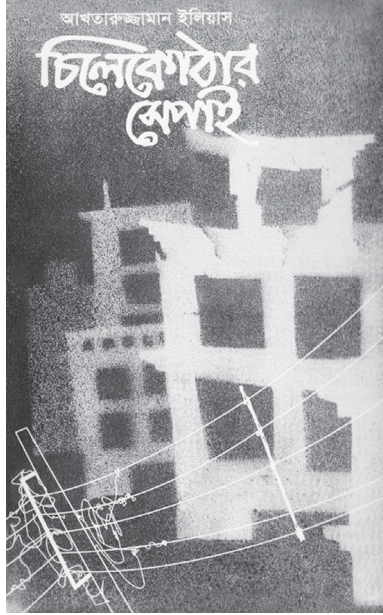


বাংলা থেকে ইংরেজি অনুবাদ
চিলেকোঠার সেপাই : ষষ্ঠ অধ্যায়
আখতারুজ্জামান ইলিয়াস
অনুবাদ : ম্যাথিউ ডি. রিচ



চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের প্রচ্ছদচিত্র

Bangla to English Translation
Rooftop Soldier : Chapter 6
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 6th Chapter of the novel, depicting the elaborate activities and interactions on the Eid Day of the old Dhaka rickshaw service business family including the prominent character Khijir, a man from working class. This chapter also recalls the realities of the childhood of Skin-n-Bones Khijir and how his father Falu mistri's attitude and behavior towards him influenced his life. This chapter is also a high reflection of the novelist's keen surveillance of the Old Dhaka vernacular which being unique common expression of interpersonal exchange. Despite of existence of the Mohajan-rental power dynamics of relationship, the enthusiastic tradition based hospitality to everyone around gives the readers the documentary descriptions of the middle class social life of Old Dhaka localities in that time. We observe here the flashback of the growing days of Khijir a rickshaw puller whose mother and wife both are the kept of his employer. The translation work of Matthew D. Rich feels very close to Akhteruzzaman Elias' narrative style and detailing and so apposite for soothing the global readers' interests in the masterpiece of the modern Bangla literature of the independent Bangladesh.

Osman is coming out of Ronju's place looking very happy; when he sees Skin-n-Bones Khijir on the stairs he freezes. After taking a bath with cold water from the aquifer overrun with shrubbery on the ground floor on this winter morning Osman had put on a pajama-panjabi and over that wrapped himself with the shawl Altaf left the day before yesterday around midday, and then when he was combing his hair Ronju came over and practically dragged him off to their place. They ate *semai*¹ over there for nearly half an hour. The sweet rice *semai* had thickened right up until it puckered; the milk *semai* had too little sugar. On the other side of the curtain Ronju's mother's keening continued unabated in a soft, low contralto. This is the first Eid since Taleb's killing; in his mother's keening were recounted various memories of how he used to observe the Eid holiday. Even as the space inside the home became a bit too somber from all this, and after Ranu and Ronju's incessant pleading, he ate *semai* while he lay down for a good 25-30 minutes for a rest like sweet sunshine. Now he'll go over to Anwar's place for a bit. Except, now that Khijir has come to his room, will he be able to easily leave?

In Khijir's hand is a tray. It is covered by a yellow handkerchief with thornless branches, leaves and roses embroidered on it in green and red thread. Khijir stops for a moment, "Where ya goin'? Landlord sent some snacks; 'ave some 'n then head on out!" Turning to the left, he goes towards Ronju and their room and says, "Go'on up an' wait in yur room. I'll give the rest 'o this to th' other renters an' come on up."

The key to the door in Osman's room is at Ronju's place. When Ranu's newly married friend and her husband come to visit they will all go up to the roof to take pictures together. Osman knocked on Ronju's door and got his key back.

Lifting the dishes of *semai* and chicken *pulao* from the tray Osman says, "I have only one plate in total. Where am I going to keep all this?"

