

অনুবাদ
বাংলা থেকে ইংরেজি
চিলেকোঠার সৈপাই : প্রথম অধ্যায়
আখতারুজ্জামান ইলিয়াস
অনুবাদ : ম্যাথিউ ডি রিচ



চিলেকোঠার সৈপাই উপন্যাসের প্রথম সংস্করণের প্রচ্ছদ

Translation
Bangla to English
Rooftop Soldier : First Chapter
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Abstract

Osman living in a rooftop room dreams of his father's death but finds himself in a distorted fact no less horrible. All he witnesses sometime seem hallucination sometime real. It's a time when receiving news of someone's being shot dead appear normal to Osman. The environs reflect situation of mass suffocation pressed under hideous images of late sixties Bangladesh, the then East Pakistan. Osman's personal life reveals as abnormal, so does the public life. Even lamenting upon a dear one's odd death is as if restricted. "It's risky to answer" of any normal query! The first chapter of Elias' *Rooftop Soldier* engulfs the readers with inner happenings of atypical socio-political state of pre-liberation Bengali life depicted with the unique language and style. The following translated piece from one of the best classic fiction of Bangla literature will surely be an astounding experience for world's literature lovers.

“Where’s your Ronju now, stranded in some foreign land? Ya didn’t even get a last look at ‘em, did ya!”

Standing at the edge of the well, Osman tears up the lemon leaves one after another and listens to his mother’s lament. He moves toward the courtyard, gently crushing a leaf with three of his fingers, when somebody suddenly takes notice of him, “Hey you. Let Ronju in to get a shoulder on this!”

Who was that?

The same guy goes on in a tone of regret, “Oh no. Doesn’t matter how many, he’s the first, the eldest son! Where’s he got himself to now? Didn’t get a chance to toss even a drop of water on his old man’s face! Oh God. Even being his old man he didn’t get that handful of earth tossed on his body by the hand of his own son, a pity it is!”

They’re talking right in front of Osman. Nobody even notices the mistake. He puts his shoulder to the bier with his father’s dead body on it, and moves on towards Poshchim Para¹ with the others. In Poshchim Para is the *jumar ghar*², behind that Jorashimultola³ where the Qazis are, and beyond that is the graveyard situated on a bumpy patch of ground overrun by dense bushes and thorny date trees. When the rosewater is sprinkled on the passing members of the funeral procession, it’s like dew plops down one drip at a time from the red silk cotton tree. When a few drops fall on Osman’s legs he wakes. The sheet covering him is pretty wet now; the rain is coming in through the window on that side in thin sheets.

1 Place-name meaning “neighborhood to the west.”

2 A mosque in rural areas large enough for communal prayers.

3 Place-name meaning “at the base of the joined (pair of) red silk cotton trees.”

আখতারুজ্জামান ইলিয়াস চিলেকোঠার সেপাই

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‘তোমার রক্ত পড়ি রইলো কোন বিদেশে বিড়িয়ে, একবার চোখের দ্যাখাটাও দেখতি পাল্লে না গো!’

কুয়োতলায় দাঁড়িয়ে ওসমান একটার পর একটা লেবুপাতা ছেঁড়ে আর মায়ের বিলাপ শোনে। ওটে আঙুলে লেবুপাতা চটকাতে চটকাতে উঠানের দিকে এগিয়ে গেলে কে যেন তাকে দেখে ফেলে, ‘ওরে! রক্তকে এঁটু কাঁধ দিতি দে!’ লোকটা কে? সেই লোকটাই ফের আফসোস করে, ‘আহা হাজার হলেও বড়ো ছেলে, জ্যেষ্ঠ সন্তান! কুথায় পড়ি রইলো সে, বাপের মুখি এক ফোঁটা পানি দিতি পাল্লে না! আহারে, বাপ হয়ে ছেলের হাতের এক মুঠি মাটি পেলে না গো!’

