

LOST SPRING.

This story narrates about the children of the bangle makers of Firozabad. The essay does so through the lives of two children, Saheb-e-Alam and Mukesh whose spring or childhood is lost in misery and poverty. Saheb is the son of two parents who migrated from Bangladesh. They came to Delhi in 1971 as their house was swept away by repeated storms. Then they began to live in Seemapuri, a slum of Delhi. Saheb like many other children of the slum was a

rag picker. They searched the rags and garbage and tried to find out coins. Sometimes they found one rupee coins and sometimes even ten rupee coins. Saheb did not attend any school as there was no school nearby. He was too poor to wear chappals. Saheb liked the game of tennis. Someone gave him a pair of tennis shoes. But he would never get the chance to play the game himself. At last, Saheb got employed in a tea stall. He was not happy as he had lost his freedom. But he had no choice in the matter.

The life of Mukesh at Firozabad was no better. Mukesh lived with his elder brother who was a bangle maker. He wanted to be a driver and a motor-mechanic, not at all eager to continue bangle making. But the people thought that it was their karam or the result of their karma in the previous birth that they were born into the caste of bangle-makers. So they were destined to make bangles and they could not do anything else. Thousands of children are engaged in bangle making and many of them lost their eyesight before becoming adults. They did not know that it was illegal for children to work in that hazardous condition in the glass factories. The story is the same in every family. Mukesh took the writer to his house where the writer came to know that his grandfather had become blind working in the factory. Similarly in another family, the author came to know how the husband was happy that he had been able to make a house for his own family to live in but the wife complained that she did not get a full meal in her whole life.

Hundreds of years of slavery had killed the initiative of people to think of a better life. They carried on their miserable life as they did not have the courage to rebel against tradition. They did not have money enough to start their own new kind of enterprise. If someone dared to start a new line, there were police, middle-men, sahukars and politicians to persecute them. Police, middle-men and others would not allow them to take any other vocation. Justice after all is the right of the rich and the powerful, not of the helpless like Mukesh. The condition of the life of Saheb or Mukesh was far from desirable. It should not be allowed to continue. But some people must bell the cat. The writer was happy when he came to know that some young men like Mukesh was ready to take the plunge, rebel against tradition and start a new life.

Second story:

Raju works at a roadside dhaba for sixteen hours a day. Idrees has lost his memory and bears on his body the scars of being tortured at the carpet-manufacturing unit where he worked. Saheb scrounges the garbage dumps on the streets of Delhi for his daily wages. Munni has travelled long distances from her village home, looking for work as a domestic help in the city. Like Raju and

Idrees, Saheb and Munni, millions of children all over the country are doomed to a life of backbreaking toil. Half adult, half children, victims of physical and mental abuse, they represent the dark underbelly of India's economic growth. In Lost Spring: Stories of Stolen Childhood, best-selling author Anees Jung exposes a national shame: children cleaning floors and tables in shanty restaurants; making locks, slates and fireworks; rolling bidis; weaving saris and carpets; packing and hauling loads in factories and stone quarries. With her trademark sensitivity and insight, she analyses the grinding poverty and traditions sanctified by caste and religion which condemn these children to a life of exploitation. In this bleak world, the author also finds stories of resilience and fortitude-children who have refused to accept their condition, thus opening new vistas for themselves and others like them. She also documents incredible profiles in courage-individuals and institutions who battle not only governmental and bureaucratic apathy but also social values and cultural norms that support and accept the concept of child labour