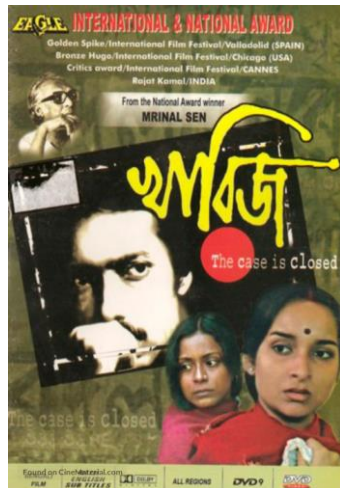


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## ***CASE CLOSED / KHARIJ* (1982)**

Mrinal Sen

Bengali language



Film link: <https://vimeo.com/user65682564>

### OVERVIEW

**Director** Mrinal Sen made his first feature film in 1953 but was slow to come into success as his first few films didn't fare well at the box office. Eventually, he tasted both success and controversy with *Baishey Sravan* (*Wedding Day*, 1960) and *Aakash Kusum* (*Up in the Clouds*, 1965). Soon after, *Mr. Bhuvan Shome* (1969), a landmark film, radically altered new cinema and art-house cinema in India. Other films such as *Mrigayaa* (*The Royal Hunt*, 1976) and *Aakaler Sandhane* (*In Search of Famine*, 1980) still retain their impact. Sen won awards at all the major international film festivals, including Cannes, Venice and Berlin. His films usually have a signature shock treatment style that is both cerebral and hard-hitting, coupled with technical jugglery and gimmicks. He was both loved and hated for his uncompromising political stance and critique of the contemporary communist government in West Bengal. Along with Satyajit Ray and Ritwick Ghatak, Sen is considered one of the trio of great Indian filmmakers both domestically and internationally.

**Film** *Case Closed* is based on a popular novel of the same name by Ramapada Chowdhury (*Kharij*, 1974). The Bangla word, *kharij*, is usually used in the context of dismissed court cases, though it is used less specifically here. The film bears clear structural similarities with Sen's previous film, *And Quiet Rolls the Dawn*, beginning *after* a major event— in this case, the death of a servant boy in a middle-class household. In terms of content, too, as the film progresses the major event becomes mere trivia as the focus shifts to an exploration of middle-class mindsets, human relationships, sense of responsibility and denial thereof and child labour/ loss of childhood.

**Background** The film had a hard-hitting impact. Many families reportedly gave their domestic servants the day off when it was aired on television the first time, as they would be uncomfortable watching a film like this with their servants present. A close female relative of a veteran Marxist leader reportedly said, "Now, I have to go home and ask my maid to sit on my lap so I can feed her". A senior Bengali journalist, stationed in Bombay (Mumbai) and suffering from the "Anjan complex" of having brought a servant along with them, asked his wife, "Have we given him a blanket?" (much to her mirth, as one typically wouldn't need a blanket in Mumbai's warm and humid winters). After watching the film, the then-Chief Minister of Bengal, Jyoti Basu (a seasoned politician who held the post for 24 years) commented, "The film is excellent, but it is too grim to be popular". And he was right— the middle-class audience wasn't ready for such shock treatment. But Sen was amply compensated by the film's critical acclaim: four national awards [Second Best film/ Silver Lotus, Best Film in Bengali, Best Editing (Gangadhar Naskar), Best Art Direction (Nitish Roy)]; a Golden Spike (best film) at

Valledoid International Film Festival; a bronze at Chicago International Film Festival and a Jury award at Cannes (all in 1983).

