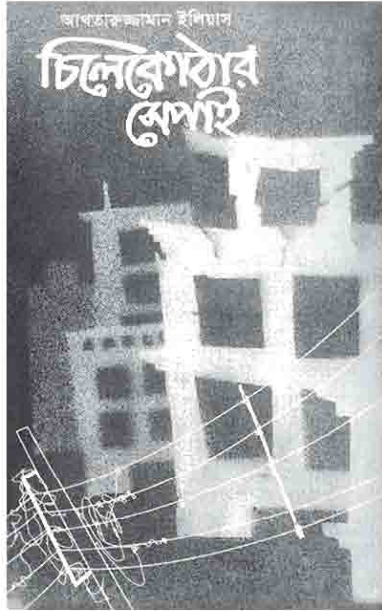


অনুবাদ
বাংলা থেকে ইংরেজি
চিলেকোঠার সেপাই : পঞ্চম অধ্যায়
আখতারুজ্জামান ইলিয়াস
অনুবাদ: ম্যাথিউ ডি. রিচ



চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের প্রচ্ছদচিত্র

Translation
Bangla to English
Rooftop Soldier : Chapter 5
Akhtaruzzaman Elias
Translated by Matthew D. Rich

Abstract

Chilekothar Sepai (Rooftop Soldier) written by Akhtaruzzaman Elias is one of the best Bangla novels of Bangla literature. It is based on the political and historical consequences of the Agartala's Conspiracy Litigation in 1969. Chapter 5 of *Rooftop Soldier* pictures the socio-political reality of Bengal when Shekh Mujib, the great leader, was imprisoned in cause of Agartola Conspiracy! This was the time when the Pakistani rulers were witnessing protests of Bengali commoners in all sense. The quite detested government's force was following the path of repression, oppression and killing to keep their power by creating mass fear. But the reality was that even the Muslim Leaguers, who still dreamt of undivided Pakistan, wanted release of Shekh Mujib. The world was witnessing the flaming fire in Bengali people's heart to burn all of the repressive oppressive system to establish equal citizen rights.

Asha Bhosle singing a Naushad tune be heard as they push aside the tattered and grimy curtain hanging at the door of Shahin Restaurant and Sweetmeats opposite to the start of Jorpul Lane. Few enough are listening, fewer still eating. Anwar lights a Kingstork as he takes a sip of the umber-colored tea thinly covered with froth; exhaling the smoke entirely he asks, "How do you think things are?"

That's exactly why Osman has been searching all over for him, to tell him what's going on. But right now, Osman is feeling really nauseous; he's got to put something solid down. Here right now he is not going to find anything except carrot *halwa*, *bundiya*, and *laddu*. Right now, putting something sweet in his mouth is impossible. Anwar answers his own question, "Their days are numbered. Their back is up against the wall, they are like a rabid dog now!"

Osman feels a little relieved hearing Anwar speak; in the hopes of getting a bit more relief, he asks, "You've been out and about. What's the situation out there?"

"That's what I'm saying! *Their days are numbered*. Now the worry is about the big fish of the opposition."

"Why?"

"Look. People have come a long way. In the villages the *govment* is *failing*, the people will stop paying taxes. The *people* don't even pay attention now to those *influential* people the *govment* relied on to function. What do the *leaders* want out there? Tell me. If Sheikh-*sabeb* gets out, what else does the Awami League have to want other than this *adult franchise*?"

"They will release Sheikh-*sabeb*?" Osman sits up very straight, and despite feeling a terrible *acidity* in his stomach, he lights a cigarette. He

feels a stabbing pain in the left side of his stomach. In his throat the vomit wells up into a ball. With his stomach empty, the vomit is all stuck there. To the extent that the possibility of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's freedom has invigorated him, that drains away and he says, "But are they going to be able to *withdraw* Agartola?" He remembers Shawkot's explanation: it is impossible for Ayub Khan to withdraw the Agartola Conspiracy case. Whether it be a true or false one, once they have brought a case, the Army's honor, even its existence, depends on it. Whether you are talking about the ruling party or the opposition party--in all of Pakistan, what other well-organized political organization is there like that? If they withdraw the Agartola case, won't that prove that the military is laughably pathetic? He can make all these kinds of arguments to Anwar, but Osman does not feel like talking. Also, if Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is freed, he would be so happy; Anwar is explaining the possibility of his release, that's why Osman stays quiet.

