah! How many guest'r comin' to the mahajon's house!" As she gives a long list of guests gathering at the mahajon's house Jummon's Ma gets all agitated. Most of them are classy high class Muslims: some will touch the dish of sēmāi, some won't; some dip their finger in the plate of pulao, but won't even lift it to their tongue. But the plates still have to be scrubbed. On Eid day all the expensive plate ware were taken out. Other than Jummon's Ma who's going to wash all of those? Who else can Bibi-saheb rely on? As she talks about scrubbing the pile of dishes Jummon's Ma's chest heaves, "Na, I'm off."

Seeing his wife's chest heave Khijir feels woozy, he embraces her, "Saheb gave me today off. I'm gonna take out the baby taxi from Saheb's place. What ya say? I'll take ya on out, show ya around New Market, Shahbag, Romona field. Whacha say, will ya go? We can even go to th' airport. How them planes take off: Ya wanna see? Wanna go?" Alauddin Miah, of course, will not give up a scooter; but at least a rickshaw will be available. It's better to tell the wife about the baby taxi. "Wanna go?"

Hearing her tall, skinny husband talk of such indulgences certainly does make Jummon's Ma shiver with excitement! She goes silent. Even more, when Khijir's one hand parted her blouse and began fondling her breast her body even went kind of slack. But no. It wouldn't be right to anger the mahajon. When it happens that she's caught breathless from the pressure of the mahajon's heavy hand, what is there to do? It's the mahajon who is

able to bring her Jummon back to her. Then her son will stay with her, in the mohajon's garage; there's so much work to be done in the garage, he'll fit him in somewhere. And then? Then, when he gets bigger the mohajon will buy him a rickshaw--he won't have to rent the rickshaw, better yet, the mohajon will pay the money for the license--yesterday, on a moonlit night, the mohajon himself gave her his word. Whatever else, he's important, rich, big-time: is he just going to spit out some nonsense?

It was late-night. When night's over, Eid. From running around getting everything ready Jummon's Ma was breathless, her energy spent. The part-time hired help, Abul's Ma, left before it was even 10 o'clock at night once she got the news about her son's accident. Different kinds of curries made from a whole goat, ten shers of beef bhuna, ground beef kababs, a few chickens--and then there is the continuous grinding of spices of course! Jummon's Ma is frying *semai* for the morning, everyone will eat *semai* before they go to prayer--by the time they finished all this it was one, one-thirty in the morning. Watching TV from the corner of the sitting room Abdul had fallen asleep leaning against the wall, he's the one who takes Jummon's Ma home if it's a bit late at night. Once she'd gotten everything organized Jummon's Ma was approaching the sitting room to call Abdul, when she passed the foot of the stairs the mohajon called, "Ya goin'?"

His voice was hoarse and shaky. Rohomatulla again said, "Ya goin' or what?" Then he withdrew a paper packet from beneath the shawl wrapped around him and held it out in her direction, "Here." The mohajon has come right up close to her now, suddenly he places a hand on the back of her neck and says, "Ya worked hard, didn't ya?" His voice was shaking to such an extent that his words failed in their attempt at sympathy. Again he says, "Here. It's for you. If Shetara's Ma finds out she's gonna start in wit' the bitchin'." It's only as she takes the packet in her hand that Jummon's Ma realizes what it is. Shetara had given her one once, a used one of Shetara's, but not so worn out. But no matter how much these ladies get all gussied up, looking at them you'd think even a man's chest was bigger than theirs. Today the mohajon gave her one of those but brand new. The man put his arm on her lower back and drew her close to his body, pressing his mouth close to her neck he said, "Tmorrow ya wanna see yur kid, idn't it? Tell Khijir, Nimtola or wherever it is Kamruddin lives, 'e should go over and pick 'em up from 'is house!" Under the weight of the mohajon's hand it was like her neck and shoulders were collapsing. Right at that place on the back of her neck the mohajon gave her a kiss, he put a hand on her chest and said, "Your chest is *farst kelasb*. Put that 'un on an' you'll see how good ya look!" Then again he brought up Jummon, in a low voice making a rasping sound the mohajon said something about putting Jummon to work in something or other. Once he gets a bit bigger he would buy him a rickshaw, give him a room--her cheek began to feel warm from where the mohajon's breath struck it. Wrinkling her nose in disgust she stands still,