## SYNOPSIS

Anjan and Mamata are the very picture of a small, happy, middle-class Kolkata family. Both of them work, so Mamata hires a rural teenager boy, Palan, to take care of the household chores and their young son, Pupai. One night during a cold spell, Palan goes to sleep in the kitchen with the coal stove burning embers and dies. Much later, the doctor and the police post-mortem report confirm that he died of carbon monoxide poisoning as the kitchen had no ventilation. In the meanwhile, the unnatural death becomes a source of much curiosity and scandal among the neighbours. The police, a lawyer and a couple of doctors are consulted while Anjan and Mamata stew in their guilt of negligence and fear of repercussion. They wonder if they could have done anything differently; however, their friends and neighbours, as well as their own class values around the treatment of servants, assure them that they couldn't have done otherwise. Many opinions are presented on the issue from various factions, all of which serve to underscore the sub-par quality of life for servant boys like Palan, who work in middle-class households for a roof over their head and two meals a day, while their impoverished rural families somehow make do with their meagre wages. Mamata and Anjan have not noted down Palan's home address and hence have no way of contacting his family with the sad news. But Palan's father, Haran, arrives early to collect Palan's wages and is confronted with his son's death instead. The couple try to appease him with small gestures, but he doesn't seem to notice them in his heartbroken state. Anjan and Mamata are afraid that he, the other "lower-class" villagers and neighbourhood servant boys will create a commotion and demand justice. However, Haran accepts his son's death without incident even after he isn't allowed into the morgue to identify his son's body. After the cremation, Haran and the other villagers depart peacefully and sadly, leaving Mamata and Anjan relieved but also highly discomfited.



## CHARACTERS

<i>Palan</i>	A child servant who dies of carbon monoxide poisoning
<i>Anjan Sen</i>	A middle-class man (played by Anjan Dutta)
<i>Mamata Sen</i>	Anjan's wife (played by Mamata Shankar)
<i>Pupai</i>	Anjan and Mamata's son, around 4-5 years old
<i>Hori</i>	A child servant at the landlord's apartment, a 12-14 year old boy
<i>Sreela</i>	A neighbour and Mamata's friend (played by Sreela Majumdar)
<i>Sreela's grandfather</i>	(played by Bimal Chatterjee)
<i>Sreela's mother</i>	(played by Gita Sen)
<i>Haran</i>	Palan's father
<i>Anjan's landlord and landlady</i>	

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### **Anjan**

Anjan is a typical middle-class Bengali man from 1980's Kolkata, who is more-or-less content with splitting his time between his work and family. He seems to be a bit detached from the running of the household, as is usual, but cares enough to provide well for his wife and son. He does not seem to be the excitable or nervous type, though Palan's death certainly causes him much anxiety. As we are

only shown his actions and reactions in an extremely stressful situation, it is hard to realistically gauge him as a character beyond that.

*Anxious* Palan's death causes him much anxiety, as he has to handle most of the official legwork in a male-dominated society. He visits the police, the doctor and the lawyer and tries to sort out the situation without getting dragged into social ostracism or a legal pickle. He doesn't seem to be an extrovert, so these encounters themselves seem to cause some added anxiety on top the guilt about Palan's death. Thankfully for him, all his interlocutors are "true gentlemen"; and since it's also in their own best interests to cover over the death, they cooperate with Anjan.

*Unaware* Anjan seems to be genuinely unaware of what he could have done differently to better treat the servants in his household—that is, less malice and more "going with the flow". And for every unnecessary practical hardship, he has a supporting reason that's logical to him (and the middle class in general). For instance, when the police ask about Palan sleeping under the stairs, he apologetically replies that previously the servants slept in the living room, but one of them stole some items and escaped; from then on, the living room would be locked at night. He is also out-of-touch with Mamata's feelings; for instance, when he notices that Mamata has an extra mattress and asks her why she didn't give it to Palan (triggering a breakdown), he is totally clueless that the extra mattress was reserved for "reputable" guests and not lower-class servants like Palan.

*Practical* Apart from handling the official end of things, Anjan also tries his best to be practical and keep the support of his friends and neighbours. He consults with Sreela's grandfather since he is an older, more experienced parent figure with many important connections. And he goes out of his way to invite some local toughs into his home to assuage their concerns about Palan's unnatural death in an attempt to stave off scandal, even though Mamata is unhappy about it.



## **Mamata**

Like Anjan, Mamata is also a typical working woman from 1980's Kolkata, who, in addition to her paid job, takes on almost the entire burden of running the household and taking care of their child. She also believes in maintaining the middle-class status quo and is more concerned about what society will think of her than a lower-class child's death from neglect.