ওসমানের সামনেই কথাবার্তা চলে। ভুলটা কারো চোখে পড়ে না। বাপের লাশ-বিছানো ষাটিয়ার একদিকে কাঁধ দিয়ে সে-ও পশ্চিমপাড়ার দিকে চলে। পশ্চিমপাড়ায় জুমার ঘর, জুমার ঘরের পেছনে কাজীদের জোড়শিমুলতলা, তারপর ছোটো ছোটো ঝোপঝাড় ও খেজুর কাঁটায় ভরা উঁচুনিচু গোরস্থান। গোলাপপাশ থেকে শবযাত্রীদের ওপর গোলাপজল ছিটিয়ে দিলে মনে হয় শিমুলগাছ থেকে টুপটাপ শিশির ঝরে পড়ছে। ওসমানের পায়ে কয়েক ফোঁটা পড়লে তার ঘুম ভেঙে যায়। পায়ের ওপর চাদর অনেকটা ভিজে গেছে, ওদিকের জানলা দিয়ে বৃষ্টির ছাঁট আসছে।

ওসমানকে উঠে বসতে হলো। শিকের ফাঁকে থুথু ফেলে জানলাটা বন্ধ করে ফের শুয়ে পড়লো। কিন্তু পাশের জানলা খোলাই রইলো। ঐ জানলা দিয়ে পানির ছাঁট এসে পড়ছে চেয়ারে। চেয়ারে কিংস্টোর্কের প্যাকেট, দেশলাই, চাবি ও কয়েকদিন আগেকার ‘পাকিস্তান অবজার্ভার’। প্রথম পৃষ্ঠায় ৪ কলাম জুড়ে এই বছরের বিশ্বসুন্দরীর ছবি। রাতে ব্যবহার করবে বলে আনোয়ারের বাড়ি থেকে কাল দুপুরবেলা নিয়ে এসেছে। শালার শওকত ডাইয়ের পান্ডায় পড়ে রাতে বাঙলার মাত্রাটা বেশি হয়ে গিয়েছিলো, এসে কখন যে প্যান্টট্যান্টসুদ্ধ শুয়ে পড়েছে খেয়াল নাই। সিসিলিরূপসীর পুরুট্ট উরুতে শীতল বৃষ্টিপাত ঘটছে। ঐটা সামনে রেখে কবলের নিচে নিজের উরুসন্ধি থেকে দিবা ঘন প্রস্রবণ বইয়ে দেওয়া চলে। কিন্তু হয় না। প্যান্টের বোতাম খুলতে খুলতে বোকা যায় যে, বাপের লাশের স্পর্শে তার সারা শরীর একদম ঠাণ্ডা মেরে গেছে। ভোরবেলার স্বপ্ন নাকি ঠিক ঠিক ফলে, বাপ তার সত্যি সত্যি মরে গেলো কিনা কে জানে? একটু আগে দ্যাখ্যা স্বপ্ন, সহজে কি

চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের প্রথম সংস্করণের প্রথম অধ্যায়ের প্রথম পৃষ্ঠা

Osman has to sit up. He spits through the metal grill on the window and closes it, then lays back down again. But the window to the side is still open. The sheets of rain coming through the window fall on the chair. On it there's a packet of Kingstorks, matches, keys, and a *Pakistan Observer* from a couple days ago. On the front page, spread across four columns, is a picture of this year's Miss Universe. He brought it from Anwar's house yesterday around noon figuring he'd use it tonight. Bastard Shawkot with his booze; things got a little out of hand. He couldn't remember when he got back and fell asleep, clothes still on. A cool rain falls on the Sicilian beauty's plump thighs. Setting it in front of him, he tries to get a thick flow going from his groin. Nope, not happening. While unbuttoning his pants he can tell that a chill has settled over his whole body from the touch of his father's corpse. They say that an early morning dream really does come true. Did his father truly die? Who knows? A dream that recent doesn't easily loosen its grip; it sticks like sweat on a winter day. But if you see one of your own die in a dream, it means someone else will die. Pfah! I'm sure Dad's alright. As soon as he's sure his father's alive, Osman gets angry with him. He came to Pakistan in the first place planning to live here. Then why go back? He didn't make a home or anything. Worked here for six years, then, when he went back to his own country on vacation, he never even considered coming back here again. If you don't stay in the village, how you gonna be a big man?