1 A popular class of desserts made with vermicelli noodles.

“In yur belly, idn’t it? Lemme sit for a minute, you eat up!” Looking from side to side, Khijir takes a seat on the sill of the doorway leading towards the roof.

“Tsk. What’re you doing sitting there? Come sit on the bed, come on, sit on the bed.” Without paying Osman’s efforts any mind Khijir squats and settles himself into a seated position.

Surrendering himself to the sweet scent of the clear, thin steam wafting off the chicken *pulao* Osman says, “So much! That was a serious spread over there at Ronju’s.”

“Come on now, ya gonna measure what’s ya eat even on Eid day! Probblly don’t bother nothin’ ‘bout no Eid neither, do ya? Ya didn’t even pray, did ya?”

“I couldn’t quite wake up at dawn,” Osman says falteringly.

“I know ya took a bath.”

“Yeah. The water in the cistern is so cold!”

“Ya did right. On Eid day, ya wake up, bathe and whatnot, clean ‘n all, then ya go to pray. Ya go ‘long by rishka, ‘long wit’ yur neighbors! ‘ats a Muslim lad it is!”

On Eid day, Khijir Ali makes an effort in various ways to be a true Muslim. He woke very early, when it was still night, and scrubbed down his body well with 570 soap at the spigot by the road. He put on the Addir Kollida² panjabi with the delicate design embroidered on the chest in white thread that Alauddin Miya had given him. The right sleeve of the panjabi near the wrist is torn slightly. That’s okay. All you have to do is turn in the sleeve a bit.

Khijir’s undershirt is so dirty; it hasn’t been washed, that’s why he didn’t wear it. If he wears it, the panjabi will look dirty too. In the absence of an undershirt, with every breath he takes, that bony chest of his announces just how fittingly he has been named. He washed the white lungi himself last night, it is still damp. That is why, with a soft rustle, he is having to scratch his thighs every couple of minutes. Even so early in the morning, when he returns home from the water spigot at the corner he sees that Jummon’s Ma has gone to the *mohajon*’s³ house; on Eid day if she doesn’t go at dawn then she won’t be able to get the work done. Finding his wife’s coconut oil, he smears it into his hair. And not a small daub of it either--the oil drips down from his forehead and sideburns. The smell of *ator* wafts off his body, there are wads of *ator*-soaked cotton in his ears. The *ator* too is thanks to Alauddin. But

2 A brand name.

3 A term meaning moneylender, or more pertinently here, in a more general sense of “boss” indicating Rahmatulla’s status locally as an owner of various businesses and rental properties.

to get kohl for smearing around his eyes he had to cheat a bit. By saying that he was going to prayer with his uncle, Alauddin Miya was searching around for the stool, prayer rug, shawl and such at the mohajon's house, and seeing his chance, Khijir took the stick of kohl out of its case on the table in the room outside and smeared on as much as he liked around both eyes. Alauddin Miya must have noticed. So what if he does notice? But his master is not the type of character to get all worked up seeing the servants nab a little of this or that. Rather, on Eid or on Bakr Eid,⁴ on Muharram,⁵ on Shab-e-Barat,⁶ at weddings, at circumcision and naming ceremonies, he even gives the servants and them the opportunity to take this or that. This morning, relieving his uncle from going to the garage, he handed over to Khijir the responsibility of renting out the rickshaws to the rickshaw wallahs. That's something, is it not?

The landlord has more rickshaws than he does buildings. And Rahmatulla's affection for the rickshaws is not a bit less than what he has for his buildings. After praying *fajar*, he comes every day, *tasbi* in hand, directly to the rickshaw garage behind his house. Many others' garages certainly open before that, but it does not sit well with him to begin the day before prayer time. Before he even arrives at the garage the rickshaw wallahs have already formed a throng. With a stern face, without looking at anyone, Rahmatulla enters the garage; immediately upon entering, in a soft tone he lets go his first statement, "Oh nobab-sahebs, have you all taken your seats?"⁷ Then, a couple minutes later begins a continuous stream of complaints, "Oh my, they's right injured three o' me vehicles haven't they?" He has the number of each and every rickshaw memorized, "Ohho, gave such a poundin' to the 'andle 'o four forty-five they's made a serving spoon out 'v it! S'om bitch! Ooof! An' they couldn't protect the *mudgaad* on two fifty-eight neither! Son of a whore, which o' yur damn daddies stood on me *mudgaad* an' took a shit, huh? What? Nuttin' to say, do ya?"