"The place I went this time, our *base* there is quite good. If you don't see it yourself, you wouldn't believe how *conscious* and *militant* people have become. The heads in the villages, the ones who have been pandering their influence for a few generations, they have become so *cornered* now that even the serious Muslim Leaguers want Sheikh Mujib's *release*. Otherwise, who is going to *save* them?"

No matter how much he might talk about his own ideological stance, when it comes to political tactics, Anwar clams up completely. Is Osman feeling a bit peeved about that? When he has already said this much so far, Osman is on tenterhooks thinking that Anwar will say more. But Anwar changes the topic slightly, "They have told me this time to go to our village. Over in our area, there are practically none of our people; even those, who are there in the *char* areas a short distance away, are from another *group*. Pausing briefly, Anwar says, "Will you go with me?"

At first Osman is afraid, but then immediately he feels a strong desire to go. Anwar says again, "Come on buddy! One of my uncles lives at our village home, there's tons of room. Will you go? You've never even seen a village! Come on."

Osman laughs just a little, "You have never even lived in the village; up until we came to Pakistan that's where I was, in the village."

"Oh please!" Anwar stops him, "You came when you were so young. Do you even remember the village?"

Osman is feeling very light. It has been a long time since he took a sip of his tea. On the surface of the umber-colored tea, like the layer that would form on the pond in Paschimpara on a winter's day, the thick, umber-colored froth lay broken and scattered. In the morning time in Paschimpara, the palm trees, their bodies, their shadows tall and crooked quiver as they stand in the foam-flecked water of the pond. Osman takes a long, deep look into the tea cup.

"Will you go?" Anwar is practically pushing him, "Can't you *manage* a few days of vacation?"

Osman, as though pleading with him says, "I'll go! When are you going?"

Before Anwar can answer, they hear, "Slamalekum!" Lying belly up in front of the next table Khijir wipes his eyes with the damp edge of his lungi; even after sitting down in a chair, his eye-wiping and talking continues unabated, "Damn 'at is strong! 'is like they'd took a pipe an' poured onion juice down it!"

Next his companion speaks; wiping his eyes with a wet handkerchief, the guy looks in Osman's direction, "They hit us *heavy* with the teargas. I've used so much water, it's still burning!" When he lifts the handkerchief from his eyes, they recognize him. Osman asks, "Where were you guys, Parvez?"

"When I saw the *procession* I went for the crowd. Then, what did I see over by the court? Khijir, all *charged* up, throwing bricks! There's bullets flying, and he's throwing bricks!"

"Anyone die?"

"*Definitely!*" Parvez calls out loudly, 'Gimme a tea!' Lowering his voice again, "*At least three*, yeah, three people for sure."

"How many ya' say?" Haddi Khijir' protests loudly, "Three? Naah, it's not less 'an ten or 'leven. We saw it ourselves we did, them puttin' a number 'o bodies up in the *terucks*."

"Most of them were wounded, *injured!*" Parvez starts to get upset, "Come on now brother, they're more merciless even than *haywan*¹! *Pehle*, if you threw the teargas, then the *publik* would *disburse*. No, these animals start shooting first! (Using *tu*), Ya'll shoot first and then hit us with the teargas! What's with that?"

1 The word meaning of name of Haddi Khijir is *skin-and-bones khijir*.

2 Using his Urdu style of speech.

Anwar comments calmly, "The teargas was used so that they could remove the *dead bodies*."

Thinking about what would happen next with the bodies, Osman gets scared, "What did they do with the bodies?"

