

Obviously not satisfied, the children look for more. "The grain sack is empty," Kusum tells them. "Perhaps Father can collect enough paise⁶ today for a feast of rice and dhal this evening," she adds hopefully.

Rising, Hari strides purposefully toward his rickshaw. For him as well as for tens of thousands of others, pulling a rickshaw is the only possible way to earn his family's support. This makes him the envy of his less-fortunate neighbors. For the privilege, however, he must pay rent of five to ten rupees⁷ per day—usually about one-fourth of his earnings. When the grueling strain finally breaks his health, other pullers will gladly take his place.

Rickshaw derives from the Japanese word *jinriksha*, meaning "vehicle propelled by man." These two-wheeled carriages have been familiar sights in Calcutta for generations. Originally intended for transporting goods, their use and style have changed to accommodate passengers. A large canopy shields the rider from the blazing sun and the monsoon rains.

Stepping between the shafts, Hari grabs them at the exact spot necessary to maintain proper balance. Leaning forward, he moves into the stream of traffic at a slow jog, searching for passengers. A rickshaw is relatively easy to handle under ideal conditions.

In Calcutta, though, conditions are never ideal. Already Hari's body drips with perspiration from his exertion in the intense heat. The atmosphere, thick with the stench of uncleaned streets, makes him gasp for breath. Heading for less poverty-stricken areas of the city, he sees a well-fed man signal for a ride.

As Hari maneuvers to the curb, the man curtly gives his destination and asks the fare. Hari glances at the heavy packages at the man's feet. "One rupee," he says quietly, wiping perspiration from his eyes.