Before his anger with his dad could really settle in, a loud knock on the door startles Osman, throwing him into a nervous jitter. He leaps down from the bed. Is that Dad? Has he come? He knocks the picture of Miss Universe onto the floor as he struggles to pull on his pants. He looks this way and that, then calls out, "Who is it?" as he unlatches the door. You idiot! How the heck is Dad gonna come here? It's no simple matter to get here from India.

Just outside the door is the steep, disheveled staircase leading down. Standing on the top stair is a fourteen or fifteen year-old boy. The light coming in through Osman's open window falls on the upper part of the boy's body. He's wearing a blue, short-sleeved Hawaii shirt. There are two pockets with flaps; the right one has the top of a pagoda on it in thick embroidery the color of umber.

Keeping his eyes fixed on the door jam the boy says (using formal address), "Please come downstairs."

Osman looks directly into the boy's face, "What's the matter?"

In a low voice the boy answers, "We live on the second floor."

"What's that got to do with me?" Osman smiles a bit.

The boy doesn't smile, doesn't get annoyed either. Laying his hand on the railing beside him he mumbles, "Just please come. My brother's died." He pauses for a moment, then suddenly says with peculiar force, "He was shot and killed by the police yesterday."

Where did the bullet hit him? Without asking this question, Osman quickly lowers his head a bit, then again almost immediately brings himself to his full height and asks, "Where?"

"Please come to our place. The landlord told me to call everyone."

"Let's go."

After following closely behind the boy, a few stairs down, Osman suddenly stops. The light from the window in his room, after first combing its way through the boy's unkempt hair, now rolls down the back of his neck. Hearing Osman's footsteps cease, the boy turns around and looks back. Now the light is all the way to his chin. The thin red lines in his eyes quiver restlessly. Turned towards Osman standing seven or eight steps above him, the boy's eyes, red from the falling light, seem much larger.

Osman says, "You go ahead. I'll be there in a minute."

The boy stands for a moment; the light is now on the back of his neck, on the collar of his shirt. Then, without looking back this time, he goes down. Osman had thought he might get another look at the boy's sad eyes.

Putting quite a bit of paste on his toothbrush, Osman goes over and takes a piss in the corner of the rooftop as he brushes his teeth. He comes back inside, pours some water from the jug into his glass and takes it back out to another side of the rooftop to wash his face. He has to wash out his mouth slowly and carefully; otherwise, if he gurgles too quickly there's a chance he'll gag. Osman takes care of washing his face

and urinating right there on the rooftop. He doesn't have the landlord's permission for any of it. To bathe though, he has to go downstairs. On the ground floor is the landlord's *Gowsol Azom Shoe Factory*. There are ten or so workers in the factory. The three bathroom stalls set up in a row are occupied by them pretty much all the time. To one side of the dank courtyard there is an enormous cistern for bathing. That is called the *hauz*.⁴ But just glancing in that direction makes him shiver; for the most part, he just doesn't bathe.

Goni's been in this place for about two-and-a-half years. The building is *hopeless*! There's no open space in front of it; it's just built right next to the drain. There's a wide door right off the street. The door's a little low. Those who live in the building, even the short ones, have to lower their heads a bit to enter. People going up take one step to reach the stairs on the left, and the employees, or workers, of the Gowsol Azom Shoe Factory pass through a narrow passage and cross the dank courtyard. If this one door right off the street is closed, it's impossible to enter this enormous, misshapen building. On the second and third-floor verandahs there are iron railings at belly height for a Bengali. The rooms are small, but they are made smaller yet by the hardboard, wood, and bamboo partitions that were put in to increase the number of rooms. The main walls of the rooms are thick, the braces heavy. It seems when the building was constructed there was an intense desire at work to protect themselves from some enemy. Who was that enemy? And if there wasn't an enemy then what's the point of building something that's not-a-fort and not-a-house. Well, whoever knew, whichever Shah or Bosak or moneylender sold it to Rahamatulla, he went back to India in 1950. With the help of a colleague from his old office, Osman found this flat pretty much at the same time that he got work at EPIDC.⁵

By "flat" I mean a room on the roof. It's the only room on the roof--no kitchen, no bathroom. If you want to use the bathroom or bathe you have to wait in line on the ground floor. But in Osman's room there's plenty of light and air. Two doors--one at the top of the stairs, another opening out to the roof. The roof is quite big, with

4 An Arabic word for "cistern."

5 East Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation

railings on all four sides, the one in the front a little higher. From one side there's a wonderful view of the street. Directly across, on the other side of the street, there's a two-story house, quite large and similarly misshapen. Adjoining the house there's a mosque; a signboard on its verandah has the name Haq-e-Noor Maktab written in Bengali and Arabic scripts. Osman sometimes likes to stand out on the roof. After a while, standing amidst all the clustered buildings, the roof feels terribly vacant beneath his feet, then he quickly shoots back inside his room. Today though he didn't have to wait for the vacant feeling. A police jeep waits in the street below.