Jummon's Ma can breathe out without problem, but it's like drawing air in through her nose has become so hard! And at the same time she gets scared when she thinks, what if Bibi-shaab suddenly comes over and sees them from the second floor! She can see Abdul from here, leaning against the wall the guy is sleeping like a log, his mouth parted--Just please let his eyes not part too as the mohajon goes on about his nonsense! Just then the sound of a cat could be heard from inside the kitchen, "Meow!" The mohajon abruptly released her and sat back, and then called out harshly, "Abdul! Abdul! Get up! Drop this'n off to home and go to th' garage! The garage's is sittin' there unguarded!"

The way that Jummon's Ma was so terribly startled by that harsh call of the mohajon's, even today that reverberation remained. She looked in Khijir's direction and said, lowering her head, "Could you go an' pick up Jummon today?"

"Jummon!" At the sound of Jummon's name all of Khijir's excitement about taking the wife out for a day around town basically was extinguished. The bitch just can't forget her son for a minute. The kid's gonna come and be a weight on Khijir's back. Who's gonna look after him? If she pined for him that much then she could've gone ahead and hitched up with Kamruddin! Then again, he feels somehow like a thief or something harboring that kind of anger against a seven/eight year old kid. Adding a harsh tone to his voice he asked, "Jummon stays in Malibag, isn't it?"

"No! Ya know that slum next to the rail line near Nimtoli? 'es stayin' there in that slum."

"Didn't the master workman¹ get hisself a room in Malibag?" Calling him "master workman" Khijir was making fun of Kamruddin a bit. Kamruddin is actually a supplier, but the bastard talks in the style of a master workman. It's said his grandfather and great grandfather were the finest master workmen in the Kolkata Bazaar, claiming sway Kamruddin used to beat his wife whenever he wanted. In Malibag over there by Khilgaon apparently there are so many buildings being built that supposedly he's got an endless supply of work. What else would he do but rent a room over there? When did the guy move to Nimtoli?

Without letting her current husband's barb about her old husband prick her skin, Jummon's Ma says, "While's he was working he fell from the scaffoldin', now 'es not able to do 'is supplyin', it's said 'e broke one of 'is legs he did."

"Broke 'is leg, did he?" Keeping up the sarcasm as though it were conversation makes Khijir feel bad. Kamruddin actually has never treated him badly at all.

"What's 'e doin' now then?"

"I's heard e's sellin' fried *dal puri* over in Kayettuli." Jummon's Ma chuckles a bit, "Wanna go? Could ya bring 'em by, let me take a look at 'em? It's just the one day 'o the year, what's 'e gonna eat, who's to look after 'em?" This sappy voice on Jummon's Ma was not really familiar to Khijir, he also didn't know what the rules were for answering it. Opening her small eyes

1 This is the man's paternal surname and an occupational title, Ostagor.



চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের রচয়িতা আখতারুজ্জামান ইলিয়াস

as wide as possible Jummon's Ma said again, "is daddy abuses the poor kid sumpin' fierce! Can ya bring 'em just this once? The mohajon done said 'e'll get 'em some work. 'e can stay in the garage, once 'es grown 'e'll buy 'em a vehicle, he will. 'e don' need to pay no rent, whatever 'e earns, he can keep hisself."

Khijir sat up right away at the mention of the mohajon. The anger that he felt at Jummon had been a bit dammed up, now that same anger ten times in strength spilled over freely at the mohajon, "ow's it the mohajon comes in here again? If ya can't bring the mohajon into it, yur mouth starts itchin', don' it?" Even after this attack by Khijir, Jummon's Ma was silent for half a minute. But just because she's hurting for her son she can't afford to just sit there all speechless, getting herself together a bit she spat back, "What's all this yur sayin'? Yur to benefit? If I's get to keep me boy close yur to benefit, is that it? You's a slave t' others, but ya talk like you's the Nawab's own son!"

"What's that, woman? Say it again! Slut whore, ya gets all gussied up fur yur love play wit' the mohajon idn't it? What is it gives ya the juice to raise all this racket now?" But without replying, the woman stomped her way on out.