*Caring* Mamata is deeply caring towards her husband and son at the beginning of the film and in her daily life. In the very first family scene, we see her holding a tumbler of milk and helping Pupai drink from it, presumably after getting him ready for school, as he's dressed in his uniform and is carrying a backpack, all while Anjan relaxes. She also mentions that she cooks both before going to work and on her return, which she finds taxing. But she is (unsurprisingly) blind when it comes to Palan; as a servant boy, his existence in her household is marginal at best.

*Conventional* In this respect, Mamata is again typical of her class and gender. In Bengali middle-class households, it remains fairly common, to this day, to have separate, usually sub-par

accommodations for domestic servants (regardless of caste/ religion); for example, eating utensils, clothes and bedding and sleeping and toilet arrangements reserved solely for their use. They are also not allowed free use of the household furniture; a servant sitting on the couch or bed or even eating their meals at the dining table remain uncommon practices. We see all of these quite naturally in Mamata's household; in fact, Mamata's unwillingness to part with a spare mattress and blanket for Palan or allow him to sleep in the warmer living room instead of the drafty space under the stairs are direct reasons for his death. And while no one accuses her of being complicit in child labour to her face, she would most certainly have brushed aside such allegations with the logic that she was paying for the servant to do household chores, not go to school or enjoy leisure time like a middle-class child.

*Resentful* After Palan's death, Mamata feels guilty yet doesn't clearly understand what she could have done differently; as a result, she turns resentful, especially towards Anjan and, of course, Palan. Her resentment is clear when she snaps back at Anjan when he blames her for something or other, like not noting down Palan's address, as if it was only her responsibility and not his, too. Later, she complains to Sreela that Palan must have been keeping bad company, which taught him to lie and steal, when he once claimed to have received a pair of trousers from a neighbour lady. Like Anjan, Mamata believes that the death was accidental; she is more concerned about a shameful scandal, possible legal repercussions and a black mark against them in society, leading perhaps to not being able to find servants in the future.





## THEMES

**Mystery** Like Sen's previous film, *And Quiet Rolls the Dawn*, *Case Closed* is also set up as a mystery, though the eventual revelation has less to do with the "hows" than the "whys". Once Anjan breaks down the kitchen door and finds Palan dead on the floor, he becomes obligated to inform the police. The police officer does a show of investigating and asking questions, from which it is revealed that the coal oven was left burning and there were no windows or other ventilation in the kitchen. At this point, most viewers would correctly surmise that the cause of death is carbon monoxide poisoning, but the film postpones this revelation in favour of heightening tension. Mamata and Anjan conjecture that Palan may have been sick from other diseases, and the doctor and police also ask about that possibility. The police officer also asks Anjan if Palan ate the same food as the rest of the family; Anjan's guilty conscience interprets that to mean the possibility of poisoning. Added to the mystery is the police lackadaisically tracking Palan's last steps: we discover that he borrowed money and went to watch a late night film show, then came home, then skipped washing the dirty dishes as he was very tired, then finding his usual sleeping spot under the stairs colder than usual, went to sleep in the warm kitchen after closing the door as he knew that the coal oven would still be burning embers. All of this comes as a big surprise to his employers, who had already gone to bed as usual and didn't emerge until the morning. The mystery is further heightened by the furore in the neighbourhood, with wild conjectures and silent accusations that somehow Anjan and Mamata were murderers; as such, Anjan has to run around, anxious, consulting a doctor and a lawyer and also visiting the police station a couple of times. Only toward the end of the film does an independent doctor, whom the landlord consults, and the police, tell us the definitive cause.

**Class** *Case Closed* is a stark portrayal of Bengali middle-class opinions about and behaviour towards the lower "servant" class; as such, it is almost a slap in the face of middle-class complacency. This treatment of the lower class as *literally* lower is revealed early and in the small details, like Haran and Palan not offered a seat on the living room sofa when they arrive: instead, the older man squats on the floor in a supplicating position while Mamata and Anjan stand over them. Palan's position is also inflected with a series of similar behaviours that leave no scope of misunderstanding his place in the so called "family", as these middle-class householders like Anjan are fond of saying. From the endless petty chores to the sleeping space under the stairs and other similar (and unnecessary) deprivations to an absence of allowances for any child-like whims or desires, Palan's life, while not exactly one of extreme hardship or physical abuse, is characterized with that peculiar Bengali middle class neglect that appears to be anything but, at least to the film's immediate audience.