As he runs his hand over the hood, mudguard, seat, front wheel, rod, even the spoke and chassis of each and every of the 18 rickshaws lined up, he does not interrupt even for a second his flow of speech. And in the midst of this, a rickshaw is given to each driver. 1 and then 2, 1 and then 2, they stream out into the street three wheels at a time. When the pedal on the last rickshaw starts to turn Rahmatulla heads off to the *tehari*⁸ shop to the right for breakfast, counting the names of Allah on his *tasbi* as he goes.

4 Eid ul-Adha, the Eid of sacrifice.

5 Annual Muslim festival commemorating the death of Husain, grandson of the prophet.

6 A Muslim festival commemorating the recently deceased and occurring on the fourteenth or fifteenth night of the month of Sha'ban according to the Islamic calendar.

7 Rahmatulla uses a formal phrase from Urdu for "take your seats" in Bengali and with a heavy dose of sarcasm.

8 A rice and meat dish favored in Bangladesh.

As a rule, the rental fees are not taken from the rickshaw wallahs on Eid day. But on some Eids he will not rent out all the rickshaws. Those rickshaw wallahs who do come, he feeds them to their fill, but gives rickshaws only to a couple of them. In any case, Rahmatulla is angry with all of the rickshaw wallahs, “No one except a whore’s son ‘I take work drivin’ a rickshaw. How can they cheat the *mohajon*, t’ats the only t’ing the bastards keep on ‘bout!” Who is a little bit less of a whore’s son among them, who cheats him slightly less—he takes a moment to evaluate these things. And then there is the question of who he can retrieve long-owed money from on that day itself, “Eh Jobboira,⁹ ya flipped 212 over in the Malibag intersection messin’ about with a *teruck*, didn’ ya? Ya even know how big a fine I had ta pay ‘cause o’ ya?” Seeing Jobbar remain silent, his temper flares, “Did ya pay me even a cent?”

“The tube of the tire was damaged *mohajon*.” In response to this explanation by Jobbar, Rahmatulla yells, “Damn your bloody tire! Which o’ yur pappies is gonna’ pay for those spokes?” According to regulation, if anything except for the spoke goes bad the responsibility for repair is on the *mohajon*. At the Malibag intersection Jobbar was trying to overtake a rickshaw when a truck hit him from behind and flipped rickshaw number 212 right over. All the tires and mudguards had to be replaced, the *mohajon*’s anger over this still has not passed. But hearing that he will have to pay for all of the spokes on the ruined and replaced tires, Jobbar wilts. The guy tries one last time, “*Mohajon*, but ‘at the time you didn’t say nuthin’!”

“Ifn’ I’d a said it then, you’d a’ been able to pay? At the time I took pity on ya’. Forget it, I don’t want nothin’ to do wit’ yur money, ya son ov a’ tramp. Ya gettin’ lippy wit’ me, uh? Damn yur lip!” Meanwhile, it’s now time for Eid prayers; begging the *mohajon*, Jobbar gives a portion of what all the spokes will cost, and gets his rickshaw. If he can get a passenger selling things to bring to Bayatul Mukaram he could double his fare. But still, why should Rahmatulla let him go? It is not like his own expenses on Eid are paltry. Where is the money supposed to come from? This group of tramps by themselves will polish off a whole pot of his *semai*. That’s why Rahmatulla is so busy on Eid morning.

But today, just as dawn was breaking, Alauddin Miya crossed the narrow gulley to the *mohajon*’s house and stirred up the pot, “Uncle, suppose ya’ don’ go to the garage, today a’ least! Sen’ somun’, they can give the rickshaws t’ the drivers.”