"I saw with me own eyes--they 'as pulling an' liftin' a few of 'em"; in his excitement and anger Khijir's dark face appears even darker. He switches the pliers from his right to his left hand, then he places them on the table, or he keeps them wrapped in the twisted fold of his dirty, white lungi; his black-as-black finger hard as iron plays along them, "That frist one--with one bullet, 'es finished he is. They grabbed 'em and lifted 'em in; then I see his two arms flipping and flopping about. 'an the other life Allah accepted after they'd got 'em up in the *teruck*." This time Anwar asks him something, and he too gives a detailed description of how the police disappeared the bodies. But Osman doesn't hear a thing. That stabbing pain in his stomach has now reached his head. There are round yellow-colored balls of light in front of his eyes. The configuration of the balls of light comes to something like this: as though a bloodied dead body were being pulled and lifted into a truck. The dead body is hanging outside the truck, resting against the railing. Even 4 or 5 man-size policemen pulling at once would not be able to pull it inside the railing. The dead body's eyes are coming out of their sockets. From the roof of the District Council office, from over top of the Azad Cinema, and over that way from the uneven tin roofs of Raysaheb Bazar, the *publik* are throwing bricks. The broken bottles flying in that direction are attempting to repel and return the .303 rifle bullets and tear gas shells--the body's detached eyes devour all of this. Its two hands have moved downwards; from each hand, hard as pressed iron, hangs a person riddled with bullets. Their pairs of eyes, four eyes in all, greedily yearn to take a look at the brick-and-bottle-throwing *publik*. Osman, hoping to extinguish the images, places his hands over his own eyes, but instead it comes to rest in between them. Then he places his hands on his forehead and looks back and forth.

"What happened, Osman? You not feeling well? You *feel uneasy*?"

Hearing Anwar's call, Osman sits up. Agh! He should have taken two antacid tablets at Amzadiya before heading out. It's like, if only he could sit, the sun on his back, and eat a couple of spoonfuls of hot rice with a *magur* fish curry while watching the *shalik* birds pick at the paddy spread out in the courtyard, then everything would be alright. In the

absence of that taste of rice soaked with the gravy of a *magur* fish curry, he begins to salivate. But damn if it's not a bitter-sour saliva. Leaving quickly he lifts the filthy curtain at the door and spits outside. His throat suddenly feels dry, and a nasty cough starts. Along with the coughing, he shudders as he vomits. A choking sound comes from his throat and mouth, but what actually flows out is far less than the sound it makes. A sour, bitter spittle mixed with the taste of the cigarette runs down his lips. At the same time, Parvez stands next to him and softly pats his head. Khijir is offering him a glass of water.

In the street, Khijir moves along pressed close to his side; lowering his voice he says, "Our Alauddin-saab 'as wantin' to speak with ya' 'bout sumpin' or other. He'll be givin' ya' two books 'o donatin' tickets³, said he'd go hisself an' give it to ya." Osman now has completely recovered; now he thinks: And what the heck is he supposed to do with a receipt book for donations to the Committee Assisting the Accused in the Agartola Conspiracy Case? Who is he going to ask donations from?

Anwar calls, "Osman, come with me. Eat, rest for awhile, and then go back to your place."

But Osman wants to go to his own place now. He can get by without the *magur* fish curry for the moment. What he needs the most are two antacid tablets. After that, he'll eat rice or bread, whatever they have at Blind Abul's restaurant, and go home and lay down continuously until evening. Around evening, if Ronju comes by with his notebook and says, "Take a look at my math, would ja?" Well, his body feeling *fresh*, he could work him through his math until night, the two of them with their heads pressed close. But Anwar is adamant, "Let's go. You won't get a rickshaw now, it'll be difficult to walk all the way to Lakshibazar. Let's go."

There's no sunlight in Anwar's house right now, but the heat from the morning sun hasn't been erased entirely. Anwar's table is really disorganized: on one side, kept in a pile, are a stack of *leaflets*; next to them a book, newspaper, assorted papers, ashtray, and an empty packet of cigarettes used as an ashtray. Even a dirty undershirt and a half-eaten orange. But Anwar's bed is neat: a comforter over a thick mattress, a sheet and pillow on top of that; the whole bed is covered with a thick Gultex bedcover. The floor of the room is clean too. It seems like Anwar doesn't let anyone touch the table.

3 These are a means for collecting donations for various kinds of political, religious or social causes, and can sometimes waver between extortion and donation.

Anwar asks, “You wanna take a bath?”

“No. You go ahead.”

“Then go ahead and lie down awhile. It’ll just take me five minutes.”

Thinking of something, Anwar starts rummaging through papers on the table. He says very softly, “I want to show you a letter. One of my relatives, “continuing to rifle through the books and papers he says, “last year when I went home, we got along really well; one of *Abba’s cousin’s husbands* or something, his home is right there in our village; I received a letter from him, very *interesting*.”

