

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



চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের প্রথম সংস্করণের প্রচ্ছদ

Translation
Bangla to English
Rooftop Soldier : Second Chapter
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Translation : Matthew D. Rich

Abstract

The following translation piece is the 2nd Chapter of *Rooftop Soldier (Chilekothar Sepai)* written by Akhtaruzzaman Elias. The body of Taleb shot by the police of autocratic Pakistan Government is at the center of the Chapter. The reaction and sentiments of the protagonist Osman, Haddi Khijir and others towards the dead body exposed in this part of the piece. Police is in hurry to complete after-death sacraments. The dead body became the crucial cause of roaring procession to protest tyrannies. Besides the political context, socio-religious and cultural perspective were depicted in classic style. Indeed the chapter is giving a glimpse of a superior literary piece during pre-liberation era of Bangladesh.

Swarthy, thin, with sunken cheeks, Osman had seen the guy many times. But where? In the stairway of this building? That's it. He had seen him many other places too. Where? At the stadium? Could be. In Gulistan, looking at the cinema posters? Could be. At a meeting on the Paltan Maidan? Could be. At Victoria Park? Near the field at Armanitola? Seated by the side of the road at Thatari Bazar eating shish kebabs? Could be. Standing side-by-side taking a piss at Balaka Cinema? Could be. Late at night in Nobabpur standing next to a pushcart eating *halim*? In Amzadiya arguing at a table nearby? Could be. His face is familiar from way back. There are acne marks on either side of his nose, two of the marks quite deep. Are those from pox? At the end of his closed eyelids thick, black lashes. On the tip of his nose and on his thick lips blackish marks. There's not even a single wrinkle on the part of his small forehead visible under his tousled hair. You can see that the strands of his patchy beard are quite soft. Maybe twenty, twenty-one, no older; the guy was fully in the midst of his youth. He's five, six years his junior, with an utterly average face; maybe that's why he seems so familiar--and *he* gets the honor of dying riddled by bullets! Osman hunches down a bit and looks outside. There is no rain now, the sunlight glints in the freshly washed blue of the sky, but there's no chance he can go out. The inspector says, "Please, all of you sit for awhile in the other room. Within a half-hour I'll let you go."

What does he mean, *let us go*? That means they're being detained? Riazuddin comes into the room, sits in the chair with the busted

armrests, and looks outside. In the other chair is a short man wearing glasses. On the cot are Osman and another guy. That young man with a red-striped, light-pink shirt and pajama pants on is Parvez. He lives

আখতারুজ্জামান ইলিয়াস

চিলেকোঠার সেপাই

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শ্যামবর্ণের রোগা ভাঙা গালওয়ালা এই লোকটিকে ওসমান অনেকবার দেখেছে। কোথায়? এই বাড়ির সিঁড়িতে? তাই হবে। আরো অনেক জায়গায় এর সঙ্গে দ্যাখা হয়েছে। কোথায়? স্টেডিয়ামে? হতে পারে। গুলিস্তানের সামনে সিনেমার পোস্টার দেখতে দেখতে? হতে পারে। পল্টন ময়দানের মিটিঙে? হতে পারে। ভিটোরিয়া পার্কে? আর্ম্যানিটোলা মাঠের ধারে? ঠাট্টারি বাজারের রাস্তার ধারে বসে শিককাবাব খেতে খেতে? হতে পারে। কলাকা সিনেমায় পাশাপাশি দাঁড়িয়ে পেছাব করতে করতে? হতে পারে। নবাবপুরে অনেক রাত্রে ঠেলাগাড়ির পাশে দাঁড়িয়ে হালিম খেতে খেতে? আমজাদিয়ায় পাশের টেবিলে তর্ক করতে করতে? হতে পারে। মুখটা তার অনেকদিনের চেনা। নাকের ২পাশে ব্রণের দাগ, ২টো দাগ বেশ গভীর, এগুলো কি বসন্তের? বন্ধ-করা চোখের পাতার গ্রান্তে বড়ো ঘন কালো পল্লব। নাকের ডগায় ও পাতলা ঠোঁটে কালচে ছাপ। এলোমেলো চুলের এদিকে ছোটো কপালে ১টি জঁজও নাই। খোঁচা খোঁচা দাড়ি দেখলে বোঝা যায় এগুলো বেশ নরম। বয়স বোধ হয় ২০/২১-এর বেশি নয়, লোকটার পূর্ণ যৌবনকাল চলছিলো। তার চেয়ে ৫/৬ বছর ছোটো, একেবারে গড়পরতা চেহারা বলেই হয়তো এতো চেনা চেনা ঠেকে,—আর সে কিনা গুলিবদ্ধ হয়ে মরার মর্যাদা পায়। ওসমান একটু কঁকড়ে বাইরে তাকায়। বাইরে বৃষ্টি নাই, বৃষ্টিধোয়া আকাশে রোদ গুরুগুরু করে। অথচ তার বাইরে যাবার উপায় নাই। দারোগা বলে, 'আপনেনা ঐ ঘরে একটু বসেন। আধখন্টার ভেতর আপনাদের ছেড়ে দেবো।'