It was obvious from the rising and falling tones of the women's mournful droning that he could hear as he descended, someone from this apartment had died. Not the way there would be inconsolable wailing at a home where someone has died, there is none of that. The sound of crying is coming out from the subdued bustle inside; Osman accompanies that sound as he descends. There is another pick-up truck behind the jeep, it too is police. There are seven or eight people with Rahamatulla crossing the street from the other side. Four of them are police. There's a black *jinnab* cap on the landlord's head. Last time when the governor came to inaugurate the opening of a community center there, Rahamatulla got the cap as a gift for being one of the neighborhood's finest *original democrats*. But what he wears all the time is a white *kisti* cap. Only if he needs to display his influence, then he uses the *jinnab* cap like it's his crown.

No, it's not because of the cap, just looking at the landlord causes a smile to tug at Osman Goni's lips. In reply, scrunching his face into a grave scowl, the landlord says, "You were on your way to my house? Come on then, let's go up."

Rahamatulla's supposition was not correct. Osman was going in the direction of the Islamiya Restaurant. It started raining suddenly in the early hours of the morning, the cold's really settled in now, *paya* with *nan* bread would make this Sunday morning just perfect! About face. He turns to follow the landlord, asking as he walks, "What's going on? How did it happen?"

"Where were you? The neighbor below you catches a bullet and dies, and you don't even know about it?" Osman walks along with him in silence. It's risky to give an answer; if he asks something, his ignorance will be even more glaring. Rahamatulla keeps on talking alone, "If I didn't spend the whole night back and forth, station to hospital, hospital to station, you think I would've gotten the dead body?" Arriving at the base of the stairs, seeing the police inspector, he says, "If it wasn't for Inspector Samad here, the body'd still be out there somewhere!"

On the second and third floor are people, standing on their narrow verandahs clutching the railing, watching.

Reaching the second floor, everyone waited out front of the door next to the verandah on the right-hand side. The two doors for the two apartments are side-by-side. The two rooms and the verandah out front were authorized for use by a single family who occupied that flat. Moving alongside the verandah you reach a partition made of hardboard. From there begins another family's space. Once again, two doors side-by-side, after the second door an identical partition, except made of canvas. The door beside the canvas is closed. On the khaki-colored canvas there is a landscape sketched in white chalk. A slender river, a palmyra tree stands tall at its bank, the sun above its head. Sunrise, sunset, it could be a picture of either. Quite a distance above the sun are a flock of five or six brash birds. Above the impetuous birds, and below the river, some marks made by lime and ink, and a few English and Bengali letters. A name, written in clear and unbroken English script, pricks at something in him, piercing his mind; the name and the prickly sense cause something in him to take flight; his hair stands up straight, just a little, and he reads, "Ranju." That's Osman's own nickname! An indistinct surge of emotion wells up and catches in his throat. But not for long though. Now a new difficulty begins to claw at his head: the same person who wrote his own name so prominently at the front of his house is the one who was killed by the police!

The landlord calls out, "Ranju." This call causes a ghostly echo to rise up in Osman's chest. The same boy from this morning comes out from the doorway. The tiny red lines in his eyes have all merged. The tip of his nose is moist and runny, his lips dry, the color of eggplant. Then

একাকার হয়ে গেছে। নাকের ডগা তার ভিজে ভিজে এবং ঠোটজোড়া শুকনা ও বেগুনী। তাহলে রঞ্জু ও নিহত ব্যক্তি এক নয়, নিহত ব্যক্তির ছোট ভাই হলো রঞ্জু এবং রঞ্জু এখনো জীবিত—এটা বুঝতে পেরে ওসমান আরাম পায়। এখন রঞ্জুর ভালো নাম জানতে ইচ্ছা করে। ও কোন কুলে কোন ক্লাসে পড়ে? কি খেলতে ভালোবাসে? কিন্তু এখন এসব জানবার উপায় নাই। তাই সে সোজা ঘরের ভেতর দেখতে শুরু করলো।