“You mean, your *fupha*? What did he write?” It is vital that he look interested. But if right now Osman could just lie down he’d be saved. As he’s looking for the letter, suddenly Anwar remembers, “Ah hah! I gave the letter to my brother to read. These younger brothers, pff, they want socialism by having harmonium parties. That’s why I said, look, out there in the villages, see how *militant* the people have become? Read this and you’ll get it.” Anwar probably went off toward his brother’s room.

Meanwhile, Osman himself took no notice of just when he kicked off his sandals and lay down. After lying down he feels a bit cold. It is such a neat, well-made bed that he feels kind of hesitant to pull up the bedcover and get underneath. In his rooftop room, in the late afternoon when he lies down, sometimes the wind from the cold breath deep inside the thick walls on all four sides comes out and softly blows on his eyes, forehead and the tips of his ears. Then in fact it’s better to get up and go stand outside. Outside, a bullet-riddled body can be seen being lifted into a police vehicle in front of the mosque opposite his building. Without any hesitation, the truck goes out straight down Johnson Road. He can’t seem to find his place to stand. Below, like a snake shedding its skin the police lorry changes its *body*. In place of the lorry, now there is a red vehicle that looks like an enormous box. On its dark blackish-blue glass, one after another bullet strikes and ricochets back. Can’t even a single bullet pierce that glass? They need to keep trying. And who is it shooting the rifle? With the barrel of the rifle resting on the railing of the Azad Cinema’s roof, firing continuously, it is Ronjul Ronju! What madness is Ronju up to! Just a single bullet from the police below could come up and blast his head to smithereens.



চিলেকোঠার সেপাই-এর রচয়িতা আখতারুজ্জামান ইলিয়াস

ইংরেজি অনুবাদক ম্যাথিউ ডি. রিচ

To protect Ronju's head from the bullets, Osman grabs his face and forehead with both hands. Just then he hears, "You sleeping?"

Removing his two hands from his own forehead and face, Osman looks at Anwar.

"This is it, that letter! *Bhabi* took a long time to find it. Read it, yeah? It'll just take me five minutes to take a bath."

Still drowsy from sleep, the tiny Bengali letters like a line of ants at first seem to blur. But as he stares at them, they gradually become clear; then he carries on reading with ease.

"In these parts, the calamity of cattle theft has increased at a terrible rate. There is no way to thwart its progress. A fortnight ago, Nadu Poramanik of Haowrakhali had gone to the station to file a complaint about cattle theft, but the sub-inspector would not accept his deposition. Moreover, the next day on Wednesday night, when Nadu was departing Podumshohor weekly market some one or some ones assaulted him with a goad (a particular kind of prod used for herding cattle and other livestock). Three days later, that is, Saturday at midday, while the former

President of the Union Board and current Member of the 2nd Ward Khoybar Gazi's nephew Afsar Gazi was having a farmer carry his half-maund sack of chili peppers on his head to Mulbari Ghat, they approached the mausoleum of Bhulu Khondokar, and Nadu's son Chengtu made ready to dispatch his dog to attack him. Afsar Gazi fled and took refuge in Bhulu Khondokar's cowshed. Chengtu is going around saying that it was at the direction of Khoybar Gazi that the sub-inspector did not accept their deposition about the theft of their cattle. A foul-tempered man like Khoybar Gazi will not let the matter drop until he gets his revenge. Nadu Poramanik has been working as a seasonal laborer at your family home as his forefathers did before him. Impoverished and low-caste though he may be, the man is truly faithful and honest. But his son is an insolent cur; his arrogance will bring destruction upon his family." As he reads the letter, Osman's drowsiness disappears entirely.

"The moral compass among the people of our area no longer functions, there is basically no sense of honor anymore, you can say. It is gradually becoming toilsome for an educated person to live in the countryside. It has been many days since you came to the village home. If you take the time to come and see and hear everything for yourself, then you will be able to reconcile what the eye sees with what the ear hears. Here, God looks after everyone's wellbeing. Your aunt's condition is as before. The cataract on her left eye is ready to be operated on, she can see practically nothing with that eye. A trip to Dhaka is needed."

A smile tugs at Osman's lips as he reads the final sentence; this guy's gonna swindle some money out of Anwar for his wife's medical treatment. Still, when the sunlight floods midday, it washes over some woman's eyes clouded with cataracts. A dark and tall young farmer, a brick-colored dog by his side, walk along a road--this image is unsettling. Osman too is going to that village along with Anwar; if they keep on like that, hopefully no one will sick a dog on them!