ছেড়ে দেবে মানে? তারা কি তবে বন্দি? পাশের ঘরে এসে রিয়াজউদ্দিন হাতলভাঙা চেয়ারে বসে বাইরের দিকে তাকায়। অন্য চেয়ারটিতে চশমা পরা একজন বেঁটে লোক। তক্তপোষে ওসমান এবং আরেকজন। লাল স্ট্রাইপের হাফা গোলপি শার্ট ও পাজামা পরা এই দু'বক হলো পারভেজ, তিনতলার তানদিকে থাকে, মুখের গঠন ও বাঙলা বলার সময়

চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের প্রথম সংস্করণের দ্বিতীয় অধ্যায়ের প্রথম পৃষ্ঠা

on the third floor on the right-hand side. From his facial structure and from the particularly attentive way he speaks Bengali you can tell it is not his mother tongue. (In an educated Bengali sounding half like Urdu), “Riazuddin-*sabeb*, after *jumma*, near Victoria Park, you know what I saw? Seated in a horse cart, they were announcing the strike, Taleb was listening with *babut* concentration. He saw me and what he said you know? Parvez-*bhai*, Maulana Bhasani has called a strike. Will the offices-and-what-who be open tomorrow?”

“What is all this they’ve started? Daily *bartals*, daily strikes!” Even before Riazuddin could finish his brief comment, Parvez said, “Just yesterday, I’m on my way to a shop, and I see Taleb, sitting in Ali Nawaz’s saloon reading *Film Fair*. So, you know what he said? ‘Where you going? Isn’t today the strike?’”

“The strike ‘as *saksesful*. Except for a few *dalaks*¹, all of ‘em offices was shuttered yesterday.” This time Alauddin comes into the room, sits on the cot, and aims a little barb at Riazuddin, “No one’s gonna put a break on the *publik* now.”

Parvez says (respectfully), “That’s right.” (In his peculiar mix of English and Urdu-Bengali), “Last night, my brother, you know what did he say? There was gunfire in Neelkhet, my *sistar’s buzband* came in and said, ‘An employee at the Hatirpul Power Station, he has gone and *death* you know’. I could not *imajin* that was our Taleb...” His voice got husky with emotion during the last part of the statement. Then about a minute of silence; not even a pebble broke the surface of that silence, neither the hushed conversation between the inspector and Rahamatulla, nor the weeping of the women. Riazuddin calls out suddenly in his gravelly voice, “O *Allah, Allahu goni!*” The manner of his call is such that you might think Allah—who’s being addressed—is waiting out on the verandah, or in the next room for his command, and after another call, he’ll tuck his *biri* behind his ear and come running into the room. But it’s Skin-n-Bones Khijir who comes in; this guy is simply unable to talk in a quiet voice, “Yesterday, no less ‘n seven,

1 The “brokers”, the ones who support the Pakistani government.

eight is died I s'pose!" His words resound throughout the entire room. The short guy with glasses says, "Who are the ones dying? Whether it's the marches, the meetings, I've been seeing it since British times. Who're the ones dying?" He looks at everyone with questioning eyes, then gives the answer himself, "It's the gentle, the good ones who die. Yeah, the leaders, they never get shot and killed. The ones that have to die are..."