To add insult to injury, these servant boys and their rural families are always described in less-than-appealing, sometimes downright criminal terms. The police, doctor, landlord and his family and every other middle-class character shown in the film almost unanimously support Anjan and Mamata's actions, overlook their neglect, demean the "servant class" and pass on the blame to someone else. Mamata herself (guiltily) fumes that Palan may have kept "bad company" and was a "liar and thief" for sure. Sreela, Mamata's younger-sister-like neighbour, repeatedly tells the son, Pupai, that Palan was taken away by the police and confined to a hospital as he was naughty, thus implanting a seed of middle class condescension early and often. While Pupai is too young to understand death, there were numerous other narratives at Sreela's disposal to explain Palan's absence. Sreela herself seems to have learned this from her grandfather, who is clearly wary of and condescending towards the "servant class". He repeatedly advises Anjan to be careful of them but remains optimistic that the whole issue was "just a hassle for a few days". But to be on the safe side, he introduces Anjan to a top lawyer in case it went into court.



**Child labour** *Case Closed* is just as much a film about child labour as *Quiet Rolls the Dawn* was about feminism; that is, only ostensibly and at the beginning or in parts. In fact, only two characters directly raise the topic of child labour in the film: one, a random old man on the street discussing it with his younger companion and two, the top lawyer whom Sreela's grandfather brings Anjan to meet. The lawyer presents a brief but interesting counterpoint to this general attitude on hiring poor children to work as domestic servants. He immediately calls out Anjan for claiming Palan as "family":

No, he was not, because it is not possible. All the facilities that your son enjoys, how much of it has that boy received? Did you give him a room to sleep in? He slept under the staircase. Have you thought of giving him an extra blanket in these days of the cold wave? You have not... So all this "family" business is meaningless— we cannot and we do not give them their legal rights and moral claims".

The lawyer continues that everyone is guilty; the heavy tomes on his desk are meant to keep that "moral truth" hidden: "The legal lie must prevail over the moral truth". He is very aware of his own class interests and exactly which side he will represent, but refuses to sugar-coat the truth for his clients' comfort.

In the context, this isn't legally considered child labour at all. First, work in domestic settings is less strenuous or dangerous than, say, work in construction or factories. And, second, older children were always put to work by the lower classes. In fact, the The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, which prohibits child labour below the age of 14 years in any factory or mine or other hazardous employment, was only passed in 1986, four years after the film's release. Even so, this act doesn't specify domestic labour, so any "legal rights" remain a grey area; further, these boys are around 12-14 years old and would soon be exempt from the legal prohibition. Thus, Palan and Hori, and other working boys in the neighbourhood, have no choice but to continue under the yoke of their negligent domestic employers. Hori, whom we see frequently, is always present but hardly noticed, unless he's required for some chore or the other, such as bringing water or making and serving tea, not only for his employer (the landlord) but also other tenants like Anjan. And Hori hardly has a voice. Even when he tells Mamata that he knows where Palan's home is, Anjan quickly brushes aside the information as he's not keen to confront Haran with the news of Palan's death, another act of gross negligence.



**Childhood** Sen chose a hard-hitting but sentimental topic to reveal the Bengali middle-class's inherent hypocrisy and condescension towards the lower class— the death of a child. It is surely a topic that wouldn't leave anyone unmoved; however, Sen's treatment is intellectual rather than melodramatic even in this instance. The stark contrast of childhood experience as differentiated by class is brought out in the contrast between Pupai's and Palan's lives. Pupai, as a son of a middle-class household, is pampered and mollycoddled by his family and everyone else around him. He gets the best of all comforts Anjan and Mamata can afford— physical and emotional affection, a good education, nice toys and clothes, leisure to play as he wishes and so on.

