
Chapter - 2

Lost Spring: Stories of Stolen Childhood

By Anees Jung

The author examines and analyses the impoverished conditions and traditions that condemn children to a life of exploitation these children are denied an 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 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 for rummaging in the garbage.

It is the only way of earning the life they live in impoverished conditions but are resigned to their fate. The writer is pained to see Saheb, a rag picker whose name means the ruler of earth, lose the spark of childhood and roams barefooted with his friends.

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. The author then tells 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.
