

In this excerpt taken from Anees Jung's book, *Stories of Stolen Childhood*, the author examines and analyses the grinding poverty and traditions that condemn children to a life of exploitation. There are two stories in this chapter - 1.Saheb A Ragpicker 2.Mukesh A Bangle maker.

### I – Some times I find a rupee in the garbage.(Saheb)

The first part talks about the writer's impressions about the life of the unfortunate rag pickers. The rag pickers migrate from Dhaka and find a settlement in Seemapuri. They end up losing their fields and homes due to storms. They then come to the big city to find a living, but are **poor**. The author then watches Saheb, the rag picker, every morning who is always scrounging for "gold" in his herneighbourhood. Garbage is actually the means of survival for the elders and it is something wrapped in wonder for the children. Sometimes, the children find a coin or two from it. Even these kids have desires and ambitions, but they have no clue about how to achieve them. There are many things that are unreachable to them, for instance, shoes, tennis and similar stuff. Later on, Saheb starts working at a tea stall where he earns 800 Rupees and also gets to eat all the meals. But the job takes away his freedom.

### II – I want to drive a car.(Mukesh)

The second part is about the life of Mukesh, who comes from the family of bangle-makers. Firozabad is quite popular for its glass-blowing industry. A staggering 20,000 children are a part of this business and any law that forbids child labour is brutally ignored here. Also, the working environment and the living conditions are pathetic. Children live in dingy cells and work around hot furnaces that make them blind when they enter adulthood. Since they are weighed down by debt, they cannot think or find any way to escape this trap. The politicians, policemen, middlemen and bureaucrats obstruct their way of progress. Most women in such families think that this is their fate and just follow the tradition. But Mukesh is very different from the rest of the folks there. He has dreams of becoming a motor **mechanic**. The garage is quite far from his house but he shall walk.

## QUESTIONS FROM TEXTBOOK

### THINK AS YOU READ

**Q1. What is Saheb looking for in the garbage dumps? Where is he and where has he come from?**

**Ans.** Saheb is looking for gold in the garbage dumps. He is in the neighbourhood of the author. Saheb has come from Bangladesh. He Came with his mother in 1971. His house was set amidst the green fields of Dhaka. Storms swept away their fields and homes. So they left the country.

**Q2. What explanations does the author offer for the children not wearing footwear?**

**Ans.** One explanation offered by the author is that it is a tradition to stay barefoot. It is not lack of money. He wonders if this is only an excuse to explain away a perpetual state of poverty. He also remembers the story of a poor body who prayed to the goddess for a pair of shoes.

**Q3. Is Saheb happy working at the tea-stall? Explain.**

**Ans.** No, Saheb is not happy working at the tea-stall. He is no longer his own master. His face has lost the carefree look. The steel canister seems heavier than the plastic bag he would carry so lightly over his shoulder. The bag was his. The canister belongs to the man who owns the tea-shop.

### THINK AS YOU READ

### **Q1. What makes the city of Firozabad famous?**

**Ans.** The city of Firozabad is famous for its bangles. Every other family in Firozabad is engaged in making bangles. It is the centre of India's glass-blowing industry. Families have spent generations working around furnaces, welding glass, making bangles for the women in the land.

### **Q2. Mention the hazards of working in the glass bangles industry?(short answer type)**

**Ans.** Boys and girls with their fathers and mothers sit in dark hutments, next to lines of flames of flickering oil lamps. They weld pieces of coloured glass into circles of bangles. Their eyes are more adjusted to the dark than to the light outside. They often end up losing eyesight before they become adults. Even the dust from polishing the glass of bangles is injurious to eyes. Many workers have become blind. The furnaces have very high temperature and therefore very dangerous.

### **Q3. How is Mukesh's attitude to his situation different from that of his family?**

**Ans.** Mukesh's grandmother thinks that the god-given lineage can never be broken. Her son and grandsons are born in the caste of bangle makers. They have seen nothing but bangles. Mukesh's father has taught them what he knows—the art of making bangles. But Mukesh wants to be a motor mechanic. He will go to a garage and learn, though the garage is far away from his home.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT**

### **Q1. What could be some of the reasons for the migration of people from villages to cities?**

**Ans.** People migrate from villages to cities in search of livelihood. Their fields fail to provide them means of survival. Cities provide employment, jobs or other means of getting food. The problem in case of the poor is to feed the hungry members. Survival is of primary concern.

### **Q2. Would you agree that promises made to the poor children are rarely kept? Why do you think this happens in the incidents narrated in the text?**

**Ans.** The promises made to the poor are rarely kept. The author asks Saheb half-joking, whether he will come to her school if she starts one. Saheb agrees to do so. A few days later he asks if the school is ready. The writer feels embarrassed at having made a promise that was not meant. Promises like hers abound in every corner of their bleak world.

### **Q3. What forces conspire to keep the workers in bangle industry of Firozabad in poverty?**

**Ans.** Certain forces conspire to keep the workers in bangle industry of Firozabad in poverty. These include the moneylenders, the middlemen, the policemen, the keepers of law, the bureaucrats and the politicians. Together they impose a heavy burden on the child.

## **TALKING ABOUT THE TEXT**

### **Q1. How, in your opinion, can Mukesh realise his dream?**

**Ans.** Mukesh is the son of a poor bangle-maker of Firozabad. Most of the young men of Firozabad have no initiative or ability to dream, but Mukesh is an exception. He has the capacity to take courage and break from the traditional family occupation. He has strong will power also. He does not want to be a pawn in the hands of the middlemen or moneylenders. He insists on being his own master by becoming a motor mechanic.

He can realise his dream by joining a garage and learn the job of repairing cars and driving them. He will have to overcome many hurdles before he succeeds. Then comes transport problem. Money is the first one. He will have to earn some money himself. The garage is a long way from his home. He will have to cover it twice everyday anyhow—by walking on foot.

Patience, hardwork, firm will and the determination to learn will help him realise his dream.

### **Q2. Mention the hazards of working in the glass bangles industry.(long answer type)**

**Ans.** The glass bangles industry has many health hazards. It usually employs small children. It is illegal to employ very young children in hazardous industries, but certain forces like ! middlemen, moneylenders, police and politicians combine to entrap the poor workers.

Let us first consider the places where bangle makers work. It is a cottage industry. They work in the

glass furnaces with high temperatures. The dingy cells are without air and light. Boys and girls work hard during day next to lines of flames of flickering oil lamps.

They weld pieces of coloured glass into circles of bangles. Their eyes are more adjusted to the dark than to the light outside. That is why, they often end up losing their eyesight before they become adults.

Glass blowing, welding and soldering pieces of glass are all health hazards. Even the dust from polishing the glass of bangles adversely affects the eyes and even adults go blind. Thus, the surroundings, prevailing conditions and the type of job involved-all prove risky to the health of the workers.