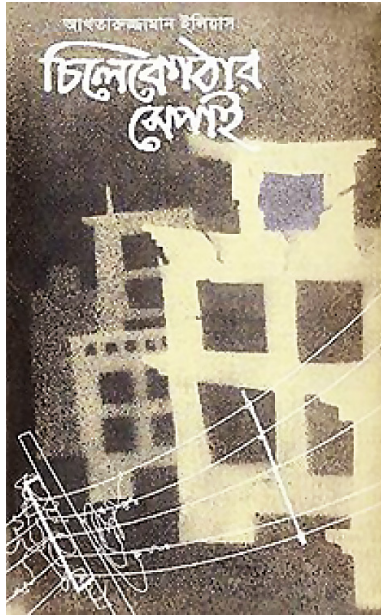


বাংলা থেকে ইংরেজি অনুবাদ
চিলেকোঠার সেপাই : ত্রয়োদশ অধ্যায়
আখতারুজ্জামান ইলিয়াস
অনুবাদ : ম্যাথিউ ডি. রিচ



চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের প্রচ্ছদচিত্র

Translation
Bangla to English
Rooftop Soldier: Chapter 13
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Abstract

Set against the backdrop of growing political unrest in the end of 1960s Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan), the chapter 11 of the *Rooftop Soldier* unfolds in a vibrant student-led protest at Victoria Park, Dhaka. Amid chants and speeches calling for justice and autonomy, a range of characters, including student leaders, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens, grapple with the complex socio-political situation. The narrator of the story emphasizes the exploitation of Bengal by West Pakistan, highlighting issues like economic inequality, political oppression, and the denial of rights to the Bengali people. The course of story reflects the protagonist's, Anwar's, internal conflict deepens. His struggle to balance personal safety with a desire for meaningful change mirrors the broader societal crisis. The description of the meeting intensifies as slogans echo, and tensions rise between different groups, who are opposing for leadership in the movement. At the heart of the protest is Mokbul Hossein, a grieving father whose son was killed by police gunfire during a recent demonstration. His raw, emotional address becomes a pivotal moment, stirring empathy from the crowd but also causing a brief disruption led by the unconventional person Khijir, who attempts to restore order with humor. The story interweaves personal struggles, political tension, and collective anger, encapsulating the broader struggle for freedom and identity in an unrestrained time.

That university student who died today in the police shooting, Khijir had never seen him. If he hadn't ducked into the Medical College so he could throw stones at the police, right at that time he would have been between Dhaka Hall and PG¹. The boy was shot right there. Suppose, if instead of entering the Ali Medical Hospital he had stayed in the procession. Then? The police lorry was beside PG, in front of the Roshid building. The shooting started from right there. Just imagine, Khijir is right next to him, they're moving along shouting slogans, just then the bullet grazed his arm and entered the chest of the boy next to him. It could have been like this, that the bullet-riddled boy collapses right onto him. All the people are running, he too is running, he's not having any problem at all running with the young man's dead body in his arms. So? As he is thinking about all this, the smell of fresh shit strikes him and lets him know that he's reached their slum. But is anyone able to curb his enthusiasm? Alright, that's it, the bullet could have struck his body too! Do the police bullets distinguish between educated/uneducated, rich/poor, student/laborer? No! A bullet in the chest just won't do. Dying now without clearing out at least a few of them is not alright. Okay, think about it, if he gets a bullet in the left leg there's not all that much inconvenience. His two legs are like iron *pillars* after driving a rickshaw for so long. Then again, now he drives a scooter; since he's given up driving the rickshaw he's got chronic pain in those *pillars*, when he gets rained on, his legs throb. If a single bullet struck, the blood would run and that chronic pain would be cured for life.

After he lifted the flap and entered the house, the clamor of slogans, gunfire and tear gas in the area of Chan Khan bridge and Nimtoli reverberated in his head. He was washing his hand in his plate after having gobbled up his rice while seated on the floor when Jummon's Ma calls out from up on the bed, "Ate 't all did'cha?"

¹ An old and well known medical school and hospital in Dhaka.