No matter how angry he was, how is it that Khijir can release his wife from working at the mohajon's house. Not long ago his mother took



চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের আমেরিকান অনুবাদক ম্যাথিউ ডি. রিচ

Khijir and sought refuge in that very house. Otherwise, who knows where she would have drifted off to after all those days of putting up with Falu carpenter's beatings. Even more, consider this: Who was it that got him married to Jummon's Ma in the first place? Jummon's Ma goes to that house for work, Kamruddin was a hundred percent on board for that. Raise all the racket you want, but supplying materials for the mason all day, hitting the bottle and whoring, and then on top of all that managing the wife and kids, it's no easy thing. Even so, Jummon's Ma used to go home after working all day; at that time Kamruddin used to live in one part of his ancestral home in Kolkata Bazaar. Within about three months of working for the rich folks Jummon's Ma got a little meat on her bones, even acquired a couple of saris, even started applying the Snow powder to her face every chance she got. Then she no longer enjoyed the beatings from Kamruddin each night upon his return from the Kandupotti whorehouse. Saying that she had to take care of the sick bibishayeb she started staying overnight sleeping on the bibishayeb's floor. One day after sunset Kamruddin came stumbling in to the mohajon's house and dragged his wife out into the street by her hair pounding her as he went. Hearing Jummon's Ma's screaming a crowd formed in the street, and even the bibishayeb forgot about her asthma long enough to say in her peculiar dialect, "What's all this now? What's all this now?" as she came down, and at her bidding and behest Bozlu, Khijir, Abdul--they got together and put a nice thrashing on Kamruddin. That guy didn't show his face over there for a long time after that. He sold off his portion of the ancestral home to some cousin on his father's or mother's side and cruised on around happy as can be.

After a quite a few days one rainy night, it was very late, Kamruddin showed up at the mohajon's garage and called out to Khijir. Khijir was alone that day, he was a bit frightened about whether he had come for payback or not. But no! He instructed Khijir to pass a message to Jummon's Ma. What's the message? Yeah no, that girl who Kamruddin got married to last night, Jummon's Ma isn't fit even to be her servant. After passing this message he was on his way, then he came back and said, "Tell your mohajon I come. My name is Kamruddin Ostagor, my father's name is Hasmot Ali Ostagor, grandfather's name is Lal Mohammad Ostagor, great grandfather's name is Nannu Ostagor. Nannu Ostagor built the cupola in the Nawab's house, ya hear what I'm sayin'? Your mohajon thinks he's big time, huh? Ask 'em his granddaddy's name. 'e couldn't tell ya!"

The message sent for Jummon's Ma, Khijir delivered as usual. But asking Rohmotulla his grandfather's name, that he didn't get around to. Khijir doesn't know his own father's name. And he's going to ask who the mohajon's grandfather was? Yet all of this talk by Kamruddin surely enough made its way to the mohajon's ear. At first when he heard it Rohmotulla blustered about mightily, if he wanted to, he'd have Kamruddin eating prison food. He's still got a wife. Where'd this bastard construction helper get the cheek to go and get married again? Ayub Khan had made a new rule, in order to marry a second time the first wife's permission was needed. Rohmotulla was one of Ayub Khan's BD members², if he didn't himself take note of all these matters then the tendency to disregard the law would multiply among the country's denizens. But it was the mohajon's bibi who presented a problem! Keeping Jummon's Ma was actually necessary, it was the bibishayeb who took the initiative to marry Jummon's Ma to Khijir.

This bibishayeb, daughter from a prominent family, was ill twelve months a year. Saying she wouldn't share a home with the other wife, two years after the wedding she took her six month old daughter and went back to her father's home; she returned to her husband's home just before the other wife died. 40 *bhori*³ of gold along with her, she was the only daughter and an asthmatic at that. Because of her sickness or from sorrow she wheezes pretty much all the time and in the brief intervals between wheezing, breathing loudly, she would discuss with a tone infused by her own opinions such important matters as the likeness between the chicken *pulao* at her father's upper-class home in Begum Bazaar and the Nawab's home-cooked *kabuli*; or the comparison between the chicken *kebasta* and *lajij* kababs at her father's home and her sister-in-law's home-cooked chicken *tikka* tough as rope; or the suddenly rich using saffron to change the color of their *zarda* pathetically betraying their lower-class origins, all the while loudly declaiming her acute dissatisfaction with her own illness and fate. After failing 9th grade twice

2 An elected member under the concept of rule known as "Basic Democracy": a system of grassroots governance implemented by Ayub Khan in East Pakistan.