Even when Rahmatulla does not agree, Alauddin Miya does not let up, “Today, there’s none of that messin’ wit’ their rental fees an’ all. It’ll do if ya’ sen’ somun’. Go on, hurry and take yur bath, we’ll go to Bayatul Mukaram. There’s a huge *jamaat*, a chance to meet up wit’ so many people!”

9 Rahmatulla pronounces his name like this.

To this too Rahmatulla does not reply, “No miya, forget all o’ that. Did Ayub Khan’s military seize the mosque over on our bridge, or did they use section 44 to stop the faithful from prayin’? Me dad and gran’dad, all our ancestors goin’ way back prayed at the mosque on the bridge. But t’day ya’ runnin’ ‘bout lookin’ fur a new ‘un, huh?” Alauddin accepts his uncle’s devotion to traditional practices. But he remains completely unmoved in his objection to his uncle going to the garage.

He applies a new strategy, “Okay, there’s no use in sendin’ ‘nother. I’m goin’. You trust me, right?” Alauddin Miya is practically yelling, so that this headache he has because of his uncle reaches everyone’s ears. At the very least it is necessary for it to reach his uncle’s wife’s. His auntie does not appreciate all this cursing at the rickshaw wallas immediately after getting up at dawn on Eid day. Whatever else, auntie is a lady from a rich household in Begum Bazaar. So what if their situation went downhill three generations ago: those aristocratic airs of hers were annoyingly ever-present in her way of speaking, when she would hit the servants, then again when she would serve heaps and heaps of food, or in her snooty superiority when it came to food. It is very important for Alauddin Miya to bring his auntie to his side. And his auntie’s daughter leans more to her mother’s side than her father’s. In the last few days auntie’s O-level-flunking nephew has been coming around the house. No way! It won’t work unless he is able to persuade auntie. With patience and unstinting fortitude, he keeps on expressing various frustrations and impatience regarding his opposition to uncle going to the garage. If you stick with something, is there anything that cannot be accomplished? In the end, auntie and her daughter both gave their support to Alauddin, and Khijir got the responsibility of going to the *mohajon*’s rickshaw garage.

The uncle and nephew’s garages are side by side. On Eid day, to be sure, Alauddin Miya takes out all his vehicles. Today the baby taxi will come in handy for himself, rolling the rickshaws outside, Khijir enters the *mohajon*’s garage.

Seeing Khijir, the rickshaw wallahs start tugging on the rickshaws however they like. Scrunching up his *surma*-smeared eyes, Khijir looks at this mess and shouts, “Eh, you’s thinkin’ ‘is a whorehouse or sumpin’?” He tries to bring Rahmatulla’s harsh tone to his voice, “Eh, is this the Kandupotti whorehouse¹⁰ or what? I’s like you’s started up grabbin’ and tuggin’ on a whore by her back ‘n ribs!” Without the *mohajon* there, the rickshaw wallahs are feeling their oats, like the rickshaws are the bastards’ regular whores! Listen to each one of their chest-swelling boasts: “I’s Eid, and you’s talkin’ ‘bout money is ya?”

10 The name of a now defunct brothel that used to be located in Old Dhaka frequented mostly by day laborers.

“How’s ya gonna talk ‘about collectin’ money?”

“Go, go on then, go fetch it in writin’ from the *mohajon*, why doncha?”

“Ahright, let t’ *mohajon* come then!” At this suggestion of Khijir’s, the rickshaw wallahs’ vigor subsides. If the *mohajon* comes, it means trouble right from the start. That means not even one of those fares to the mosque for prayers. Then one after another one taka note, half-taka note, quarter-taka note is going to keep coming out. Except for a couple of guys still drawing on their cigarettes, they hand over the *biris* to Khijir, and say this as they do so to ease the sting of having to part with them, “Eh, scrawny skin-n-bones, ya still takin’ care of the mohajon are ya, massagin’ ‘im an’ all? Or did he drop ya an’ find ‘nother?” Like Khijir’s got time to answer each and every one of these. One by one, except for three of them, all the rickshaws come out into the street.