“You didn’t eat?”

“Did’cha ask? Did’cha ever in yur life ask? All’s ya’ care ‘bout is yur belly. All ya’ do is cram it in! Oh Allah, I figure he’s hid two or three jugs worth in t’at handful of bones right there!”

As Khijir sits down over on this side of the bed he says, “Yur mohajon he done fit t’a whole Koltabazar water tank in that belly o’ his, he did. Ya’ brung back three or four jugs from the mohajon’s belly yurself didn’cha?”

Khijir lies down on one edge of the bed as he’s speaking, he thinks to himself as he scratches the armpit on his right side, if he’d been able to repel that bullet with this limb right here, that university student wouldn’t have died. But right now the trouble is Jummon’s Ma. At night who can stop her squabbling?

“Useless! What a halfwit idiot! Ya took the vehicle out today, yeah? Did’cha drive it? Yur bloody *baap*² ‘ll be payin’ the bills, idn’t it?”

This time Khijir loses control of his temper, he says, “Why’s me *baap* gonna pay ‘em? What, couldn’t ya stay the night thru playin’ *danguli* wit’ yur mohajon-*baap*? What’cha come here fur? It’s one in t’a mornin’ and this bloody whore’s fittin’ to play that old broken record now, is she?”

This time Jummon’s Ma’s broken record plays at a terrific speed, “The mohajon be who’s *baap*, that one t’ whole neighborhood is knowin’! Did the mohajon even see me mother once in his life, did he? My father at least is just t’a one!”

Khijir is thinking to himself: taking off running like that from the place of the procession wasn’t right. I mean, he wasn’t able to hit the police with even one stone.

“Ya go out wit’ the vehicle, then ya leave the vehicle in the street and go off flirtin’, idn’t it?”

This time Khijir is shocked, how’d the woman know that? He says, “Who’s it said that to ya? Yur mohajon-*baap*, idn’t it? Lightnin’ is gonna strike yur mohajon right on his head, it is. Ya hear me?”

“Quietly, quietly! Ya stay in the mohajon’s own room, yet ya go on talkin’ rubbish ‘bout him. Ya got no shame, do ya?”

“Stayin’ fur noothin’, am I? I don’t pay rent?”

But Jummon’s Ma keeps bringing up the same subject, in the morning he went out with the baby taxi, then in order to watch the people’s craziness he left the vehicle in the middle of the street? What’s the meaning of all that? The mohajon may be a bad guy. That’s true. But for how long will Alauddin Miah stand for Khijir’s craziness about watching all this monkey business?

² word for father

Khijir asks again, “I’m askin’, then who’s it spreadin’ these lies?”
Is there any shortage of people to do that?

This afternoon Alauddin Miah himself went to Rohmotulla’s house. When he got there he said, “Uncle, a *university istudent* died, the police were firin’ on him. Be a bit careful, alright! The *publik* is right fired up ‘bout Ayub Khan! Monem Khan has started thrashing himself like it’s *matam!*”³

“You all’ll rip out Ayub Khan’s pubes ya will!” Rohmotulla is angry, “Let ‘em drop a few more bodies and all that squealin’ an’ howlin’ll be right hush as a forest.”

Alauddin, however, doesn’t get angry, he says in a normal tone of voice, “I don’t think so. With this university student dyin’ Nurul Amin is finished, isn’t he? Just you be a bit careful. They smashed the Amligola Muslim League office.”

Rohmotulla barks at his daughter to bring some tea; the daughter went to visit at the next door neighbor’s house. It’s Jummon’s Ma who brings the tea. Setting down *bakerkhani*, *panir* and tea on the table she was on her way out when Alauddin says, “What’s all this that Khijir is doin’? He goes out with the baby taxi then leaves it with some guy in the street. What if that bastard ‘ad nicked it an’ run off!”

Slightly angry and slightly wounded, the mohajon sits silently for awhile. Then he says, “Ya’ll won’t leave me none of me honor! After you chase ‘im off, the very next day I’ll give that son-of-a-whore the boot and put ‘im out in the street! And that Jummon’s Ma o’ mine, I’ll marry her off to Kamruddin.”