ঘরে কি?—দেওয়াল ঘেঁষে দাঁড়িয়ে রয়েছে ২জন পুলিশ। দারোগাকে দেখে তারা হাত তুলে স্যালুট করে। বড্ডো আঁটোসাঁটো ঘর, স্যালুট করতে গিয়ে ১জনের হাতের কনুই দেওয়ালের সঙ্গে ধাক্কা খায়, বেচারার স্যালুটরত হাতের পাতা একটু একটু কাঁপে। ঘরে আর কি?—তক্তপোষ এলোমেলো বিছানা। ২জন লোক সেখানে বসে ছিলো। এবার উঠে দাঁড়ালো। এদের ১জন, বয়স ৫০ এর ওপর, ৫৫ বোধ হয় হয়নি, তার পরনে সবুজ চেক লুঙ্গি, তার খয়েরি এস্তির চাদরের নিচে কোথাও কোথাও সাদা পাঞ্জাবির আভাস। এক পা তুলে ফের মেঝেতে রেখে সে বলে, ‘স্বামালেকুম। ওসি সায়েব ভালো আছেন?’

দারোগার মুখ থেকে বিড়বিড় ধ্বনি যা বেরোয় তা থেকে নানা ধরনের বাক্য গঠিত হতে পারে, যেমন, ‘আর ভাই থাকা!’ অথবা ‘আমাদের আবার ভালো!’ অথবা ‘আল্লা রেখেছে ভাই!’

রহমতউল্লা লোকটিকে জিগ্যেস করে, ‘রিয়াজউদ্দিন সায়েব, সব হইছে?’ রিয়াজউদ্দিনের জবাবের জন্যে কিছুমাত্র অপেক্ষা না করে রঞ্জুর ডান হাত ধরে রহমতউল্লা ভেতরের ঘরে ঢোকে। মিনিট পাঁচেকের মধ্যে এই ঘরে ফিরে এসে বলে, ‘দারোগা সায়েব, আসতে পারেন। আসেন।’

‘কম্প্রিট? মূর্দাকে গোসল করানো হয়েছে?’ দারোগার প্রশ্নের জবাব দিয়ে রিয়াজউদ্দিন ফিসফিস করে মাত্র কয়েকটি শব্দ বলে। তারপর কন্যাকর্তার বিনয় ও আতিথ্য গলায় তুলে নিয়ে সবাইকে নেমস্তল্ল করে, ‘আসেন, আপনারা আসেন।’

এই ঘরটি আবার বাঁশের বেড়া দিয়ে বিভক্ত। ঘরের এপারে মেঝেতে একটি মাদুরে কয়েকজন মেয়েমানুষ। নেকাব পর্যন্ত ঝোলানো বোরখাপরা ১ মহিলা কান্দো কান্দো গলায় কোরান শরীফ পড়ছে। জড়সড় হয়ে শুয়ে রয়েছে ১ মহিলা; ১ তরুণী তালপাতার পাখা এবং ১ প্রৌড়া গামছা দিয়ে তার মাথায় হাওয়া করছে। শুয়ে থাকা মহিলার গলা থেকে একটানা আওয়াজ বেরোয়। কখনো কখনো তার স্বর অস্পষ্ট হয়ে এলে অনেক দূরে এবড়োখেবড়ো মাঠে গোরুর গাড়ি চলার রেশ আসে। আরেকজন কিশোরীকে জড়িয়ে ধরে ১৬/১৭ বছরের ১টি মেয়ে ফুঁপিয়ে ফুঁপিয়ে কান্দছে। লোকজন চুকলে তার ফোঁপানি মৃদু হয়ে আসে। মাদুরের প্রান্তে ১ বছরের ১শিশু অঘোরে ঘুমায়। তার পরনের জাগিয়া পেছাবে ভিজে গেছে। শিশুর হাতের মুঠোয় ধরে রাখা ১টি চাবি। তার মুখের কাছে দুটো মাছি ওড়ে। শিশুটির পায়ের কাছে লুটিয়ে পড়েছে হলুদ, সাদা ও খয়েরি ছোপ-লাগা বিবর্ণ সবুজ পর্দা।

