

LESSON - 2

LOST SPRING



STORIES OF STOLEN CHILDHOOD

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anees Jung (1964) was born in Rourkela and spent her childhood and adolescence in Hyderabad. She received her education in Hyderabad and in the United States of America. Her parents were both writers. Anees Jung began her career as a writer in India. She has been an editor and columnist for major newspapers in India and abroad, and has authored several books. The following is an excerpt from her book titled *Lost Spring, Stories of Stolen Childhood*. Here she analyses the grinding poverty and traditions which condemn these children to a life of exploitation.

CHARACTERS AND PLACES

Saheb-e-Alam : A rag picker
Place : Seema Puri
Mukesh : Son of a bangle maker
Place : Firozabad

BACKGROUND

The story, "Lost Spring" describes the pitiable condition of poor children who have been forced to miss the joy of childhood due to the socio-economic condition that prevails in this man-made world. These children are denied the opportunity of schooling and forced into labour early in life. Anees Jung gives voice to eliminate child labour by educating the children and to enforce the laws against child labour by the governments strictly. The call is to end child exploitation and let the children enjoy the days of the spring that will bring joy, smile and excitement in their life.

GIST OF THE LESSON

Part – I : Sometimes I find a rupee in the garbage.

- The author examines and analyses the impoverished condition and traditions that condemn children to a life of exploitation. These children are denied education and forced into labour and hardships early in their lives.
- The writer encounters Saheb - a rag picker whose parents have left behind the stormy and floody life of misery in Dhaka to earn a living in Delhi.
- His family like many others of rag pickers lives in Seemapuri. They do not have other identification other than a ration card.
- The children do not go to school and they are excited at the prospect of finding a coin or even a ten rupee note scrounging the garbage.
- It is the only way of earning the life they live in impoverished condition but are resigned to their fate.
- The writer is pained to see Saheb, a rag picker whose name means the ruler of the earth, lose the spark of childhood and roams barefooted with his friends.
- After sometimes from morning to noon the author encounters him in a tea stall and is paid Rs. 800. He sadly realizes that he is no longer his own master and this loss of identity weighs heavily on his tender shoulders.

Part – II : I want to drive a car.

- The author then talks about another victim, Mukesh who wants to be a motor mechanic.
- Hailing from Firozabad, the centre of India's bangle making and glass blowing industry, he has always worked in the glass making industry.
- His family like the others there do not know that it is illegal for children to work in such close proximity to furnaces, in such high temperatures.

- They are exposed to various health hazards like losing their eyesight as they work in abysmal conditions, in dark and dingy cells.
- Mukesh's father is blind as were his father and grandfather before him.
- They lead a hand to mouth existence as they are caught in the vicious web of the money lenders, middlemen, police and the traditions
- So burdened are the bangle makers of Firozabad that they have lost their ability to dream unlike Mukesh who dreams of driving a car.

THEME OF THE LESSON

The theme of the story is the grinding poverty and the traditions which condemn poor children to a life of exploitation. The two stories taken together depict the plight of street children forced into labour early in life and denied the opportunity of schooling. The callousness of the society and the political class only adds to the sufferings of these poor people.

MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

The title 'Lost Spring' conveys and pictorises that childhood is like the spring. As everything blooms in this season, in the same way the childhood should bloom but through the misery of Saheb and Mukesh, we come to know about their stolen childhood. It is being destroyed and dumped in the web of poverty, dirt and dust. They have a strong desire to come out of this pitiable situation and work hard for their betterment. Let us have a strong determination to realize our dreams.

Answer the following questions in 30 – 40 Words.

1. Who was Saheb? What was his full name? What was the irony about his name?

Ans. Saheb was a poor rag-picker. His full name was Saheb-e-Alam. It means Lord of the Universe. But the poor boy had not even shoes to wear. Thus there was deep irony in his name.

2. What is Saheb looking for in the garbage dumps? Where is he and where has he come from?

Ans. Saheb is a poor rag-picker. Every morning he comes to probe the garbage heaps in the author's neighbourhood. He is searching for gold in the garbage dumps. He lives in Seemapuri area of Delhi. He has come from Dhaka, Bangladesh.

3. What explanation does the author give for the children not wearing footwear?

Ans. The rag-pickers were poor children. They always went about barefoot. They had become used to it. Even if they had shoes, they look for excuses not to wear them. Some even said that going barefoot was a tradition among them.

4. How does the author describe the area of Seemapuri?

Ans. Seemapuri is a place on the periphery of Delhi. Those who live here are Bangladeshis. They came here in 1971. They live in structures of mud. They have roofs of tin and tarpaulin. They are all rag-pickers. They have no sewage, drainage or running water.

