

Flamingo Chapter-2

Lost Spring: Stories of Stolen Childhood

“Lost spring”, an extract from Anees Jung's book "The Lost Spring- Stories of stolen childhood" has a tinge of irony. Spring being the best season of a year, is full of colour, fragrance, freshness, renewal and growth. Similarly, the childhood of human life is often linked to spring, as it marks the beginning of human life, full of joy, pleasure, play and growth. The writer expresses her concern over the exploitation of childhood in hazardous jobs like rag-picking and bangle making. Abject poverty and thoughtless traditions result in the loss of childhood of millions of children like Saheb and Mukesh by working hard to support themselves and their families rather than enjoying their childhood by playing and seeking education. There is a dire need to provide these poverty stricken children, opportunity to dare, dream and do and a life of dignity.

Thus the title brings out the depravity of child labour in a very telling way. 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 hardships early in their lives. The writer encounters Saheb - a rag picker whose parents have left behind the life of poverty in Dhaka to earn a living in Delhi. His family like many other families of rag pickers lives in Seemapuri. They do not have any 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 for rummaging in the garbage.

It is the only way of earning a living. They live in impoverished conditions but resign to their fate. The writer is pained to see Saheb-e-alam, a rag picker whose name means the ruler of universe, losing the spark of childhood and roaming barefoot with his friends.

Now, from morning to noon, Saheb works in a tea stall and is paid Rs. 800 per month. He sadly realizes that he is no longer a free bird and master of his own will. He is more of a bonded labourer with surrendered freedom and identity and this loss weighs heavily on his tender shoulders.



The author then tells about another victim of poverty, Mukesh who wants to be a motor mechanic and wishes to drive a car. Hailing from Firozabad, the centre of India's bangle making and glass blowing industry, he has always worked in the glass making industry. He lives in a stinking surrounding with choked lanes and garbage piles all around in a half built shack with thatched dead grass roof with iron door and his family of three generations uses firewood stove and aluminium utensils.

His family like the others there do not know that it is illegal for children to work in such close proximity to furnaces, with such high temperature. 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 most of them have lost their eyesight before even attaining adulthood. Their desire to dream and dare is snubbed in their childhood only.

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 - 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.