Palan, on the other hand, as a servant boy, has none of these. He doesn't go to school and instead does most of the chores and a thousand odds and ends of maintaining a household all day. He sleeps under the staircase and has no toys or hobbies that his employers know of and is shown dressed in hand-me-down, threadbare clothes, maybe getting a new set once a year at best. Mamata even insinuates that he stole a pair of pants from a neighbour lady because he didn't have pants— as if *they* didn't give him any clothes! But most of all, Palan is deprived of leisure and play, as we see in a short but significant montage where he imagines playing in the park alongside Pupai while doing chores like fetching water from a hand-pump, breaking coal and airing out heavy mattresses. Like any other 13-year-old, Palan wants to slide down a fancy slide and swing on a swing, but he can only watch from a distance. In death, too, Palan gets no sympathy. Even as his cold, dead body lies rotting at the morgue, Sreela and Pupai happily sing a nursery rhyme about Miss Molly's (Polly in American usage) dolly being sick, and immediately the doctor comes and prescribes a pill and advises the dolly be put to bed. The irony becomes too apparent for comfort.



**Guilt: The breakdown of a marriage** Mamata and Anjan are first heard as young lovers riding in a taxi. Anjan tells her to choose from a list of middle-class luxuries and she assures him that she only wants him. Soon after, the same dialogue is repeated, now with emphasis on Mamata's desire for a servant boy and the long list of chores he would do while both of them were away at work. However, after Palan's death, both of them are riddled by guilt and suddenly begin to find fault with each other. This is, in part, because they are genuinely afraid of backlash from Haran and the other neighbourhood servants, the scandal in the neighbourhood and possible legal repercussions of an unnatural death. For instance, Anjan accuses Mamata for not having paid more attention to Palan, but she counters that it would have been impossible in the normal scheme of things. When Anjan blames her for leaving burning embers in the coal oven, she is annoyed; her usual practice was to put a container of water to warm up overnight for the laundry next day and she couldn't possibly be expected to poke and prod the fire out! Anjan's list of blame goes on, with Mamata's responses getting weaker and weaker: she didn't keep Palan's address, or told the police that the oven was still burning embers, or failed to offer a cup of tea to Haran, or even a negligible thing like forgetting to change the date on the paper calendar.

So, ultimately, it becomes the dead boy's fault for not sticking to his usual sleeping spot under the stairs and sleeping in the kitchen; but, this is never directly expressed, always insinuated. Instead of putting up a united front, Anjan and Mamata start blaming each other in a game of "passing the buck", because to do otherwise would mean confronting some cold, hard truths that the relationship is not ready to handle. Anjan is happy to pass it off as an accident, and Mamata keeps breaking down, not from grief but from guilt and fear, but they cannot rally to comfort each other. Even when the crisis blows over and Haran leaves quietly, without creating a fuss, they remain uneasy and not sufficiently relieved, because the internal dynamics of their relationship have changed forever.



**Grief** Anjan and Mamata, while immediately impacted by Palan's death, hardly show any sign of grief. Not once does Mamata cry for Palan, but only laments, "What will I tell his father"? Hori, the servant boy from the landlord's household, is sad and forlorn, but even he is never shown crying until the crematorium scene, possibly because his employers wouldn't take kindly to any excessive display of emotion on his part. Only Haran, Palan's bereaved father, breaks down crying on quite a few occasions, but he only ever blames his own bad luck and never Anjan and Mamata's negligence. It is as if he doesn't even realize that it was a completely preventable death: if only Palan was allowed to sleep in the living room with extra blankets, he wouldn't have ventured into the kitchen for warmth and met an untimely end. Anjan and Mamata try to appease Haran by offering tea or a fresh bed with a proper mattress in the living room, but he politely declines, choosing instead to spend the night in the kitchen. The next day, he follows Anjan to the morgue where he isn't allowed to identify the body. Then he sits right by the funeral pyre with the other servant boys and a few villagers as Palan's body is cremated, breaking down and crying every so often, saying, "Palan, you will not feel cold any more!", as the body burns.