5. What is the usual morning scene in the streets of the authoress Anees Jung?

Ans. Saheb roams about in the streets rag-picking with an army in his barefoot friends. They appear like birds in the morning and disappear at noon.

6. What does garbage mean for the elders and children in Seemapuri?

Ans. Garbage to the elders has different meaning. It is their daily bread. It means a roof over their heads. But for children it is even more. For them, it is a thing wrapped in wonder. For the elders it is a means of survival.

7. How did Saheb feel working at a tea stall? What did he get there?

Ans. Saheb did not feel happy there. He had lost his carefree look. He was paid 800 rupees and all his meals. But he was no longer his own master. He belonged to the man who owned the tea shop.

8. Who was Mukesh? What was his aim in life?

Ans. Mukesh belonged to a family of bangle makers in Firozabad. He did not like the life of a bangle maker. He wanted to be his own master. His dream was to become a motor mechanic.

9. What makes the city of Firozabad famous?

Ans. Firozabad is famous for its bangles. Every other family here is engaged in making bangles. It is the centre of glass-blowing industry. It makes bangles for all the women of the land.

10. What is the condition of children working in the glass furnaces of Firozabad?

Ans. About 20,000 children work in the glass furnaces of Firozabad. They have to work in very hot temperatures. They work in dingy cells without air and light. They have to work all day. Thus they lose the brightness of their eyes.

11. What does Mukesh's grandmother say about her husband?

Ans. She says that her husband belonged to a family of bangle makers. She calls it god-given lineage. It could not be broken. Her husband went blind with the dust from the polishing of bangles. She calls it his Karma.

12. What does the writer say about boys and girls working in dark hutments?

Ans. These boys and girls work with their fathers and mothers. They have flickering oil lamps in front of them. They weld pieces of glass into bangles. Their eyes get more used to the dark than to the light outside. Many of them lose their eyesight before they become adults.

13. Who is Savita? What is she doing? What does the writer wonder about?

Ans. Savita is a young girl. She is soldering pieces of glass. Her hands are moving mechanically. The writer wonders if she knows the sanctity of the bangles she is making. They symbolize an Indian Women's Suhaag.

14. Why don't the poor bangle makers organize themselves into a cooperative?

Ans. There are cruel middlemen. They don't let the bangle makers form any cooperative. They put the police after them. They are caught and beaten by the police. They are put into the jail on false charges of illegal acts. The poor bangle makers have no leader to guide them.

15. What forces conspire to keep the workers in bangle industry of Firozabad in poverty?

Ans. There are Sahukars, Middlemen, Policemen, Bureaucrats and Politicians. All these form a vicious circle. Poor bangle makers have been trapped in it for generations. Now they have come to accept it as something natural.

16. How is Mukesh's attitude to his situation different from that of his family?

Ans. Mukesh belongs to a family of bangle makers. These people think it a god-given lineage. Mukesh wants to be his own master. He wants to become a motor mechanic. He wants to break away from the family tradition.

17. What could this elderly woman's husband achieve which many others couldn't?

Ans. The husband of the elderly woman who could never enjoy one full meal in his entire life, has made a house for the family to live in, a roof over head which many others fail to get.

Answer the following questions in 100 to 120 Words.

1 The life of bangle makers of Firozabad was full of obstacles which forced them to lead a life of poverty and deprivation. Discuss with reference to 'Lost Spring.'

Ans. The bangle makers of Firozabad were illiterate and very poor. They believed that they had to follow their caste and family tradition from one generation to another. Moreover, they were trapped into the vicious clutches of middlemen. They were afraid to form co-operatives to safeguard themselves because they felt that they would be beaten up by the police and jailed

for doing something illegal. Circumstances created by politicians, policemen, sahuks, middlemen and bureaucrats, they saw very little hope of escaping from their impoverished life of misery and deprivation.

Glass bangle workers worked in dingy cells, sacrificing their precious daylight hours in close proximity to hot furnaces with high temperatures, blowing glass, weldings, soldering the bangles and polishing the glass of the bangles. The environment created health hazard. 20,000 children were involved in bangle making industry in Firozabad and many of them lost their eyesight before they reached adulthood. They were unaware that it was illegal for children to work in glass furnaces with high temperatures. Their life was full of misery and deep despair. There was no hope of improvement in their life.