"Taleb, poor guy, he was such a *simpal*-type. I've known him for four years."

"Pff! I've known that boy since 'e 'as running 'bout naked." Riazuddin's gravelly voice gets downright smooth as his confidence grows, "In Islampur I've a small fabric store. Right next to my shop's a gully, Pannu Sardar Lane, four down on the gully, no... one, two, three houses down, after that, Matihaji's house--he used to stay in a rental on the second floor 'o that house. How often Taleb's ol' man used to come to my store!" He knew Taleb longer, even more so his father, than Parvez did; now that he had announced that fact to everyone, Riazuddin sits back and rests contentedly. The new tenant, the short guy with glasses, by this point he is barely even acquainted with anyone; therefore, for him it is impossible to join this competition over who has the greatest familiarity with Taleb. He takes a different slant this time on his opinion about the *bartaks* and the processions, "Nothing but *bartaks*, nothing but processions. Shops closed, offices closed, how is the country going to develop?"

"Yeah, yeah, we got it." Alauddin replies in an animated voice as he settles in well on the cot, "To strike is man's *civil right*. An' then when they do strike, they gotta eat bullets in the street, is that it? In what other country you seen an *aktion* so savage as that!" Lowing his voice a bit, "Their *aktivities* is one alone: oppress people how-so-ever you're able!"

"And if the people become *rowdy*...?"

Practically shouting the guy with glasses down, Alauddin says,

“What kinda nonsense is you talking? Don’t you see how’s they got us all stuck here, how they done planned it? How long? Is the students gonna let this go? They’s shootin’ an’ killin’ people. Students ain’t gonna show up?”

“How they’s s’posed to come?” Everybody shifts uncomfortably hearing Khijir’s deafening voice, but his sentence continues unhindered, “How’s they gonna come? Police in the house, police on the road. Go on, look ‘round, police even on the roof! If’n the students could come, they’d put the screws to ‘em sons-a-bitches though!”

Parvez says, “Wherever there are police there’s *babut* ballyhoo!”

“What is you got to worry about? Sons-o-bitches, it’s us Bengalis they’s can’t stand!” Parvez cringes a little at Alauddin’s objection. Osman starts to get angry with the police. He feels like going to the verandah and calling down to the people in the street, “The body of Taleb, who was killed by police gunfire during yesterday’s *bartal* is here. Come everyone. The body of the martyr Taleb killed by the gunfire of this authoritarian government is...’ That wish remains in his mind. Rahamatulla comes into the room and raises his hand as though he’s about to slap Khijir, “*Tur*² shut up! What d’ you know anyway?” Skin-n-Bones Khijir clams right up. He’s very tall, that’s for sure; without a stool to stand on, it would be impossible for the landlord to smack him. Osman can’t stand listening to the landlord and the racket he’s making. The *paya* at Islamiya is probably all gone by now; over that way, the *paya* at Central Hotel is good. Even if he leaves right now though it’s not sure there’ll be any *paya* left by the time he gets there. Oh well. How nice would it be to gulp down some *paratha*-with-liver and then go over to Amzadiya to have a nice *adda*³ though. There was shooting yesterday; Nobabpur, Gulistan, Stadium--those areas are all abuzz today for sure. This Sunday morning died right there on the ground at the hands of the police.

2 The most intimate of the three second person pronouns, here, the language of command.

3 Long, aimless chit-chat with friends.

Suddenly two 18 to 19 year-old young men enter the room. Osman has met one of the two before. His name is Shahadot Hosen Jhontu. He studies economics at the university. It seems apparent from Shahadot Hosen Jhontu and his companion's agitated manner that they are not going to let the matter go easily. Now that they've come, either by avoiding the police altogether or by convincing them somehow, they're not going to let it go until they've shaken the bastards up a bit. Osman feels invigorated. But if there's a problem, what if it comes back on him too?