But interestingly, though the graffiti on the walls of the crematorium scream "revenge", a reminder of bygone Naxalite days, Haran doesn't seem to be infected with that radical notion. In fact, even though the small crowd of mourners returning from the crematorium are framed as if they are just about to pounce on the ones responsible for Palan's death, the situation fizzles out as one by one they leave the house quietly. Sen's radical friends disliked this ending sequence; one of them even asked Sen, "Why did Haran not slap Anjan?" But this typical middle-class desire for justice served, a fantastical wish-fulfilment of vicarious revolution (of course, so long as it doesn't affect oneself personally) was a luxury that Sen wasn't willing to afford the viewer. Sen replied, "Well, he has slapped you, me and everyone— didn't you feel it?"





## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Do you think that *Kharij (Case Closed)* is aptly named, given also the legal connotation? [The Bangla word is used most often when court cases are dismissed.]
- 2) Do you think this is a film about child labour? Or does it become something more?
- 3) Why do you think Anjan and Mamata are so anxious and guilty? What does their reaction reveal about the Bengali middle-class milieu?
- 4) Are there any major characters who are innocent or non-complicit in Palan's "accidental" death? Discuss.
- 5) Sen famously said, "(Haran) has slapped you, me and everyone— didn't you feel it?" Explain.



## SCENES

### PALAN

**Household help needed** In a taxi showing the back of the taxi driver's head, we hear a man (Anjan) asking a woman (Mamata) what she wants after marriage: house, car or saree? She says that she doesn't want any of that, just him. They repeat the conversation (later) while he's shaving and she's getting their son, Pupai, ready for school. She says what she wants now is a household helper, a 12-14 year old boy. They list out all the chores this boy would perform and the low cost of employing a young boy.



**Palan is employed** A man brings his son to their doorstep. Mamata asks the boy (Palan) if he can do all the chores. His father (Haran) agrees for him and says he is a hard-working village boy. They haggle over the wages and decide on 30 rupees per month. We see another servant boy, Hori, who also works in the same building. Haran tells Anjan that he will come and collect the wages every month.

**Palan's days** A boy slides down a large slide shaped like a woman's high-heel shoe, followed by Pupai. Palan does household chores like fetching water from a hand-pump, breaking coal and airing out heavy mattresses while Pupai swings on a swing with another boy (or Palan imagining himself there).



## PALAN DIES

**Cold spell** The city suffers from a cold spell, according to a newspaper style headline over city buildings. The family sleeps under thick comforters in a single bed. Mamata wakes first and goes to look for Palan. Hori tells her that he slept in the kitchen. Mamata and Anjan bang on the door and try to wake him, but are unsuccessful. The landlord, returning home, says it's very cold outside. Hori goes to dispose of trash.

**Palan doesn't open the door** Mamata and Anjan keep calling Palan and banging on the door, rousing all the neighbours and Pupai. The landlord's son come to help break open the door. Pupai asks Mamata why Palan isn't waking up. They finally break the door open.



## AFTERWARDS

**The neighbours are over-excited** Palan is lying on the floor and doesn't respond. Anjan phones for a doctor and an ambulance. The neighbours gossip. Mamata and Hori try to wake up Palan while Pupai peeks from afar. The doctor examines Palan. An ambulance arrives at the house. The entire neighbourhood crowds around the house. Anjan opens the main door and they rush inside.

**Anjan contacts the police** The doctor tells Anjan to inform the police. At the police station, a uniformed constable has a one-sided phone conversation in which he mentions that the boy died at night and writes down Anjan's details. A crowd has gathered in the area. On the street, an old man and a younger man discuss the issue of child servants. The old man says that child labour is immoral and should be illegal, while the younger man counters that we can't get along without the help.

**Police arrive at the house** The police arrive at the house. Mamata packs off Pupai with her friend and neighbour, Sreela. Sreela tells Pupai that Palan is sick and naughty, so that's why the police are here to take him away. Anjan tells the police officer that they broke open the door. The police offer steps over the boy's dead body and notices the coal and gas ovens. Anjan suspects that Palan lit the coal oven for warmth. The police take all the dirty dishes and the bedding.

