

Lost Spring *Stories of Stolen Childhood*



Anees Jung

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.

INTRODUCTION

Lost Spring, based on socio-economic problems, is a sad commentary on how poverty and tradition condemn children to exploitation and misery. The lesson reveals grinding poverty in India and exposes the underbelly of India's economic progress. The author depicts miserable and pitiable conditions which our children live in. The title signifies how childhood, often compared to Spring and marked by fun, frolic and merriment, is snatched away from the children. The children in **Seemapuri** and **Firozabad** are exploited badly and are deprived of their childhood, i.e. the spring of their life.

SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Sometimes I find a Rupee in the garbage

Saheb is a rag-picker who scrounges the garbage deposits to sustain his living. He and his family, refugees from Bangladesh, have come to the big city "looking for gold". He is unable to study due to the lack of schools in his neighbourhood. The narrator jokingly makes a false promise to open a school for him but is later left embarrassed when he keeps approaching her enquiring about the school. Saheb's full name, Saheb-e-Alam meaning "lord of the universe", is ironic because he, along with others like him, is outright downtrodden. The author wonders if staying barefoot is just a tradition among the poor or "only an excuse to explain away a perpetual state of poverty".

The author recalls a story about a man from Udipi who, as a young son of a priest, used to pray for a pair of shoes. After thirty years, when the author visits the place, she finds that the situation has slightly improved because the son of the present priest now wears shoes and goes to school. However, the author pines at the thought of the still barefooted rag pickers of her neighbourhood.

Seemapuri in Delhi, is home to 10,000 rag-pickers, mostly Bangladeshi refugees who came here in 1971. These people live in mud structures with roofs made of tin and tarpaulin.

The ration cards, which allow them to buy grains, and the garbage are their means of survival. They believe that their transit shacks are a better place than their native villages that provide no food. Once in a while the children manage to find coins and rupee notes in the garbage heaps. The author notices how such occasional findings help the children to cling on to hope and life.

Saheb reveals his desire of playing tennis to the author. Even though he has managed to find a discarded pair of tennis shoes, the author knows the game itself “is out of his reach”. Contrary to his heartfelt desire, Saheb eventually ends up picking up a job in a tea stall where he is paid 800 rupees and all his meals. One morning, he meets the author on his way to a milk booth carrying a canister to fetch milk for his master, and the author observes how, in the process of earning a few hundred rupees, Saheb has lost his freedom and ‘carefree look’.

I want to drive a car

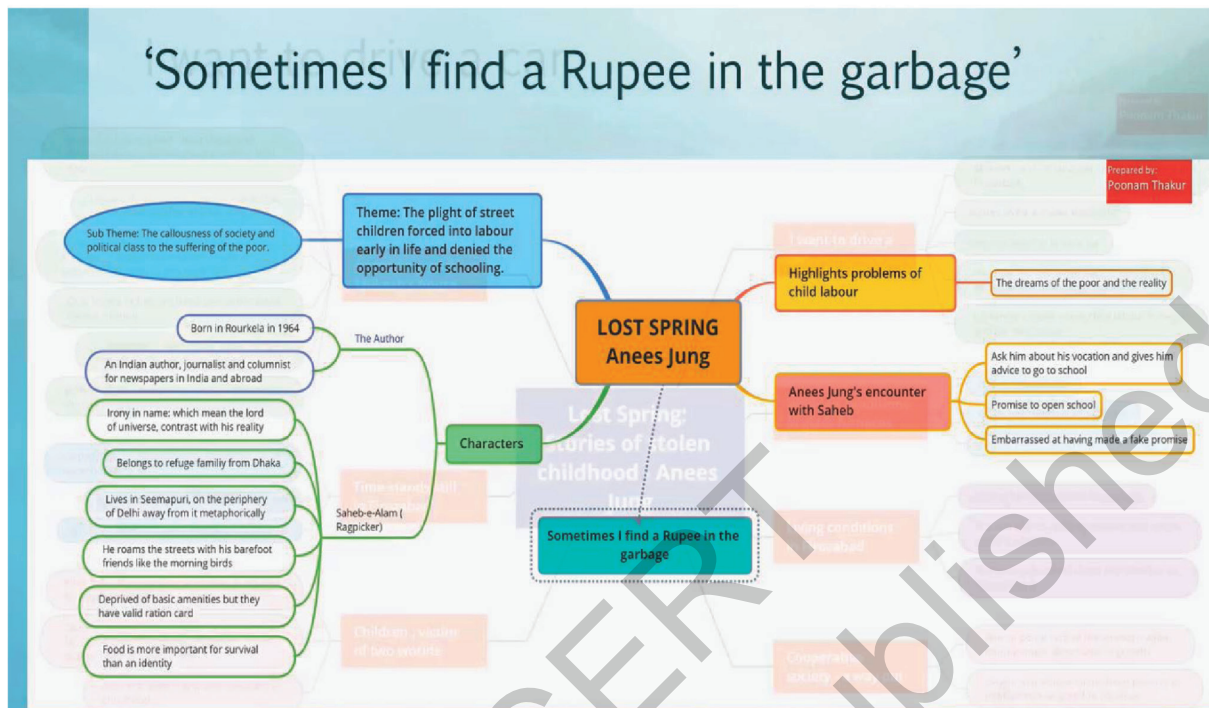
Mukesh belongs to a family of bangle-makers in Firozabad. Most of the families in the place are unaware of the illegality of their action in engaging children in such a hazardous industry. Even though children in such families take up the family profession, Mukesh wants to be a motor mechanic and drive a car. Mukesh takes the author to his house which is one among many of the dilapidated houses of bangle makers, constructed in stinking lanes. Mukesh’s father has been unable to