“Kamruddin? He’ll marry her?”

“If ya give ‘im cash, yur sayin’ he won’t? I’m building a road at Dolai Khal. Aren’t I gonna be needin’ masons fur that?” The mohajon goes on with so many complaints about Khijir! He has the gall to get up at Victoria Park and slander the very same person who fed him growing up! “Miah, ya understand, these are dark days. If they weren’t I could take one toe o’ me foot and squash all them grubs and insects right into the earth.”

Listening to the conversation between the uncle and nephew Jummon’s Ma got quite frightened! That was the reason the mohajon had sent Jummon today to Malibag to find Kamruddin?

Today in the evening Alauddin Miah had scolded Khijir a little. He doesn’t like it when people give out his vehicles like that to just anyone. In fact Khijir thought that he should have left the vehicle in the garage himself. These are bad times, who knows when somebody will take a vehicle and just disappear? If one baby taxi is lost just think how much of the *shayeb’s* money will be wasted! Seeing the throng of students in

³ An ironic reference to the customary self-flagellation that is part of the Shiite observance of Muharram, *matam* is the name for these practices.

front of the university at Neelkhet he just lost his head. He was taking a passenger from New Market to Kamlapur station, seeing the student procession at Neelkhet he wanted right then and there to join their throng. They were really going at it with the slogans at that point, the procession was going in the direction of Fuller Road. Behind, the police vehicles were standing in front of the girl's hostel, in the street was the police barbed wire barricade. After dropping the passenger at Kamlapur he had just started heading back to the garage, in the area near the garage Ronju, Korim, Hosen, they were hanging around—if he gives one of them the baby taxi for 5 taka, in the afternoon he can pick up that money from them and give it to the *shayeb*, that'll work just fine. Is Alauddin really going to investigate who drove the vehicle throughout the entire day? But in front of the State Bank in Motijhil he sees Adom Ali standing waiting for the bus. The poor guy's cheeks have sunk in, more than half of his prickly beard has turned grey. About a year back he too used to drive one of Alauddin's baby taxis, then he gave up the job and went back to the village to work the fields. Somewhere in there, one day Khijir saw him with a vegetable basket on his head calling out, “potatoes, *potol*, green chilies, dried fish” as he walked along K.M. Das Lane. Today Khijir called Adom Ali over in front of the State Bank, sat him down beside him said, “You wanna drive?” The damn country bumpkin⁴ was so grateful he couldn't hardly speak. Khijir got down near Gulistan and said, “Give me five taka, the rest of the money you can give me tonight at eight, I'll wait in front of the garage. And don't tell the *shayebi*!”

Adom Ali sits down in the driver's seat and asks for the license. If the police stop me it'll cost me some coin!

“Screw the police! All them police is at the university now!”

Khijir is cursing out the police but he also doesn't agree to hand over to Adom Ali the license or registration, “What license? Go'n now, git!”

Partway by bus but walking and running most of the way, Khijir caught up to the procession in front of the *shahid minar*. He was able to catch up to the procession because there was a meeting going on at the *shahid minar*. Advancing with the procession he arrived at the south gate of the medical college hospital, there he sees students throwing stones at the police from inside the hospital. After climbing over the railing Khijir too starts throwing bits of brick and stones. As soon as the shooting starts, Khijir ducks inside the PG Hospital going through the medical college. Not long ago there was a university here. Khijir used to regularly bring two girls from the neighborhood here by rickshaw. All the people are running in the opposite direction, and what do you know, he is sprinting like a maniac towards the PG gate. At the gate are

⁴ This one I'm not sure about. My guess is that this is a phonetic spelling of a dialect pronunciation of the word *gramyo*, which I've translated as “country bumpkin”.

