

# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

- Anees Jung (1964)



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# **Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood**

- Anees Jung

## **PRELUDE**



According to a data released in 2017,  
12 percent of all children in India are  
engaged in some form of Child labour

...more than 12 million

# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

## Seemapuri

Saheb – “Sometimes I find a Rupee in the Garbage”



## Firozabad

Mukesh – “I want to drive a car”





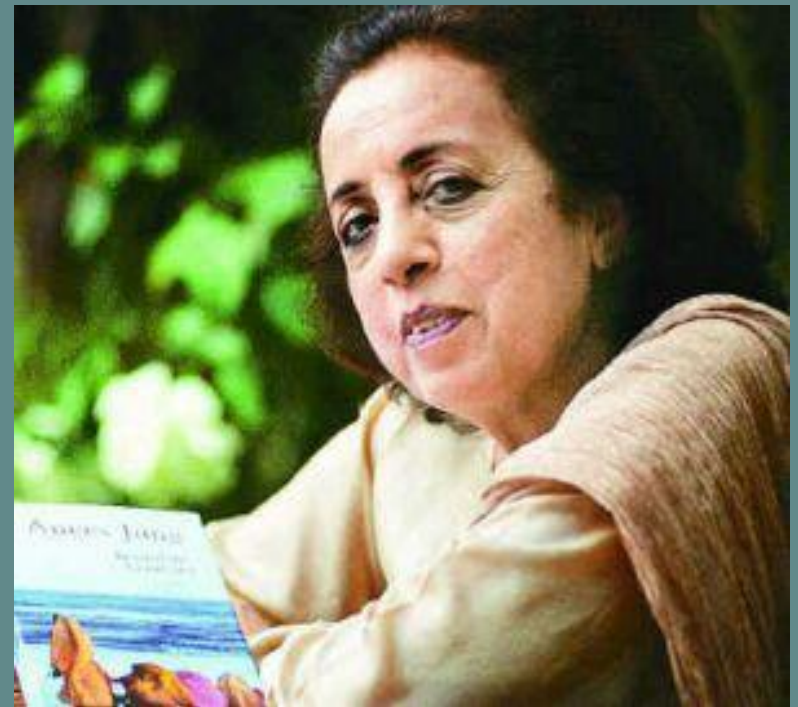
# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood



**-Anees Jung (1964)**

## **About the Author :**

Anees Jung was born in Rourkela. She 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.



# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood



**Background/Context :** Lost Spring, based on socio-economic problems (poverty is considered a legacy), 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 snapped 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.



# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

**Theme :** The plight of street children forced into labour early in life and denied the opportunity of schooling

**Sub-Theme :** The **callousness** of society and the political class to the sufferings of the poor

**Plot :** Rag-picking in Seemapuri  
&  
Bangle Making in Firozabad



**The commentary highlights child labour & exploitation of the underprivileged.**

# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

## CHARACTERS :

- ❑ **Narrator**—Anees Jung, the author
- ❑ **Saheb-e-Alam**—A rag-picker in Seemapuri
- ❑ **A man from Udipi, the priest and his son**
- ❑ **Savita** – A young girl and a bangle maker
- ❑ **An old woman**
- ❑ **Mukesh** – a boy who wants to break the jinx of bangle making
- ❑ **Mukesh's sister-in-law & his brother**
- ❑ **Mukesh's grandmother & grandfather**
- ❑ **Mukesh's father**



# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

## SUMMARY

### ***‘SOMETIMES I FIND A RUPEE IN THE GARBAGE’ - Saheb - the rag-picker***

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 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 **ironical 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”.

### ***Recollecting the story of a priest’s son***

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.



# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

## SUMMARY

### **Seemapuri- The haven for rag-pickers**

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.

### **Discrepancy between Saheb's desire and reality**

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'.

# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

## SUMMARY

### ***“I WANT TO DRIVE A CAR”- Mukesh and his family***

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.

### **Mechanical life of a bangle maker**

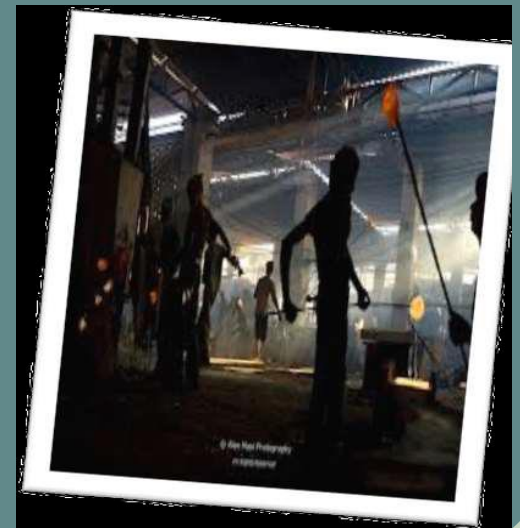
According to Mukesh's grandmother, once born into the caste of bangle-makers, they have no way out but to surrender to their destiny. The grandmother recalls how her husband finally turned blind after working for years in the glass-blowing industry. The lives of the people of Firozabad are centred on 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.

# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

## SUMMARY

### **The unfavourable social system**

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.





**Author's meeting with Saheb, a ragpicker**

- meets Saheb, a ragpicker, who scrounges for gold in the garbage dumps
- Saheb belongs to a refugee family from Bangladesh
- author advises him to go to school
- Saheb tells him that there is no school in his neighbourhood
- author gives him a hope by promising to open a school in his neighbourhood
- feels embarrassed at having made a promise that she cannot keep

**Irony in Saheb's name and existence**

- Saheb's full name is 'Saheb-e-Alam' which means 'lord of the universe' but he is a ragpicker; hence the irony
- ironical that he roams the streets with other ragpickers
- all ragpickers are barefoot
- lead a poor and miserable life
- author observes that being barefoot has been a tradition in the poverty-stricken India
- author expresses wonder at this excuse

**Author's observation on the past and the present**

- remembers a priest's barefoot son from a town named Udipi thirty years ago
- longed for a pair of shoes
- thirty years later, the author observes a conspicuous change
- present day priest's son is dressed in grey uniform and wears socks and shoes
- but many still like other ragpickers remain shoeless

**Ragpickers' dwelling – Seemapuri**

- most refugees migrated from Bangladesh in 1971
- dwell in Seemapuri – a place on the periphery of Delhi
- their dwelling – a structure of mud with roofs of tin and tarpaulin, devoid of sewage, drainage or running water
- lived here without an identity but with ration cards that enable them to buy grain
- food more important than identity
- happy to live here where they get grain than in their own country where they get no grain
- ragpicking for their survival
- garbage to them is gold



# SEQUENCE & KEY POINTS

3

## (SEEMAPURI)

- a chance rupee or a coin in garbage sustains their hope and they keep scrounging in the hope of finding more

### **Saheb's yearning**

- yearns to play tennis, to wear shoes
- but the game is out of his reach

### **Saheb as an employee**

- gets a job in a tea-stall, earns Rs. 800/- per month
- meets the author while fetching milk in a steel canister for his employer
- his face loses the carefree look
- steel canister appears heavier than the plastic bag
- appears burdened and unhappy
- no longer a master of his own self
- an employee with no freedom

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## (FIROZABAD)

### **'I want to drive a car'**

#### **Mukesh's desire**

- a child labourer in a glass factory in Firozabad
- wishes to become a motor mechanic
- desires to learn to drive a car
- Mukesh and his family engaged in making bangles
- his family unaware that child labour is illegal

#### **Harzardous conditions in glass furnaces**

- high temperatures
- dingy cell without air and light
- poorly ventilated
- children often lose the brightness of their eyes





## Living conditions of bangle-makers in Firozabad

- stinking lanes choked with garbage
- houses with crumbling walls, wobbly doors, and without windows
- both humans and animals live together in these houses

## Author's visit to Mukesh's house

- Mukesh's house, a half-built shack thatched with dead grass, and a wobbly iron door
- firewood stove, aluminium utensils are used
- Mukesh, his father, his grandmother, his elder brother and wife of his elder brother live in the house

## Wife of Mukesh's elder brother

- a frail young woman
- cooking evening meal for the whole family
- her eyes filled with smoke
- commands respect as a *bahu*
- incharge of the household
- observes the custom of covering her face with a veil in front of male elders

## Mukesh's father

- poor bangle maker
- worked as a tailor, then a bangle maker
- failed to renovate his house
- could not give education to his two sons
- only taught them the art of bangle making

## Mukesh's grandmother's philosophy of life

- believes in theory of *Karama* or destiny
- her husband has become blind with the dust of glass bangles
- his blindness the result of his *Karama* or destiny
- believes that the art of bangle making is a God-given lineage



**Birth in the caste of bangle-makers : Their *Karama***

- poverty-stricken
- children join their elders' profession of bangle making
- weld piece of glass into bangles
- their eyes more adjusted to the dark than to the light outside
- they often lose their eyesight before they become adults