Prayer time is almost over. The responsibility of carrying the small carpet, shawl, and prayer rug from Rahmatulla and Alauddin’s home up to the mosque falls on Khijir. He needs to get back quickly. Kring! Kring! goes the sound of the rickshaws’ bells, the sound is coming from inside the garage. Which goddamn bastard got into the garage! Khijir, annoyed now, looks around carefully inside. Nope, nobody. It must have been a rickshaw bell out in the street. After coming out from the garage, while he is closing the door made of thick strips of bamboo and securing a lock to the chain, again he hears, “Kring! Kring! Kring!” Khijir opens the door and once again enters the garage--everything is quiet. But there is somebody or other in the garage. A chill runs down Khijir’s spine; when he was young he spent so many nights here in this garage, sometimes that headless Shiva would come out from Nondolal Dutto Lane and ring the rickshaw bell! Did that one come back here today? In a split second the uncanny sensation is gone; he paces up and down from one end of the garage to the other hoping to clear things up with this damn, foul *jinn*.

The border of Rahmatulla’s house is the 15 inch wall made of brick and mortar. With that wall on one side, the *mahajon* built a thick bamboo fence at the front and other two sides and started this garage about 19/20 years ago. At that time there was just enough space to keep about two rickshaws, all of it enclosed by fencing. Later, after the *mahajon* became the owner of this building he built the garage right next to the wall. Time passes. The garage eases outwards to the front. Crossing the drainage ditch in the road, the garage spreads out into the street. Then it must expand to the sides. Now it has crossed the lamppost in that direction; as a result, there is no need to install a bulb on one side of the garage. There was a plan to cut a door through one side of the thick wall to attach it to the inside of the house. But the kids from the low-class families would come in anytime they

want and steal things, and the *purdah* inside the home would be lost--once they had removed a few bricks, Rahmatulla's wife made a fuss about all this and the work on the door stopped. There is a huge space where the loose bricks fell out. More than that, the places where the bricks fell out here and there or were taken out were made into places for keeping knickknacks. When Khijir used to stay here, was it like that? He gets startled by the sound of lots of marbles cracking against one another, he used to keep his marbles hidden in a little crack. Which one was that? Following that sound he feels around with his hand. No. Where are the marbles? In one crack there is an unused bicycle chain. In another crack there is a little tin of oil. Ah okay, in the evening he had gone to sell a screwdriver at the smuggler's market next to Raysaheb Bazaar; when the electricity suddenly went out, he grabbed a ball bearing. When he got home he saw it was brand new, it shone so beautifully. He had hidden it in a nook somewhere in this wall. He didn't want to sell it. Then, when he did want to sell it and there was the opportunity, he couldn't find it again. Which nook was it in? Uggh! It's nowhere. Where did he used to keep that torn cigarette pack with the deck of cards in it? He puts his hand in one crack and brushes something, but no, it's just a bit of used sandpaper. In another there's a screwdriver, in one a bicycle chain. Uggh! He can't find his ball bearing or his marbles or his deck of cards. On the other hand, inside the building that rickshaw bell keeps on ringing in his ears stopping periodically; gradually, along with the beat of his hands, that ringing of the bell takes on the form of a regular rhythm. No! It's just impossible to grasp it. Disheartened, Khijir sits up against the wall and stares in front of him.

The people wearing freshly washed pajama-panjabis and lungis slip through the gully avoiding the muck. There's a tupi on each one of their heads, many with a child's hand grasping their finger. You cannot see anyone very clearly, gradually the street becomes desolate. Even as he watches it, the street too vanishes into thin air. Khijir shakes his head multiple times without result. Did he put so much oil in his hair today that the inside of his head has become frozen? Caressingly running through his hair, the oil streams into his skull twisting into knots the various lumps of his brain. Is any motherfucking traffic police going to be able to loosen that knot? Was this jam always there in his brain right from the beginning? It is true, his mother thought Khijir's skull was a yawning cavern where, "There's jus' a half-grown brain?! What'm I to do wit' ya? You'll have to see to yur own fate, what's it to me?" Once Ma used to get going with her scolding there was no stopping her, "How many times I tell ya not to get in the man's way? Just seein' ya the man gets all sore, and you, ya shameless disgrace of a stinkin' toddy cat's offspring ya are, you goes 'bout all the damn day, can't avoid bein' in his way even for a secon'!"