change the condition of the house and the family, in spite of working very hard. The family now consisted of the father, the grandmother, the elder brother and his wife, and Mukesh.

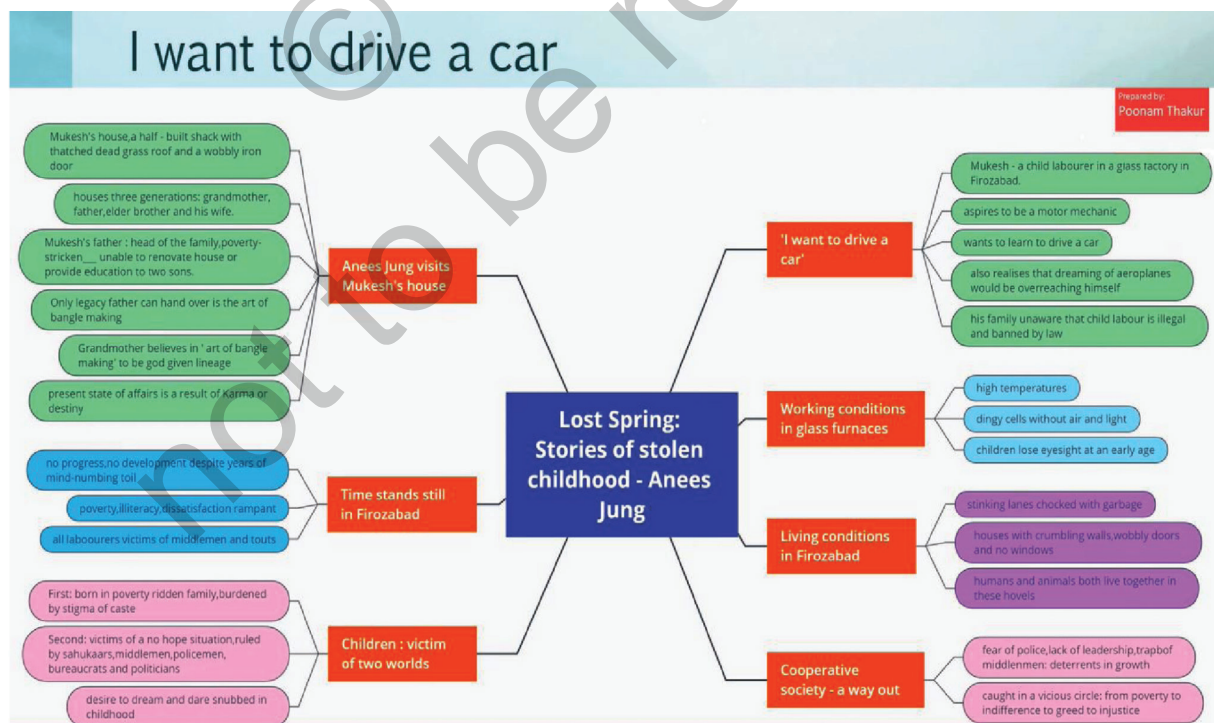
According to Mukesh’s grandmother, once born into the caste of bangle-makers, they have no way out but to surrender to their destiny. The grandmother recalls how her husband finally turned blind after working for years in the glass-blowing industry. The lives of the people of Firozabad are centred on bangle-making. All their lives they work with colourful bangles only to go blind in their later years. The author observes a young girl, Savita and ponders over the life of women in that region. Before marriage they make bangles, possibly without ever realising its sanctity, and after marriage wear them. The only boon some of these people have is a roof over their heads; but, they are not able to manage a proper full time meal.