"Oh, now's the time for ya'll to come?" Alauddin points to the next room as he says it.

"Meeting at Bottola.⁴ The meeting's going on here." Saying this, Shahadot Hosen Jhontu and his companion lift the curtain and go inside. Neither of them notices Osman. Letting the expression he had prepared especially for them slacken on his face, Osman awaits what will come next with anticipation. Out of fear, or devotion, or simply following the rules of custom, Riazuddin calls out loudly, "*Allab! Allabu Gon!*" This cluster of sounds drifts out the door and disappears. Everyone in the room is now looking outside. The sound of Riazuddin's deep and gravelly voice shakes the waiting people, the police, and also the river, the Palmyra tree, the sun, and those brash birds all drawn on the canvas partition, then it flees into the emptiness. Out there the sun's rays glint and flash. One of the student leaders in the next room is saying, "After the funeral service at Bayatul Mukarram⁵ will be the burial."

In response, Rahamtulla's voice is calm and collected, "Come now, my boys. Whatcha' gettin' worked up 'bout? It's all *komplete*, the washin' an' all. They's sent word already to the graveyard, the digging is started. The funeral's gonna be o'r there. What're ya doing bringin' *politiks* into it now?"

"Where do you see *politiks*? We've *already* announced it: after

4 Place-name, literally "at the foot of the banyan."

5 The national mosque in Dhaka.

the *jobor* prayer the funeral will be at Bayatul Mukarram, after the funeral, the body will be buried at the Azimpur graveyard.” All of what Shahadot said was well put. The police officer’s voice too is quite calm, “Why are you being childish about this? You all are *educated* people, students of the *highest educational institute*. You don’t know how to honor the deceased? If you cause a disturbance in front of a dead body, they will suffer more even than they do at the *Gor Azob*.⁶

Inside the room, Alauddin shakes with agitated excitement, “Look at ‘em, will ya? The officer-*sabeb* givin’ fatwa-s an’ all, seems he’s a *moulvi*⁷ now!”

In the other room, the landlord suddenly says, “Let’s go, let’s git outta here. Let’s give the poor boy a spell o’ peace and comfort, eh?” In order to give the deceased Taleb some relief, he brings everyone with him as he leaves the room.

This time, Shahadot Hosen Jhontu sees Osman. But he is too busy talking with the police officer. The officer, no matter what, won’t hand over the body to them, “I can’t give you the *dead body*, brother. If there’s no *ordar*, what can we do?”

Looking around, his eyes fix on the landlord, “We’ve come to *help* at the *request* of the deceased’s *guardian*.”

Suddenly the landlord lowers his voice a little, “We want to bury my nephew’s body before *jobor*.”⁸

“You are his *chacha*⁹?” This time Shahadot attempts to explain to Rahamatulla, “Then you’ll understand. After prayers at Bayatul Mokarram, imagine how many people will pray for him at his funeral. The body of a martyr will be buried without informing anyone? Is that really the way you want it?”

“Don’t be tormentin’ us no more, ya hear?” Rahamatulla’s eyes are moist, “We’s facing *babut* misery. Ain’t you seen where his old

6 Final Judgment

7 One trained in *‘ilm*, or religious knowledge.

8 The noon prayer.

9 Father’s brother

man's at? An' his boy dies catchin' a bullet!" His voice thickens from the salty tears in his throat, "His old man's gettin' old. His entire *zindegi*¹⁰ 'as spent slavin' for 'nother, now, he'll come back from Tangail an' see..." At this point, he breaks into tears. Rahamatulla's crying spurs on the reserved weeping coming from the women inside the other room; they find the confidence now to begin weeping loudly. Thinking of Taleb's father arriving and what he might see here makes Osman feel like breaking into tears himself. But before that salty mist can form in his eyes, Alauddin says in a cold voice absent any hint of tears, "His ol' man is coming today only. You's not even thinkin' to show 'is body to his ol' man, is that it?"