three huge police lorries. Again he goes back and around the pond next to Beltola and ends up standing at the end of the Roshid building. The police and the EPR trucks now are going in the direction of Nazimuddin Road. All around Khijir the fleeing throng press in upon him. “They’re shooting, they’re shooting”, “He’s died”, “No, he didn’t die”, “There’s bleeding”, “They took him to the hospital”--amidst all these sorts of conversations people were running chaotically. The red car was coming from the TB Clinic. This time they let loose with the tear gas. Stones and bottles were raining down on the police from the roof of Dhaka Hall. The police are retreating, they’re entering the slum next to the rail line. Reaching what was more or less a safe distance, the police and the EPR⁵ guys started indiscriminately beating people inside the slum. With the combined force of the police and EPR brought to bear, the entire slum became a chaotic spectacle. To demolish all these brick and hardboard houses didn’t require the use of a bulldozer; the butt of a rifle is more than enough. It was like a herd of elephants was tramping through the slum. The houses were all dropping like dominoes. On top of that were the rifle butts slamming down on the people’s backs, chests, backsides and heads.

“Oh Allah, oh Ma”, “Baba, we’re poor folk, don’t understand’ nothin’”, “Baba, you’re like a father to us!”--men, women, boys, girls all wailing and pleading, the slum dwellers running to and fro, then again the exploding of tear gas shells from over there. Khijir is running. At that time his ears thirsted to hear the slogans. If you heard the slogans you understood that the people were standing up against the police. He was running with long strides along the rail line, that was when he saw Jummon, Jummon was running in the opposite direction. Khijir stops for a moment to call out to Jummon, immediately the butt of a rifle strikes his neck. Again Khijir must run. The police are entering the houses and breaking them apart, the sound of clay jugs and cooking pots being smashed gradually gets louder. While this is going on, some people duck their heads into their houses to remove their worthless jewelry and in the process they get poked in their backsides and lower back by the butt of the rifles. In the end Jummon was nowhere to be found.

After, after all that time he realized, wait, Jummon’s not on the bed. Khijir asks, “Where’s Jummon at?”

“He’s not comin’.” Jummon’s Ma replies, “The mohajon barred his daddy from sendin’ ‘em.”

“What?”

“He called the *mistri* an’ said, the boy’ll stay wit’ his daddy. I’ll give ya a place to stay.”

“How’s that?”

“The mohajon ain’t gonna let you stay here no more. Says, he stays in me own house and thinks he’ll make o’ enemy o’ me! He’s right.

⁵ East Pakistan Rifles

How's the mohajon gonna stand fur that?"

In the evening today, right in front of Jummon and Jummon's Ma, the landlord was talking with Kamruddin, "Miah is livin' wit' his missus and the boy. I'mma give that ungrateful bastard th' boot, I will! The work on the road over top of Dolai canal is moving along, there'll be no shortage o' work fur you!"

Kamruddin did not answer. Jummon's Ma just then was washing dishes next to the faucet at one corner of the paved courtyard and kept looking in his direction over and over.

The landlord was enraged, "Ya saw his recklessness, idn't it? In the meetin' he's talkin' bad 'bout me, ya understand? Son of a whore. What else he gonna be, yeah? Right, stay then in the Kandupatti red-district, stay an' be yur momma's pimp then! Stay an' be yur sister's pimp too! You'll take yur beatins from yur momma and yur sister's *customers* and pass yur days like that, that'd be good! Idn't it? I'm giving him a place to stay, I fed 'em an' raised 'em, now the whore's boy has gone'n grown hisself wings!" Listening to all this, Jummon's Ma's black hands streaked with ash, straw in her grasp, continued to work but with tremendous speed now.

"What'd you say?" Khijir asks his wife, "Ya didn't say noothin'?" Jummon's Ma lies from time to time, but she doesn't overstate things. But did she have to repeat the landlord's cursing about Khijir Ali so exactly! Given the chance, the bitch gave herself a little satisfaction cursing him out, no?

Khijir says, "What'd I say bad 'bout the mohajon? Manu from the neighborhood, that day wasn't he gonna throw 'em on the ground and bash 'em? Did I speak false? His own nephew, for God's sake, is our boss, we're there with Alauddin Miah hisself. His nephew isn't doin' the meetin's? He's not doin' the processions?"