দারোগার নেতৃত্বে সমবেত জনতা পর্দা অতিক্রম করে। এটাই ফাইনাল জায়গা, এরপর নিরেট দেওয়াল। গুলিবিদ্ধ নিহত যুবক ঠিক এখানেই অবস্থান করে। ওসমানের শরীরের রক্তপ্রবাহ তার করোটির ছাদে উদ্ভবন তোলে। তার চোখের ঘন খয়েরি রঙের মণি ও ভেতরকার রেটিনাসমূহ এখন খুব তৎপর। এমনি জিনিসপত্র দ্যাখার জন্যে চোখের এই বাড়াবাড়ি রকম তৎপরতার দরকার হয় না। একনিষ্ঠ মনোযোগী হলে ওসমান দ্যাখে যে,

Ranju and the dead person are not the same, Ranju is the dead person's younger brother and Ranju is still alive; comprehending this, Osman feels relieved. Now he wants to know Ranju's real name. What school does he go to? What class is he in? What does he like to play? But it's not possible to find out these things right now. So instead, he sets about looking around inside the apartment.

What's inside the room? Two police officers stand pressed close to the wall. Seeing the inspector they raise their hands in salute. The room is very cramped though; as one of them raises his hand in salute his elbow hits the wall, and the poor man's palm quivers just slightly. What else is there in the room? A cot, a rumpled mattress. Two men seated on it. They get up and stand. One of them, likely over fifty, probably not yet fifty-five, wears a green check *lungi*; beneath his umber ND shawl there's just a hint here and there of a white panjabi peeking out. First raising one foot, then again placing it on the floor, he says, "*Slamalekuum*."⁶ How're you Mr. Inspector?"

From the mumbling noises that emerge from the inspector's mouth a number of different phrases could be formed: for example, "Ah, bro, what...?", or "Good? How're we gonna be good?", or, "as Allah wishes it brother."

Rahamatulla asks the guy, "Riazuddin-*sahab*, is it all ready?" Without waiting even a moment for Riazuddin's answer, Rahamatulla takes Ranju's right hand and enters the room. Within five minutes he comes back and says, "Inspector, you can come now. Come in."

"Complete? The corpse has been washed?" In answer to the inspector's question, Riazuddin whispers just a few words. Then with the humility of a new bride's father, which lends to his voice a hospitable tone, he invites everyone inside, "Come, come, please, everyone come inside."

This room too is divided, yet with a barrier made of slender bamboo slats. On that side, on the floor, there are a few women on a reed mat. One woman in a *burqa*, with her face too covered by the *nikab*, is reading the Holy Koran in a voice quivering with emotion. A woman is curled up on the floor. An adolescent girl and an elderly woman fan her, one with a palm fan, the other with a *gamcha*. A continuous noise comes from

6 Slurring the greeting slightly.



চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের রচয়িতা আখতারুজ্জামান ইলিয়াস

the prostrate woman's mouth. From time to time, when her voice gets faint, the trace sounds of a bullock cart rambling along a bumpy path in the distance drift in. A sixteen or seventeen-year-old girl is sobbing loudly, her arms thrown around another teenager. When people enter, her sobbing subsides. A one-year-old baby is dead asleep at the edge of the reed mat, briefs wet with urine, in its fist a key held tight. Two flies buzz near the baby's face. A green sheet stained with yellow, white and umber marks lies crumpled near the baby's feet.