**Police speak to Anjan and Mamata** The officer asks Mamata a few questions about using coal and gas ovens. She also tells him that they went to bed around 10.30pm. The coal stove was still burning embers and she had placed a container of water on it. The officer asks about Hori. Anjan says that they previously had another servant boy who stole items from the house. That is why the servants now sleep under the staircase. Mamata starts sobbing and Anjan tells her it's an accident— they had no part in it. While leaving, the officer tells Anjan to contact Palan's family and take the body for a post-mortem. A very large crowd has gathered outside.

**Anjan speaks to the doctor** Anjan waits at the doctor's office and then speaks with him privately. The doctor tells him that he has no choice but wait for the post-mortem report. The doctor thinks that the death is unnatural and not caused by any disease or infection.

**Mamata and Anjan have a small disagreement** Anjan tells Mamata that she shouldn't have told the police that the coal oven was burning embers and that Palan hadn't eaten. Hori brings them tea. Mamata refuses to drink any. Pupai, on Sreela's lap, calls to his parents from across some buildings. Prompted by Sreela, he tells them to come over for lunch. Hori is pensive. Mamata tells Anjan that she has never told Palan to sleep in the kitchen.

## SEEKING PALAN'S FAMILY

**Anjan visits Sreela's family for Palan's address** The landlord urges them to contact Haran, but Mamata doesn't have his address. They guess that Sreela's family might. Anjan rushes to their neighbour's house. Sreela's grandfather tells Anjan to bear with it.

**Pupai and Sreela enjoy themselves** Sreela tells Pupai again that Palan is sick because he's naughty and that's why the police have put him in jail. Sreela's grandfather and mother agree that they should keep Pupai for a few days, even though it's more work for Sreela and she has to take time off her job. Sreela's grandfather asks Anjan to come with him as he leaves for work. Sreela and Pupai wave at them from the balcony.



**Sreela's grandfather helps Anjan** Sreela's grandfather tells Anjan that he will send someone to look for Haran's acquaintance, whom he knows. Anjan offers him money, but he refuses. He also asks Anjan to get a lawyer for legal advice. A random man on the road overhears them. Sreela's grandfather tells Anjan that he'll introduce him to a famous lawyer, who's his friend.

**Over-curious neighbours** Some men on the road confront Anjan and ask him questions about what happened, which Anjan hesitantly answers. Sreela walks past them looking frightened; then, she goes inside the house to give Mamata company. Anjan invites the men home. Sreela and Mamata discuss why these random men are there. Mamata rudely gives them water and asks Hori to bring her some more water from the kitchen. She is extremely annoyed at their presence. Sreela tells Mamata there really wasn't a way to avoid these men's curiosity.



**An argument with the landlord** The landlord chastises Anjan for bringing them inside the house. Anjan angrily replies that they haven't done anything wrong and as the landlord he should also have come and assuaged the neighbours. But the landlord huffs away, saying it isn't his responsibility. Sreela, Anjan and Mamata sit and sulk.

**No leads** Later, they keep sulking at Sreela's home while she plays tag with Pupai and sings "Miss Molly had a dolly". Sreela receives a phone call from her grandfather, who wants to speak to Anjan. He wasn't able to track down Haran's acquaintance yet, but gives the latter's address to Anjan. Anjan says that he regrets not taking Palan's address and blames Mamata.



**At the police station** Anjan goes to the police station. The police officer says that they found a ticket for a night show in Palan's pocket, so he probably returned late after watching the movie and went straight to sleep without washing the dirty dishes. The officer says that the postmortem report should be ready the next day and the body will only be released to a relative.

**Mamata and Anjan feel guilt** Hori tells Mamata that he knows where Palan lives; he rode a train there and remembers the way. Anjan returns and Mamata tells him the news, but he doesn't seem happy. Mamata says that they can send Hori, but Anjan is unsure what he will say as the cause of death isn't known. Mamata says Palan may have been sick without their knowledge. Anjan says that it was a shameful event for them, because now they have to deal with a thousand questions from a thousand curious outsiders. Anjan says the police officer asked if Palan's food was different from the rest of the family, implying poisoning.