**Savita — a young girl**

- sits along with an elderly woman and solders pieces of glass
- makes bangles but unaware of the sanctity of bangles
- unaware that bangles symbolise Indian woman's *suhaag* (husband's long life)
- will realise when she becomes a bride
- like other women, wear bangles but lose eyesight
- lead a poor life
- become old with bangles on wrists

**Nothing has changed in Firozabad**

- no progress, no development
- mind-numbing toil has killed bangle-maker's initiative
- lost the ability to dream

**Author's suggestion to form co-operative society risky**

- risk of being hauled up by the police, beaten and dragged to jail
- dearth of a leader
- trap of middlemen hampers growth
- caught in a vicious circle : from poverty to apathy to greed to injustice

**Sufferings of the children**

- suffer because born in a poor family
- burdened by the stigma of caste
- suffer because exploited by middlemen, the policemen, the bureaucrats and the politicians

***...as if destined to be poor***

# SEQUENCE & KEY POINTS

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## (FIROZABAD)

### Lack of initiative and courage

- burdened with poverty
- children lack courage
- dare not dream

### Mukesh – an exception

- desires to be a motor mechanic
- does not dream of flying an aeroplane, content to dream of cars
- few aeroplanes fly over Firozabad



## VOCABULARY

<i>encounter</i>	= to meet with
<i>scrounging</i>	= searching for
<i>garbage</i>	= waste food, paper etc. that you throw away
<i>amidst</i>	= in the middle of
<i>mutter</i>	= to speak in a very quiet voice
<i>glibly</i>	= without showing much thought
<i>embarrassed</i>	= shy, ashamed
<i>hollow</i>	= not sincere
<i>abound</i>	= to exist in great quantities or numbers
<i>bleak</i>	= not encouraging
<i>unaware</i>	= not knowing about something
<i>represents</i>	= means
<i>barefoot</i>	= not wearing anything on feet
<i>shuffle</i>	= to move from one foot to another
<i>tradition</i>	= belief or custom in existence for a long time
<i>perpetual</i>	= continuing for a long period of time without interruption



# VOCABULARY

<i>desolation</i>	= the state of ruin or destruction
<i>panting</i>	= breathing quickly with short breaths
<i>ragpickers</i>	= persons collecting waste
<i>acquaintance</i>	= a person that you know but who is not a close friend
<i>periphery</i>	= outer edge of an area
<i>metaphorically</i>	= symbolically
<i>squatters</i>	= persons who live at a place without paying any rent
<i>wilderness</i>	= undeveloped area of land
<i>devoid</i>	= completely lacking in something
<i>survival</i>	= continuing to live
<i>tattered</i>	= old and torn, in bad condition
<i>transit home</i>	= home that provides temporary accommodation
<i>wrapped in</i>	= wonderful
<i>wonder</i>	
<i>fenced</i>	= surrounded by barbed wire
<i>content</i>	= happy and satisfied
<i>hums</i>	= sings a tune with his lips closed
<i>discarded</i>	= thrown away
<i>intently</i>	= with strong interest
<i>canister</i>	= a container with a lid

<i>mirage</i>	= an illusion
<i>furnace</i>	= a place for heating metal or glass to a very high temperature
<i>dingy</i>	= dark and dirty
<i>enforce</i>	= to put into effect
<i>slog</i>	= to work hard
<i>beam</i>	= to become bright
<i>volunteers</i>	= offers to do without being forced
<i>stinking</i>	= having strong unpleasant smell
<i>choked</i>	= blocked
<i>hovels</i>	= houses that are dirty and unfit to live
<i>crumble</i>	= breaking into small pieces
<i>wobbly</i>	= moving in an unsteady way, shaky
<i>primeval</i>	= ancient
<i>shack</i>	= a small building usually made of wood or metal
<i>sizzling</i>	= extremely hot
<i>platter</i>	= a large plate for serving food
<i>chop</i>	= cut into small pieces
<i>veil</i>	= a thin covering to hide the face
<i>impoverished</i>	= poor
<i>renovate</i>	= to repair and paint an old building
<i>lineage</i>	= ancestry

# VOCABULARY

*spiral* = a shape with a continuous curved line winding around a central point

*mounds* = heaps

*unkempt* = not neat or tidy

*flickering* = going on and off as it shines and burns (of a light)

*dark* = dull

*symbolise* = to represent

*soldering* = joining together

*sanctity* = state of being holy

*dawn on her* = will begin to understand

*draped* = covered with clothes

*drained* = tired and without energy

*lament* = to express sadness

*mind-numbing* = very dull and boring

*vicious circle* = a situation in which one problem causes another problem which then makes the first problem worse

*hailed up* = forced to appear

*dragged* = pulled along with effort and difficulty

*apathy* = indifference

*distinct* = easily or clearly heard, seen or felt

*stigma* = feelings of disapproval by people about something

*imposed* = to make somebody accept

*hurtling* = moving very fast



# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

## Literary Devices :

- **Hyperbole** is a way of speaking or writing that makes something sound better or more exciting than it really is.