The assembled people, led by the inspector, cross the threshold of the hanging sheet. This is the end, beyond that, solid wall. The dead youth riddled with bullets is positioned right there. The blood flowing throughout his body rises and encircles the top of his skull like a noose. The dense umber color of his pupils, with the retinas within them, becomes acutely alert. This extreme alertness is otherwise unnecessary simply for looking at things. Now that his attention is intensely focused, Osman sees that there is a bullet-riddled youth pinned to the wall just under the ceiling. He's quite young, the skin on his body unworn and fresh. He hangs pinned to the wall by the .303 rifle bullet that has pierced his chest. His head hangs to the left. From the chest down, his long body trembles gently like a *sari* draped over a railing. It might tremble from the cold or from the breeze. The boy's mouth gapes wide open, a terrible cry still caught there; who knows when it might come bursting forth, shattering those decrepit walls. His black pupils, as though shaken from their sockets, stare out, set in their enormity; They stare out like they're devouring everything they see. His two black arms hang on the right and on the left like a pair of stiff iron rods. And to each of those two hands are two more youths pinned there by bullets. The two youths are twins, both of them young, both of them with skin unworn and fresh. And each of their eyes too have come out of their sockets as though the protruding pupils are restless to see all there is, familiar and unfamiliar. From each of their gaping mouths that dormant cry might at any moment come bursting out to shatter the rooftop. Their two iron-rod-like arms are thrust downwards. And look! To those two pairs of iron-rod-like arms are the corpses of four more youths pinned there by .303 rifle bullets. Who would say that they are different people? The four identical boys tremble slightly from the waist down, either from



শিকাগো আর্ট ইন্সটিটিউটের সামনে সিংহের গলায় মালা পরাবার মূহুর্তে চিলেকোঠার সেপাই উপন্যাসের অনুবাদক
ম্যাথিউ ডি রিচ্ (সর্ব বায়ে) এবং তার সন্তান জোহনা ও আদিল-এর সঙ্গে সম্পাদক সাইমন জাকারিয়া

the cold or the breeze. Those eight pupils, four pairs from four people, have shaken loose and protrude from their sockets in order that they might swallow everything they see. On those four identical faces are four pitiless cries halted. Those four people, and the other three from before, that is, seven people...Won't the houses, buildings, streets splinter and break apart from their cries? But it doesn't stop there. To the iron-rod-like arms of those final four people are pinned eight more bullet-riddled dead bodies. Without being able to make space in this room, they have pierced the floor and descended below it. When Osman looks below, hoping to see the end of that long flight of stairs made of bullet-riddled bodies descending, his gaze falls to a floor marked with white and umber lime and plaster on which lie a map spattered with blackish blue ink and thick black stains, burned matchsticks, pieces of chewed up pencil, and one pair of sandals, one pair of shoes. As, in a single moment, his fear and anxiety about seeing that flight of bodies cemented tight to one another by bullets disappears, his whole body sways. He wants to lie down. He thinks to himself, *I'm gonna get outta here, back to my room to lie down for a half-hour or something*. But the room is packed with people. There's no chance of getting around all of them to go back to his room; no, there's no point in going back. Whether because of his daily bout of morning acidity, or because of the excessive attention that looking at a person pierced with bullets requires, whatever the reason, he feels a sharp pain in the left side of his stomach. When he bends over slightly from the pain, his gaze falls on a rumpled bed sheet spread on the frame in front of him forming a wave. Everyone is standing on all four sides of the bed. The ones in a bit of a leadership position stand at the head. In this way everyone takes their respective positions; at that moment, Alauddin enters the room. He's over thirty; Osman knows him well, he's the landowner Rahamatulla's nephew, his sister's son; he came one time instead of his uncle to pick up Osman's rent. He came another time after that to collect a donation for the Citizen's Committee to Assist the Wrongly Accused in the Agartola Conspiracy Case. Behind Alauddin is Skin-n-Bones Khijir. Khijir has the responsibility of looking after a few of Alauddin's rickshaws and a couple of his scooters. This guy is very tall but he got the title in his name because his body is nothing but bone. He always has a pair of pliers and a screwdriver in hand. But

now he has incense in one hand, and a cone-shaped sheaf in the other. Overtaking everyone, Khijir comes to the front. And on all four sides he stuffs incense sticks into any hole or crack he can find.

“Hey! You gotta light ‘em first”, Alauddin says as he lights a match to the incense sticks, whose faint ash-colored smoke and smell bring every living and nonliving thing in the room, even the pall of emptiness, to a single-minded focus on death. At the inspector’s signal, Rahamatulla lifts the wavy sheet. Underneath the sheet, the fabric covering the face of the dead body wrapped in a white shroud is also lifted.