2. All children have dreams, so did Saheb and Mukesh. Do you think children like Saheb and Mukesh will be able to fulfill their dreams? (Lost Spring)

Ans. Dreams keep us going on. They help us set our goals. All children have dreams. They want to hold various posts such as doctor, engineer, writer, pilot, officer, politician etc. Children like Saheb, who was a Bangladeshi refugee lived in a slum in Delhi. He went around with his friends and picked up rags. He scrounged through the garbage dump for his survival. When he saw children playing football, wearing good clothes and shoes his desire to be like them was awakened. He also wanted to go to school, play games and lead a respectable life. He had lot of patience and resilience. He left his job as a rag-picker and joined a tea-stall where he earned Rs. 800 per month. He hoped that it would pave way for a better life. But in most cases children like Saheb and Mukesh are never able to come out of their vicious circle of poverty. Mukesh did not want to become a pilot. He just wanted to become a motor mechanic. On the contrary some move from rag-picking to petty crimes. Only those who possess 'a never say die' attitude and will power break open this circle of poverty and become a part of the respectable world.

3 Justify the title of the story 'Lost Spring.'

Ans. 'Lost spring' is an apt title for this story. Spring is the best season of a year. Being full of colour, fragrance and freshness. It is also a season of renewal and growth. The childhood of human life is often linked with spring, as it marks the beginning of human life and has a tremendous scope for growth. It is full of joy, pleasure and play. Children anywhere in the world are a great source of joy. But, ironically, millions of children like Saheb and Mukesh experience no spring in their lives. Their childhood is consumed in making a living. Education, play and pleasure are not for them to enjoy. They must work to support themselves and their families.

Thus 'Lost Spring' deal with two themes – the first theme deals with the miserable plight of street children forced into labour early in life and denied the opportunity of schooling. The second theme runs parallel to the major theme is the callousness of society and the political class to these people's misery. There is an utter lack of compassion, empathy and commitment for the upliftment of these children of a lesser God. Thus the author has metaphorically compared childhood with spring season. So the title is apt and sensitizes the reader to the miserable plight of the poorest of the poor and emphasizes the urgent need to end the vicious circle of exploitation through education, awareness, co-operative organization and empowerment.

VALUE BASED QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions in 100 to 120 words

1. Most of us do not raise our voice against injustice in our society. Anees Jung in her story, 'Lost Spring' vividly highlights the miserable life of street children and bangle makers of Firozabad. What values do we need to inculcate among the people to bring back the spring in the lives of these children.

Ans. Anees Jung wants to uplift the cause of street children and bangle makers. Children living in Seemapuri do not go to school as there is no school. They are barefooted and spend their days scrounging for something wonderful in heaps of garbage. The children lead miserable lives, caught in the vicious circle of poverty into which they have fallen due to the middlemen, sahuks, and law enforcement officials.

Media can create awareness about the underprivileged. We need to garner support from youngsters and start night schools for children like Saheb-e-Alam. There is hope when Anees Jung encounters youngsters like Mukesh who dares to dream. More people need to come forward and create an environment in which these children dare to dream.

2. "None of them knows that it is illegal for children like him to work in the glass furnaces with high temperatures". What can be done to improve a lot of poor children in India?

Ans. The problem of employment of children in hazardous conditions is prevalent in India. The Government has taken measures to curb this malpractice. However, the implementation of the laws must be stringent. The children must be provided with education. Moreover, the parents also have to be made aware of the hazards and dangers their children face in such working in hazardous conditions.

Most of the children working in Firozabad lose their eyesight before they become adults. There is a vicious cycle of poverty due to middlemen, sahu-kars and law enforcers. A situation must be created where the children can exercise their right to education and their parents receive their dues.

3. 'None of them know that it is illegal for children like him to work in the glass furnaces with high temperatures in dingy cells without air and light' These words from 'Lost Spring' throw light on the grinding poverty that forces many children in India to lead a life of exploitation whereby they have to slog in subhuman conditions. Driven by a concern for such children, who lose their childhood and who go through an unjust treatment, write an article in 100-150 words on 'Child Labour in India.'

Ans.

CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

A child, whose childhood has been snatched away, now works hard, day and night, to earn a meagre pay. This is the scenario with more than 10 million children who are employed in hazardous and dangerous trades and industries. At a tender age, they are forced to work for 10-15 hours under sub-human conditions. Fireworks factory, cashew nut industry, bangle-making factories, carpet industry—there are innumerable such factories prevailing in our country where these children are being exploited. They are underpaid and ill-treated. As a result, they develop many life-long deformities like losing their eyesight, asthma, bone deformity, etc.

In spite of the constitutional laws against child labour and RTE which enforces the right to education for each and every child below the age of 14 years, these children are deprived of any education. Their day starts in factories and ends there.

It is said that children are the future of a nation. We need to ponder on what kind of future are we building. With so many children stuck in the clutches of child labour, we are building an uneducated unhealthy and diseased India. So, it is high time that the government and society work for these underprivileged children by strictly implementing the law and rehabilitating them.