For example: **Garbage to them is gold.**

- A **Metaphor**, as you may know, compares two things or ideas that are not very similar. A metaphor describes a thing in terms of a single quality or feature of some other thing; we can say that a metaphor “transfers” a quality of one thing to another.

For example: **The road was a ribbon of light.**

- **Simile** is a word or phrase that compares one thing with another using the words ‘like’ or ‘as’.

For example: **As white as snow.**

# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

Carefully read the following phrases and sentences taken from the text.  
Can you identify the literary device in each example?

1. Saheb-e-Alam which means the lord of the universe is directly in contrast to what Saheb is in reality. - **Irony**
2. Drowned in an air of desolation. - **Metaphor**
3. Seemapuri, a place on the periphery of Delhi yet miles away from it, metaphorically. - **Antithesis**
4. **For the children it is wrapped in wonder; for the elders it is a means of survival.** - **Paradox**
5. As her hands move mechanically like the tongs of a machine, I wonder if she knows the sanctity of the bangles she helps make. - **Simile**
6. She still has bangles on her wrist, but not light in her eyes. -
7. Few airplanes fly over Firozabad. - **Contrast**
8. Web of poverty. - **Metaphor**
9. Scrounging for gold. - **Hyperbole**
10. And survival in Seemapuri means rag-picking. Through the years, it has acquired the proportions of a fine art. - **Hyperbole**
11. The steel canister seems heavier than the plastic bag he would carry so lightly over his shoulders. - **Paradox**



# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

Literary devices are techniques that writers use to create a special and pointed effect in their writing, to convey information, or to help readers understand their writing on a deeper level. Often, literary devices are used in writing for emphasis or clarity. Authors will also use literary devices to get readers to connect more strongly with either a story as a whole or specific characters or themes.

**Paradox -** A seemingly absurd and illogical or contradictory statement or proposition which when investigated may prove to be well founded or true.

**Example:** Here's a famous paradoxical sentence: "This statement is false." If the statement is true, then it isn't actually false (as it suggests). But if it's false, then the statement is true! Thus, this statement is a paradox because it is **both true and false at the same time.**

# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

**Irony** - The expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect. Irony is a statement in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words. It may also be a situation that ends up in quite a different way than what is generally anticipated. In simple words, it is a difference between appearance and reality.

**Example:** Ref – Irony in the poem ‘The Frog and The Nightingale’

**Antithesis**- Literally means “opposite,” is a rhetorical device in which two opposite ideas are put together in a sentence to achieve a contrasting effect.

e.g. Man proposes, God disposes.

The opening lines of Charles Dickens’ novel *A Tale of Two Cities* provides an unforgettable antithesis example:

“It was the **best** of times, it was the **worst** of times, it was the age of **wisdom**, it was the age of **foolishness**, ...

# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

## POINTS TO PONDER

### Seemapuri (metaphorically far away from Delhi, 10,000 rag-pickers)

- \* Background of Saheb's family – refugees from Bangladesh
- \* Food more important than identity
- \* Political gimmick – Ration Card
- \* Saheb's desire to join a school
- \* Irony in his name and existence
- \* Saheb's yearning – Tennis beyond reach
- \* The story of Udipi
- \* Reality behind not wearing footwear – a perpetual state of poverty
- \* Garbage is gold –different meanings for adults & children, fine arts
- \* Saheb as an employee– lost carefree look, no longer his own master

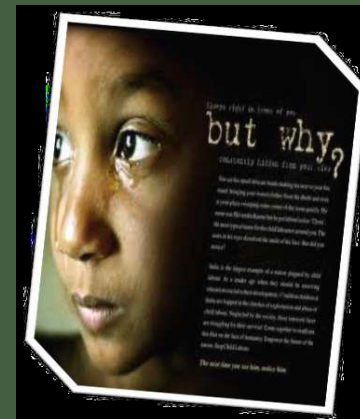


# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

## POINTS TO PONDER

### Firozabad (20,000 children work illegally)

- \* Mukesh – an exception
- \* Pathetic conditions of the bangle makers
- \* Mukesh's family and his father's failed efforts to overcome the tradition
- \* Grandmother's lament and acceptance of the God-given lineage
- \* Savita's ignorance of the symbolical connotation of bangle
- \* Why the bangle makers can't organise themselves into co-operative
- \* Two distinct worlds : caught in web of poverty & stigma of caste - vicious circle – police, middlemen, *sahukars*, keepers of law, bureaucrats, politicians
- \* Mukesh's attitude – optimist, knows his limits – knows flying a plane beyond reach, a ray of hope
- \* Mukesh's dream looms like mirage
- \* Poverty and its impact
- \* Callous attitude of society