3 A unit of measure for precious metals, 1 *bhori* equal to approximately 11.66 grams.

Shetara clearly grasped how inept she was at continuing her studies. Morning and afternoon there were her beauty sessions and listening to Radio Ceylon⁴ and Vividh Bharati and after she would become listless at the aforementioned times of day, what really would she have time left to do? The mother and daughter both could not manage even a moment without Jummon's Ma. Even if her breasts were a bit too large and were now and again left uncovered when her *orna* fell away, it was for that reason that Shetara put up with her. Anyway, the maidservant was very hardworking, you only had to tell her to do something once. Added to that she was very clean. When she was given to Khijir in marriage bibishayeb had the mohajon spend considerably on it, she arranged *bakarkhani* and *amriti* for the employees and the rickshaw-wallahs at the garage. This was nothing for bibishayeb. There was a time at their Begum Bazaar home when her father would spend 5,000 taka just to get a cat married.

After spending all that money to get him married, you know how an important guy like him is, not even ten days later, in the garage in front of the rickshawwallahs the mohajon hauled off and slapped Khijir right in the face. What for? "Motherfucker, you's eat my food stay under my roof, without me you ain't got no roof, an' ya gonna stab me in the back, are ya?"

How's that? The mohajon asks him, "Who's it done put up all them posters around the neighborhood? Oh, you's a big man now aren't ya?"

The one who had him put up the posters was Alauddin Miah. With him were two college students, Alauddin warned him to be very careful about it so that the police wouldn't see. Khijir had wanted to finish sticking the posters on all the walls in the Lakshmi Bazaar area and then climb up on the highest cupola of the new Shahid Minar in Victoria Park and layout the posters really nicely up there on all four sides. But the two students objected to that: Who's going to look up that high to read the posters? Then there were the few police they caught sight of on the other side of the park as they were coming up to the wall of the Muslim High School; they took off immediately. Khijir kept the rest of the posters in the garage, under the pile of discarded rickshaws, he'll sell them to the guy who buys old paper when he gets a chance. That the mohajon would get this mad--Khijir had no idea. The mohajon says, "Let's say I han' ya ova' to the police right now, do ya know how many years yu'll spen' in jail?" In the absence of the police the mohajon went ahead himself and began lecturing about the dangers of these activities, "People don' undershtand. This all's India's doin'! They been defeated in war, now they's turn'd to all these taktiks. Ya puttin' up the Six Points posters. If the Six Points happen, Pakistan'll still be here, will it? We done fought for Pakistan, got our Pakistan, Muslims got they respec' they did! An' look a' dis: How many people got jobs, how much business 'as done, money made, stuff built? If Pakistan didn' come, all them offspring o' tramps and beggars be slavin' for the Hindus they would! Why couldn' we make nothin' fur ourselves?" He asks the

4 The first radio station in Asia.

assembled rickshawwallahs, “Why’s it we couldn’t?” He himself is the respondent, “Ya hear me, gentlemen? We’s can give it all up, but our faith?” Once again it is he who replies, “No, that ‘un we can’t give up! That’s mine it is! Wealth an’ all, it ain’t really the thing, know what I mean? Money’s like froth on piss, now ya see it now ya don’t” After roaming through a number of unrelated subjects he summarizes his point, “I’s seen so many a leadar! They’s made themselves a fortune! Well now they’s dancin’ to a different beat, standin’ ready while Pakistan’s to be torn apart. India sends over the goods, and these jackasses leap to the ready they do.”