But is Khijir trying to cross the man? Damn it, the guy's fit as a fiddle and young; but he's the one who shows up at the base of the iron bridge 2 to 3 times a day greedily looking to take whatever his lady's boy has earned. And what was he earning back then? His job at that time was pushing the rickshaws up onto the iron bridge. Push them up and over the slope at Sutrapur, then return back alone. Then, along with all the other little ones, again they would run behind the rickshaws, "Let me give ya a push?--Can I?" Again push it over, again come back down. Gradually saving two coins at a time, going continuously until you reach 2 *ana* or 3 *ana*.¹¹ Then eat some peanuts, or *sonpabri*, or chick peas with masala. Or, up on the bridge, on one side sitting at old lady Nulu's house eating half-rotten mangoes, or custard apples riddled by the birds' beaks, or a sweet potato cut in half. But what am I going to say? 3 to 4 hours into work at the Forasganj flour mill that damn Falu Mistry skips out and shows up sure enough, "Let's see what'cha ya got?" If the amount of money was not to his liking a steady stream of blows would rain down on his neck and back, "Dirty bastard, treating yur belly like it's a Koltabazaar water tank ain't ya? Whenever I seen ya, ya motherfucker you's chewing on somet'in." Mistry certainly tried hard enough to keep himself hidden. One day he scooped up a quarter from the bridge; he even got into a tussle with Moija's Ma's boy Moija¹² over it--Moija said he saw the quarter first. Finally a compromise was made on this condition, that both of them eat beef together at a restaurant on the Sutrapur slope. Falu Mistry found out about the whole thing, that bastard Moija probably got in his ear out of spite over not getting the whole coin to himself. Behind the police traffic box on the slope of the bridge, Falu squeezed his neck with such force that day that he tasted the flavor of those pieces of beef a second time on his tongue. In one way Falu Mistry actually did him a favor, because of the force of his merciless beating he was able to enjoy the taste of a half-quarter's worth of beef twice in one hour!

Falu Mistry actually was not that terrible a person. It's true, at least he wouldn't easily raise a hand against Khijir's mother. Khijir's mother, even including Khijir himself, lived most easily during the time they were with him. Falu's residence was at the horse stables of a big home in Forasganj. The owner of the house was his boss going back two generations, Falu's father used to drive the boss's horse and buggy; since selling off the buggy, Falu cleaned the stables and made a home for himself there. He

11 16 *ana* equals 1 taka; 2 *ana* an eighth of a taka, 3 *ana* is one short of a quarter taka.

12 It is typical in Bangladesh for married women to be referred to as "mother of..." and their eldest son's name; here the repetition in quick succession mimics the proper-name-like use of the teknonym.

operated the machine at the boss's flour mill, and whoever his wife might be she had to work at his house. Falu was basically a happy-go-lucky guy. Who could understand when his mood would go dark? Consider this: he has just sat his wife down to tell her the plot of the movie "Molakat" that he has just returned from watching at the Maya theater--he has even gone so far as to shift the sleeping Khijir's head over onto the pillow--when suddenly, right in the middle of telling the story, something happened and he starts raining blows down on the sleeping boy's back. And his words are going right along with his fists, "Giving birth to 'is bastard and settin' up in me home i's like you's planted a thorny date palm an' takin' out all the fire from me. Cockblockin' little fucker, I'll cut off yur pecker I will, yours an' right down to yur grandkids' I'll cut it I will, you'll see ya won't piss yur bed again in this lifetime ya won't!"