**At the lawyers office** Anjan and Sreela's grandfather visit the famous lawyer. The lawyer opines that it's a case of negligence, but Sreela's grandfather disagrees. The lawyer says that even if they claim that Palan was like a family member, he was actually exploited and did not have a lifestyle anywhere comparable to their own son. They didn't even think twice about providing a safe sleeping space or extra blankets during the cold spell, or making him sleep under the stairs even when he was sick. The lawyer also says that we don't afford them their legal rights or moral claims, even though he's a minor.

**"The legal lie must prevail over the moral truth"** Anjan fumbles to say that he doesn't understand how he's guilty. The lawyer says that everyone is guilty; the heavy tomes on his desk are just to keep the "moral truths" hidden— "The legal lie must prevail over the moral truth". Anjan suddenly says that if there were a ventilator in the kitchen... but the lawyer stops him mid-sentence and tells him to wait and watch.

**Palan died of carbon monoxide poisoning** The landlord visits a doctor, who says that Palan's death doesn't seem to be asphyxiation but carbon monoxide poisoning. The burning coal oven produced the gas and it accumulated in the unventilated kitchen, becoming deadly. The doctor phones the medical examiner, who is his former student, and asks his daughter to call him back.

#### PALAN'S FATHER

**Palan's father, Haran, arrives** Mamata is anxious when Anjan arrives. She tells him that Palan's father arrived earlier to pick up his salary at the end of the month. Hori told Haran the bad news, but Mamata didn't meet with him. Anjan berates her for leaving that responsibility to him and not even giving him any tea. Anjan and Mamata finally approach Haran as he's waiting and sobbing alone in the kitchen. Haran breaks down, asking for Palan back.



**Family and friends discuss the matter** Sreela, her grandfather, Anjan and Mamata discuss the predicament. Sreela says that Palan asked her for a few rupees, which she gave him. Anjan says that Palan used the money to watch a film. Mamata says that she shouldn't have given him the money and that these boys keep bad company. Mamata says that Palan was a liar and thief (for getting a pair of pants from a neighbour lady) and behaved as if they didn't care for him at all.

**Deliberations** Mamata leaves them and returns to their bedroom. Sreela goes and apologises to her. The landlady comes to commiserate and says that Palan loved Pupai very much. Sreela's grandfather tells Anjan to keep a close eye on Haran and keep him there, lest he get "bad ideas" from other people. Haran overhears the conversation and approaches them. He wants to leave right away and let his family know, but the men prevent him. He breaks down sobbing, again. Sreela's grandfather tells Anjan to leave Haran alone to grieve.

**A mattress for Haran** Anjan tells Mamata that Haran can sleep in the empty living room. Anjan rearranges the furniture to make space. Mamata stands around, looking guilty. Anjan asks Mamata to find bedding for Haran while the landlady sends a blanket. Mamata has an extra mattress under their own bedding, which they struggle to bring out from under a thicker mattress. Mamata breaks down crying. Haran refuses to sleep in the freshly made bed for him in the living room and goes to the kitchen to sleep instead.

**Palan's body is released** Anjan brings Haran, Hori and a couple other relatives to the police station. The police officer again advises Anjan to be careful that the relatives don't make any trouble. He notes down Haran's details and then sends them to the morgue. Anjan alone goes inside the morgue to identify the body; Haran isn't allowed in and waits outside with some other servants who've come to see Palan for the last time. But the crematorium truck takes the body away and they aren't allowed even a last glimpse.

**Palan is cremated** At the cremation, Sreela's grandfather asks Anjan if there was any trouble. Anjan notices the word "revenge" in the graffiti on the crematorium wall. The employers depart, leaving the servant boys and villagers by the burning pyre. Haran and some of the other boys sob. Haran says that Palan will not feel cold any more. At the doorstep, the landlady has Anjan perform certain Hindu rituals to "purify" the crematorium returnees.

**"Purification" ritual** Later, Anjan and Mamata are unable to sleep. Suddenly, there are loud knocks on the main door. Haran and the others are outside, looming. The landlady quickly brings the items for the "purification" ritual. One by one, Haran and the others perform the ritual and enter the house, barefoot. Haran bows his head to Anjan and Mamata, saying goodbye and leaving as the music reaches a crescendo. One by one, all of them except Hori leave, as the household members watch.