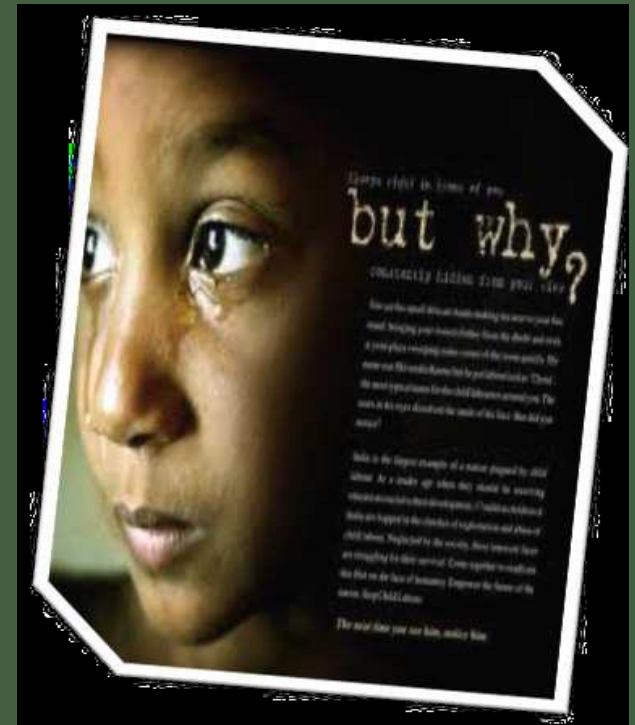


# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood

## HEALTH HAZARDS

...work in the glass furnaces with high temperatures, in dingy cells without air and light; that the law, if enforced, could get him and all those 20,000 children out of the hot furnaces where they slog their daylight hours, often losing the brightness of their eyes. Mukesh's eyes beam as he volunteers to take me home, which he proudly says is being rebuilt. We walk down stinking lanes choked with garbage, past homes that remain hovels with crumbling walls, wobbly doors, no windows, crowded with families of humans and animals coexisting in a primeval state. He stops at the door of one such house...

## POINTS TO PONDER



# Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood



## POINTS TO PONDER

### Two Distinct Worlds:

- one of the family, caught in a web of poverty, burdened by the stigma of caste in which they are born;

- the other a vicious circle of the *sahukars*, the middlemen, the policemen, the keepers of law, the bureaucrats and the politicians. Together they have imposed the baggage on the child that he cannot put down.

# **Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood**

## **Understanding the text**

1. What could be some of the reasons for the migration of people from villages to cities?
2. Would you agree that promises made to poor children are rarely kept? Why do you think this happens in the incidents narrated in the text?
3. What forces conspire to keep the workers in the bangle industry of Firozabad in poverty?

## **Talking about the text**

1. How, in your opinion, can Mukesh realise his dream?
2. Mention the hazards of working in the glass bangles industry.
3. Why should child labour be eliminated and how?

# **Lost Spring- Stories of Stolen Childhood**

## **ASSIGNMENT : QUESTIONS TO TEST COMPREHENSION**

### **Short Answer Questions (30-40 words)**

1. What is the significance of garbage in Seemapuri?
2. Bring out the paradox in the story.
3. Is Saheb happy working at the tea stall?
4. What explanations does the author offer for the children not wearing footwear?
5. What is ironic about Saheb's name?
6. Why is Seemapuri miles away from Delhi metaphorically?
7. How is Mukesh's attitude to his situation different from that of his family?
8. How does Mukesh's grandmother accept the tradition of bangle making?
9. Justify the title of the story?
10. What does the author say about Savita?

### **Long Answer Questions (150 words) :**

1. Why can't the bangle makers in Firozabad organise themselves into co-operative?  
How are they trapped in the web of poverty?
2. Mention the hazards of working in the glass bangle industry in Firozabad.
3. Can Mukesh realize his dreams? Why does his dream 'loom like mirage'?
4. How does the author draw a contrast between the two worlds?
5. 'Lost Spring' is a sad commentary on the political system of our country that condemns thousands of people to a life of abject poverty. Elucidate.
6. 'Lost Spring' examines the grinding poverty and traditions that condemn thousands of children to a life of exploitation. Elaborate.