Even after years of slogging, there has hardly been any change in the scenario of Firozabad. People seem to have stopped dreaming. The injustice of the social and legal system is the proverbial last straw for this already desolated section of people. The young men are bogged down by the police, the deceptive middlemen and their own destinies, leaving them no choice but to give in to the imposed way of life. The prospect of Mukesh attempting to break this cycle seems to the author like a ray of hope: a small step, but a start nevertheless.

(1)



(2)



IMPORTANT WORD NOTES

WORDS	MEANINGS
Encounter	To meet with
Scrounging	Searching for
Garbage	Waste food, paper etc that you throw away
Mutter	To speak in a very quiet voice
Glibly	Without showing much thought
Embarrassed	Shy, ashamed
Abound	To exist in great quantities or number
Barefoot	Not wearing anything on feet
Perpetual	Continuing for a long period of time without interruption
Desolation	The state of ruin or destruction
Periphery	Outer edge of an area
Tattered	Old and torn, in bad condition
Furnace	A place for heating metal or glass to a very high temperature
Dingy	Dark and dirty
Slog	To work hard
Stinking	Having strong unpleasant smell
Hovels	Houses that are dirty and unfit to live
Mounds	Heaps
Unkempt	Not neat or tidy
Draped	Covered with clothes
Lament	To express sadness
Apathy	Indifference
Hurtling	Moving very fast

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

1. Who is the author of Lost Spring?

- A) James Bond
- B) Arundhati Roy
- C) Sudha Murthy
- D) Anees Jung

Ans: D) Anees Jung

2. This story is an excerpt from which book of the author?

- A) Lost Spring – Stories of Stolen Childhood
- B) Unveiling India
- C) Breaking the Silence
- D) The Song of India

Ans: A) Lost Spring – Stories of Stolen Childhood

3. What does the author analyse in the story “Lost Spring”?

- A) Rich people
- B) Garbage
- C) Poor children and their exploitation
- D) Her works

Ans: C) Poor children and their exploitation

4. What forces the children to live a life of exploitation?

- A) Greed
- B) Extreme Poverty
- C) Peers
- D) Parents

Ans: B) Extreme Poverty

5. According to the author what was garbage for the parents?

- A) Means of entertainment
- B) Means of joy
- C) Means of sorrow
- D) Means of survival

Ans: D) Means of survival

6. According to the author what was garbage for the children ?

- A) Means of entertainment
- B) Means of timepass
- C) Means of playing
- D) A wonder

Ans: D) A wonder

7. What is the meaning of Saheb -e- Alam?

- A) Owner
- B) Rich man
- C) Poor man

D) Lord of the Universe

Ans: D) Lord of the Universe

8. Where was Saheb employed?
- A) At a tea stall in Seemapuri
 - B) At a saree shop
 - C) At a jewellery shop
 - D) At a sweet shop

Ans: A) At a tea stall in Seemapuri

9. What do the boys appear like to the author in the story?
- A) Morning crows
 - B) Evening crows
 - C) Morning birds
 - D) Evening Birds

Ans: C) Morning birds

10. What does the title 'Lost Spring' symbolise?
- A) Lost blooming childhood
 - B) Autumn season
 - C) Lost money
 - D) Lost age

Ans: A) Lost blooming childhood

11. Why did Saheb go through garbage dumps?
- A) To find a silver coin
 - B) A rupee
 - C) A ten rupee note

D) All of these

Ans: D) All of these

12. Why did Saheb's family leave their house?
- A) Because the storm had swept away their house and fields
 - B) To enjoy a life of leisure
 - C) To find friends
 - D) To go to college