"Who is you an' who're ya judgin'? His own nephew? *Shayeb* Manu? In a couple days it's said the mohajon is gonna get him married to his own daughter! All's you are is a servant and yur fixin' to have yur name written next to his? Oh my my, this man o' mine! Where's the queen, and where's the gal gettin' fucked!"

Khijir would like to give that bitch one good punch and split her face right up nice. But Jummon's Ma doesn't give him the chance and says, "The mohajon has shut right up seein' all that marchin' and noise makin'; otherwise how long it be 'fore he sent you packin'?"

"If he sent me packin', I'd be fine to go! There's a shortage of places to go in Dhaka city, is there?"

"Is he gonna give me work to do? After kicking you out, if the mohajon don't marry me off to the *mistri*, is he gonna let me work?"

"Then ya won't work there! If ya wanna work, what, there's nowhere else t' work?"



চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের রচয়িতা আখতারুজ্জামান ইলিয়াস

“Oh, *baba!* Them right there is some men’s words alright! The mohajon’ll give me boy a rickshaw, me a place to stay. We’ll give that all up and go stuff ourselves inside yur rib cage an’ stay, idn’t it? Even that is noothin’ but a bag o’ bones! Ya think ya can keep me in a cage o’ bones, huh? This un’s a bloody moron he is!”

While this was going on, Bozlu came home next door singing a drunken tune at the top of his lungs. He entered, sat down and immediately started puking his guts out. Right away Bozlu’s wife started with the screaming, “Comes back home at night after drinkin’ all that shit, now who’s gonna clean it up? Who washes all that?” Next, once the sound of the vomiting stopped then came the sound of the beating. With the first slap the woman yelled back, with the second, silence. After that Bozlu threw her to the floor and rained kicks down on her. When there was a pause in the stream of kicks Bozlu’s wife mumbles, “After a beatin’ from the cops, this crook is feelin’ lively, huh?” In answer Bozlu again starts kicking her. This girl is severely twisted: between taking those kicks the pithy comments she was making were more than enough to goad that drunk on. Over on this side, Jummon’s Ma is mumbling, “Oh my! Five months pregnant she is! Oh my!” Then, raising again the previous topic, she says in a tone that’s practically pleading, “Hey, ya know what I mean, talk wit’ the mohajon, if ya say it the right way t’ the mohajon...?”

But nothing she says goes in Khijir’s ear. Bozlu is kicking his pregnant wife. A steady stream of blood is coming out from Khijir’s eyes and floods the floor of any one of the building’s stairwells; Bozlu’s wife’s body lies submerged in that blood.



চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের আমেরিকান ইংরেজি অনুবাদক ম্যাথিউ ডি. রিচ

Khijir leaps up and goes outside. It only takes him one kick to knock the drunk to the ground. Sprawled out lying on the ground Bozlu, choking on his words, swears at him, “Who’r you anyway? Ya keep yur own the whole bloody day over at th’ mohajon’s like she’s collateral, ‘n nighttime ya come back to take mine, idn’t it? If one day I don’t throw ya down and break both yur legs, ya bastard, then I ain’t me daddy’s son! Even the mohajon ordered it! Told me to one day take the whore’s boy, finish ‘em right off, stuff ‘em in a sack, tie it up and toss ‘em into a *manhole*! You wait!” Bozlu’s words, garbled perhaps, were nevertheless intelligible.

Jummon’s Ma had gone to sleep. Khijir went out into the street a bit and stood. In the spaces between the moss and ivy-covered, brown buildings two or three stories tall the moon was visible filling the sky. All over the deserted street the garbage lay swaddled in moonlight. There seemed a terrible void in Khijir’s chest. Did the mohajon send Bozlu after him? His body feels cold. He needs to go inside. Tomorrow is the strike. The procession needs to be lead from here to the university. Alauddin Miah, after scolding him about the baby taxi, said over and over that Khijir was to bring the rickshaw wallahs and be in front of the office first thing in the morning. The *shayeb* even told him what slogans had been chosen. No! He needs to sleep now, tomorrow he needs to wake at dawn.