What was Khijir supposed to do about his bedwetting? Every couple of nights, at someone's urging, he would wake up and go straight out to the IG gate after the barracks at the mill beyond Foridabad. He knew this place anyway, he used to come here sometimes and play *danguli* in order to get away from Falu. Oh how nice it was to pee in one corner of the field! Some days later at Rahmatulla's garage when Totamiya stripped him naked and was horsing around with him, then too his wiener got hard like that. But that was a lot later. His mother had tried very hard to get him to stop wetting his bed. There were so many *tabiz*,¹³ so many chants over holy water! Finally what worked was the holy water chanted upon by the maulvi from the Foridabad madrassa who had been found by Moji's mother, the wife of the building contractor at Rahmatulla's house. But even after that Falu's beatings did not let up. Khijir had been of a mind to take off from that place for a long time. But he could not have imagined that his mother would move out also. Falu's stable-house was practically complete brick and mortar, hundred watt bulbs stayed on all night long on the concrete veranda, and by that light each night they would pick bones out of their Foli fish curry with rice without a worry. On one side a row of pit toilets for the servants, next to the row of pit toilets a constant supply of water in the cistern--like an idiot, Ma left all of this. She was not really able to bring much with her either. Secretly she sent along with Khijir a couple saris, four or so *seers*¹⁴ of rice, and a bed sheet. But when she tried to make off with the boss's good sari she was caught. The new head wife was arguing with someone when just then she caught her. When Falu heard about her sneaking off with

13 Qur'anic references written as incantations for healing reasons or to ward off evil.

14 A measure of weight slightly less than one kilo.

the sari what a commotion he made! “What’r you gonna do with the clothes? Slut of a woman, shake it a bit an’ ya gonna have no shortage of food or clothes, are ya?”

It is not incorrect what the Mistry said. Without this dark-complexioned mother’s body, where would the mother and son both have drifted off to? But whatever. When will this damn wench of a mother of his finally leave him be? What jinn? What Shiva? This damn whore of a mother of his is the one who has come and stopped him from doing his Eid prayers. Lifting his seething head from the wall, Khijir sees that there is no one in the street. His body goes limp with exhaustion. But just then from the mouth of Subhas Bose Avenue or Rishikesh Das Road or maybe Nondolal Dutta Lane comes the insistent sound of a horn from some truck tearing and digging into Khijir’s ears, eyes, cheeks and lips. After some time, when his entire body has regained its composure on its own Khijir is able to stand upright.

When he goes to the owner’s home, Rahmatulla and Alauddin do not even really give him a hard time. In fact Alauddin even covers for him a bit, “It’s one day in a year, ya young buck! Ya gonna spend it in the garage? Ya didn’t even do yur prayers?”

“Leave ‘em be!” Rahmatulla moves directly to the real matter, “Prayer an’ all, for that lot?! How many vehicles ya give out? Ya collected me debts?”

While he is counting the money collected from the rickshaw wallahs, Rahmatulla expresses his frustration, “Prayer, for ‘em lot?! No belief. Does that lot have any fear of Allah an’ his messenger?” This time Khijir gets genuinely frightened. He does not have the capacity to directly fear Allah and his messenger. But the way the *mohajon* was staring at him while talking about his lack of belief made him very uncomfortable. On top of that when the *mohajon* gave him 5 taka in tips, Khijir’s throat went dry. After pacing around for half an hour, he came back to Rahmatulla’s side and said, “*Mohajon!* I’d forgotten ‘bout givin’ ya the five quarters. Delowar paid for the cost o’ the spoke!”

But that fear about his faith built up in him by the *mohajon* does not subside. The money collected from the rickshaw wallahs is still with him: 1 whole taka note, 1 half-taka, 1 quarter. When he goes out to deliver the food the landlord has sent to the renters, he throws the entire half-taka into the first beggar’s bowl he sees in the street. Khijir feels bad now having lost most of the 3 takas he pinched from the money he collected from the rickshaw wallahs in the morning.