Within a week or so of the mohajon applying this kind of pressure, the police searched Alauddin’s house and took him away. Then it was Rohmotulla who took over responsibility for this garage. At Rohmotulla’s command it was Khijir himself who had to take care of Alauddin’s garage. 7 months later, a garland of flowers around his neck, Alauddin got out of jail and would not leave Khijir alone, in his absence the guy had done a splendid job managing things. With Rohmotulla’s permission he went ahead and hired Khijir at his own garage, he even arranged for a rented house in his uncle’s slum for him. But Jummon’s Ma the mohajon would not release. Without Jummon’s Ma it would be hard for his bibishayeb to run the household. Then so much else happened, Alauddin Miah bought a scooter, three months later he had two scooters. Khijir sometimes drives the rickshaw, sometimes the scooter. Of course Khijir made out well in that as well! When not driving the rickshaw or scooter Alauddin Miah’s entire garage was being supervised entirely by him. But Jummon’s Ma was not able to free herself from working at the mohajon’s house. What good is it just blaming the mohajon all the time? It’s his own wife--and isn’t she the one gnawing at the bit to get on over to the mohajon’s house, it’s Eid day, does she even pay attention to what her husband might want to eat that day--Khijir sits up in bed thinking about how angry he is with his wife, then he notices the earthenware jug wrapped in a *gamcha* standing in the corner of the room. Beneath a plate on top of the jug there’s *pulao* and a whole leg of chicken. How’d this woman manage to sneak away with the leg? Even while eating the leg Khijir’s fury at his wife didn’t subside. He’s the husband, okay. But what about the son from her own womb, does the woman have any thought even for him? Where’s the kid at? Today, she gets all weepy, sheds a few tears and thinks her motherly duties are finished? It’d be good if Jummon were here, if he can set the boy to it, he’ll be able to get his wife free from the mohajon’s grasp.

After plowing his way through his meal Khijir went over to Alauddin Miah’s house. The saheb was on his way out, a herd of boys with him. When he caught sight of Khijir the saheb barked at him, “Where you been stayin’ at? Tajuddin-shaab from number 24 gave me word he’s come, I might be late. Me big sis has come wit’ the young’uns, pick ‘em up from me uncle’s house and see ‘em home to Sat Rowja, take the new babytaxi!”

After taking the saheb's sister home Khijir left the scooter near the rail gate at the end of Nazimuddin Road and went into the slum looking for Jummon. Where is Jummon? Nobody in this slum knows Kamruddin.

"There's an Alimuddin here, ya not talkin' 'bout Alimuddin, are ya?"

"Alimuddin sells curries though, 'e's put up a house over at the signal."

This sort of dialogue continues on, but nothing about Jummon comes up. On both sides of the rail line is a long slum, 3 to 4 people to a group stand spread out in the middle of the line. There are a few fires burning here and there, in some places a few girls sitting in front of a flaming *karhai* full of coals warming their hands. Smoke rises from some of the houses; there is row after row of fenced in huts sheathed in smoke, fog and darkness, with roofs either of broken-down tin weighted with bricks or made of bamboo. Along with the smoke and fog there's a permanent stench that demarcates the limits of the slum. Khijir walks in its midst and questions pretty much everyone about Kamruddin. The people come forward, even the young kids forget about well-lit Nazimuddin Road and come to stand on the rail line to watch Khijir.

"Nah, okay, forget about Kamruddin then. His wife, she works house to house."

The people lose interest. It's the guest of an occasional maid servant working house to house, you can get away with not paying him too much mind. Their own wives do this kind of work. He roams about as the night deepens, underfoot there are sometimes the wooden sleepers of the rail line, or simply rocks. In the sky there's no moon, not even a lamp post along the edge of the rail line. Light comes from a lamp post over on one side of the main road, in the dregs of it that remain the motionless huts of the slum could be mistaken for rickshaws overturned by a truck. A pathless place with no vehicles on it amidst the murky light in the middle of the city, in a place like that Khijir Ali walks in the middle of the rail line his footsteps falling either on the wooden sleepers or on the dirt mixed with stones looking intensely into each and every shack--as soon as he catches sight of Jummon he'll snatch him right up. He goes back and forth from one end of the slum to the other until he's lost in thought, and who knows how much longer he would have had to keep roaming. But a guy with sunken cheeks, unshaven even on Eid day, wearing a *lungi* asks him, "Ya need one, shaab?"

Khijir's head clears, his fear too. The guy asks him again, "Yur pacin' back 'n forth isn't it? Come along then. I's got some good merchandise, a real housewife fur ya!" Khijir is pleased that the guy has treated him like a respectable type, he's amazed actually, which puts him even more on edge. Before Khijir has a chance to decide whether he'll sleep with the middle class housewife or not the guy gets a good look at Khijir's face and splits.