"What kind o' talk is that?" Rahamatulla is annoyed with his *bhagina*¹¹; from that, whatever trace of grief there was in his voice disappears, "His father went to Tangail. He's gotta buy fabric for 'is boss, isn't it? Bazitpur, Bolla, Kalihati, Porabari--four or five markets he'll hit, take in what 'tis he needs, put it all in sacks he will, then toss the lot on 'em *terucks*. Not less than two to four days, I reckon. What, the body's to do, just sit there, is it?"

The companion, the boy with Shahadot, practically begs, "We're not asking for two or three days. *Johor* prayer will be in the next two, two-and-a-half hours, the funeral will be after that. How long is that? So many people will be waiting."

The landlord's voice again rises, his arm now firm, "If 'is ol' man 'as here you's all could ask him. And his ma, what'cha think she might say? How can I let's ya'll take the body just so you's can march wit' it?"

Osman Goni at this point is trying to look inside. If he could just call Ronju over and talk to him for a minute, wouldn't that do it? The ones who killed his brother, won't the responsibility for burying him be on their shoulders? But where is Ronju? Amidst all the weeping inside, it's hard to make out Ronju's voice from all the rest. Uff, the poor guy, his eyes must be so red now from crying for his brother.

10 Life

11 Sister's son.

With his red eyes and his bluish lips, can't Ronju come out just for a minute? Elephant Road is such a long way from here! If he goes that way, when he passes the Hatirpul Power Station he'll think of his brother, then Ronju's going to feel bad. 10 or 11 years ago Osman stayed for awhile on Central Road. Old Elephant Road then was empty, just a house or two here and there were only just beginning to be built. Most of the area on the two sides of the street were lowland, paddy fields; sometimes the jet-black water buffaloes would sit sunken up to their mouths in the water. In the evening, when he would come back alone from New Market, Osman used to see a single red light glowing steadily like a planet above the power station's chimney. Walking along those abandoned streets looking at that light Ronju used to feel sad. His brother Taleb used to work there; he was shot in Neelkhet for no other crime than coming out from there to join the march--not a sign, not a word of anything more. Thinking of Ronju's sadness, Osman gets goose bumps over his whole body and head. The argument between the two sides over the dead youth's body streams past his ears like light; he can't hear a thing.

Shahadot Hosen Jhontu asks him (respectfully), "Do you stay here?" Osman returns from watching Ronju--grief-stricken about his brother--moving along Elephant Road 10 or 11 years ago, and then says, "Yes." Shahadot then says, "At three o'clock there will be a protest, you should come. I have to go now."

"We'll see." "I'm going to the graveyard. I'll come a little later."

"Ya'll go on now, I'm sending news along to Jurain, the funeral'll be at the graveyard; people's gonna come from Postgola, Faridabad, Milbarrack." All of this that Alauddin said doesn't make it to the officer's or Rahamatulla's ears, he's practically whispering. But it doesn't seem like Shahadot understood him clearly either. When Shahadot left with his companion, the officer says, "Now we have to make arrangements to get the body out of here." Alauddin and Skin-n-Bones Khijir go inside right behind Rahamatulla. The officer lights up his cigarette and places one foot on the door jam separating

১২৯২ ভাবনগর, জুন ২০১৯



শিকাগো আর্ট ইন্সটিটিউটের একটি থিয়েটার হলের সামনে চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের
অনুবাদক ম্যাথিউ ডি রিচ্ (মাঝখানে) তার সন্তান জোহ্না ও আদিল-এর সঙ্গে



চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের রচয়িতা আখতারুজ্জামান ইলিয়াস

the verandah from the room and says, “There’s no need for you all to go along with the dead body. You’ve worked very hard, go on home and rest now.” Basking in his success at handling the two students, the officer takes a long drag on his cigarette, and these words come streaming out along with the smoke from his mouth, “I couldn’t sleep the entire night. This body went to the hospital before the *asor*¹² prayer. By midnight, the postmortem still wasn’t *complete*. Why? No doctor. Then you got the *Dom*,¹³ you got the doctor, but there’s no electricity. Then you got the DIG¹⁴ over and over sending news that if we don’t get the *dead body* out of the hospital by dawn the students will get their *chance*. Riazuddin nods his *kisti tupi*-covered head in support of the officer. Even though the officer has finished speaking, his head keeps nodding. Then he starts up wagging the tongue, “Work? Where’s you gonna find ‘em working? I’s tell ya’ll sumpin’ ‘bout them doctors. Few days back, doctors ‘as striking wasn’t they? Ya’ll hear ‘bout that? Ya’ll ever heard such a thing, a country where the doctors is the ones doin’ the striking!”

“Please, enough about them.” The officer attempts to complete his unfinished speech, “My SP-saheb says, ‘Remove the body from the hospital! Remove it! By morning, the doctors will *inform* the students.’” The short one with the glasses gives his reply, “They play *politiks* with the body, they don’t know how to honor the deceased. Tell me, what are you going to do with people like that?”

The officer might have had more to say, but they were all forced into silence by a fresh spell of weeping that burst forth like a loud reprimand.

Rahamatulla, Riazuddin, Alauddin and Osman take the bier with the body up onto their shoulders.

“Move t’ the side. Move t’ the side!” At the landlord’s direction,

12 The afternoon prayer.

13 A member of an untouchable Hindu caste customarily tasked with handling corpses.

14 Director Inspector General

the sound of the collected wailing fills the entire house, spilling out into the streets.

“Where’re you going? Oh my lovely boy, my dear one! What is this? What’re you all playing at with my boy?” From the wailing of the boy’s mother, the bier seemed to grow heavier. Skin-n-Bones Khijir, as he walks in front, gives these orders, “Slowly”, “to the right”, “a little to the left now”, and so on. Standing right up close to Osman is Parvez. He had really wanted a chance to carry Taleb’s body, at least a little. He’s looking over at Alauddin out of the corner of his eye. As he says ‘*ashhabadu Allah ilaha illalahu*’¹⁵, Rahamatulla shifts part of the bier onto Khijir’s shoulder. Behind the bier are two policemen. One of the police takes part of the bier from Osman and shifts it up on his own shoulder. Osman is now last. No, behind him is Ronju; Parvez rests his hand on Ronju’s shoulder. When they reach the darkened turn on the stairs he loses sight of Parvez. Ronju is fidgeting with both of his hands. Why? In front of the lemon tree at Chaigada, is Ronju tearing up the lemon leaves? The bier is lowered. Becoming terribly agitated, Osman stands caught in that blurred and uncertain position between his dream at dawn and the scene he woke to in the morning. It’s difficult to say; in such a state, he might even have fallen to the ground, but before that, “A *shabeed*’s blood--do not waste, do not waste”--this cluster of sounds stands him up straight again on his feet.

17 or 18 youths and about 25 to 30 younger scamps are standing shouting slogans. Out in front is that companion of Shahadat Hosen Jhontu’s. There is a clever glint in the officer’s eye; the bier is quickly slipped into the waiting police van. One by one, Rahamatulla, Riazuddin, and Ronju get into the van. Alauddin is saying something to the youths; the officer, with an air of special deference, places his hand on his back and says, “Please, you come along with me, it’ll be crowded in there.” He pushes him into the jeep, practically shoving him in. Parvez squats to blow his nose. Osman is thinking to himself,

15 The beginning of the Muslim testament of faith, “I testify that there is not god but God...”

‘Should I get in or not? If I do, then in which vehicle, and from which side?’ Meanwhile, “A *shabeed*’s blood--do not waste, do not waste”, “Ayub’s rule, a tyrant’s rule--tear it down, tear it down”--propelled by these slogans, the police van and jeep take a left turn and race up Hemendra Das Road toward the iron bridge. Skin-n-Bones Khijir jumps in, lurching along with the van’s movement.