Ans: A) Because the storm had swept away their house and fields

13. What are the hazards of working in the glass bangles industry?
- A) Poor health
 - B) Impaired vision
 - C) Miserable life
 - D) All of these

Ans: D) All of these

14. What is the function of the glass blowing industry?
- A) To make windows
 - B) To make doors
 - C) To mould glass
 - D) To mould glass and make colourful bangles

Ans: D) To mould glass and make colourful bangles

15. The city of Firozabad is famous

- A) For casteism
- B) For ragpickers
- C) For poverty
- D) For bangles

Ans: D) For bangles

16. What is the means of survival in Seemapuri?

- A) Work
- B) Merchandising
- C) Education
- D) Ragpicking

Ans: D) Ragpicking

SHORT ANSWERS TYPE QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

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

Ans: Saheb is a ragpicker and he looks for valuable items of day to day life in the garbage dumps, which can be sold or reused by them. Sometimes he finds a silver coin, even a ten rupee note in the garbage. As there is always hope of finding more, he searches through the garbage. He is in Seemapuri, a place located in the outskirts of Delhi. Saheb has come from Dhaka, Bangladesh.

2. What explanations does the author offer for the children not wearing

footwear? Ans: The author comes across many shoeless ragpicker children in her neighbourhood. According to her, one explanation of this state of being barefoot is that it is a tradition among the people of his community. However, the author quickly mentions that calling it a tradition could be just a means of justification of the extreme state of poverty where they are unable to afford footwear and other basic necessities.

3. Is Saheb happy working at the tea-stall? Explain.

Ans: No. Saheb seems not to be happy working at the tea stall. Though he is paid 800 rupees and all his meals, he seems to have lost his freedom. His face has lost his carefree look that he had when he was working as a ragpicker. The steel canister seems heavier than the plastic bag he used to carry. He is no longer his own master but a mere servant at the tea-stall where the owner of the stall controls all his movements.

4. What makes the city of Firozabad famous?

Ans: Firozabad is famous for the glass bangles produced in the city. The place is known as the centre of India's glass-blowing industry.

5. Mention the hazards of working in the glass bangles industry.

Ans: The bangle makers have to work around furnaces with high temperature in dark dingy cells without proper facility

of air and light. The dust from polishing the bangles is injurious to eyes. The people, especially children working in the industry often lose their eyesight before they become adults. Apart from that people also suffer from lung and heart diseases later in their lives after working in a hot environment.

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

Ans: Mukesh dares to dream and has a way out of his situation. He aspires to become a motor mechanic. On the other hand, his family is too tired and scared to do something to come out of their grim situation.

7. Why do not the poor bangle makers organise themselves into a co-operative?

Ans: The poor bangle makers do not organise themselves into a co-operative because of the cruel circle of the middlemen. They do not let them form a co-operative. They use their money as power and put the police after them. They are caught and beaten by the police. They are put into jail on false charges of illegal acts. The poor bangle makers also have no leader to guide them.

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

1. Write a brief note on the town of Firozabad.

Ans: Firozabad is a town in India. It is famous for its bangles. Every other family here is engaged in making bangles. It is the centre of India's glass-blowing industry. The families living in Firozabad have been working around glass furnaces for generations. They weld glass and make bangles which are used by women of the country where these people have always been very poor. They have to work in high temperatures in dingy cells without proper ventilation.

There are around 20,000 children working in the glass blowing industry where they have to work all day in those dark places. Because of this reason, their eyes get more adjusted to the dark than to the light outside and many of them lose their eyesight even before they become adults. The poor bangle makers lead a miserable life. They are exploited by the middlemen, policemen, saukars, bureaucrats and politicians.

2. What does the title "Lost Spring" convey?

Ans: Spring is a season which symbolises youth and happiness. The poets have used the term spring to convey a happy state or a person during his youth. Youth is considered to be the happiest phase of human life.

But here in the lesson, the writer has described the stories of children belonging to two areas of India where they are living in a pathetic condition and are deprived of the basic necessities

like- food, cloth and shelter. They are engaged in different petty jobs which provide them very little money with which they try to survive. They are too poor to avail basic education unlike children of their age.

Thus through the title “Lost Spring” the writer wants to convey the dark and dreary life of the slum- dwellers like Saheb and Mukesh.

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