



—Stories of Stolen Childhood

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 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.

Notice these expressions in the text. Infer their meaning from the context

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> looking for | <input type="checkbox"/> perpetual state of poverty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> slog their daylight hours | <input type="checkbox"/> dark hutments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> roof over his head | <input type="checkbox"/> imposed the baggage on the child |

'Sometimes I Find a Rupee in the garbage'

'कभी-कभी मुझे कूड़े के ढेर में एक रुपया मिलता है।'

"Why do you do this?" I ask Saheb whom I encounter every morning scrounging for gold in the garbage dumps of my neighbourhood. Saheb left his home long ago. Set amidst the green fields of Dhaka, his home is not even a distant memory. There were many storms that swept away their fields and homes, his mother tells him. That's why they left, looking for gold in the big city where he now lives.

"तुम ऐसा क्यों करते हो?" मैं साहेब से पूछती हूँ जिससे मैंी मुलाकात हर सुबह मेरे पड़ोस के कूड़े के ढेर में होने की (एकमी) खोज करने शुरू होती है। साहेब ने काली सपना पहले अपना घर छोड़ दिया था। उसका घर दो-भो खेतों के बीच स्थित उसका था जब दूर-दूर तक भी उसकी यादगार में नहीं है। यहाँ पर अनेक तूफान आए जो उनके खेतों और घरों को बर्बाद कर गए, उसकी माता उसे बताती है। इसी कारण वे इस बड़े शहर में, यहाँ का अब रहना है, सपनों की तलाश में चल दिए।

"I have nothing else to do," he mutters, looking away.

"Go to school," I say glibly, realising immediately how hollow the advice must sound.

"There is no school in my neighbourhood. When they build one, I will go."

"If I start a school, will you come?" I ask, half-joking.

"Yes," he says, smiling broadly.

A few days later I see him running up to me. "Is your school ready?"

"It takes longer to build a school," I say, embarrassed at having made a promise that was not meant. But promises like mine abound in every corner of his bleak world.

'मेरे पास करने के लिए स्कूल की नहीं है,' का दूर देखते हुए बड़बुदाह है।

'स्कूल (पढ़ने) जाओ,' मैं बड़ी ही नम्रता से, तुम का चकमक करते हुए कि वह सच कहानी सोचती है, कहती है।

'मेरे पड़ोस में कोई स्कूल नहीं है। जब वे एक स्कूल बनाएंगे, मैं चला जाऊँगा।'

'यदि मैं एक स्कूल खोल दूँ, तो क्या तुम नहीं (पढ़ने) जाओगे?' मैं अर्ध-मजाकिया रूप में पूछती हूँ।

'हाँ,' वह पूरी तरह से मुस्कुराते हुए कहता है।

कुछ दिनों पश्चात् मैं उसे अपने पास दीड़कर आते हुए देखती हूँ। 'आपका स्कूल तैयार हो गया है?'

'स्कूल बनाने में बहुत समय लगता है,' एक ऐसा झगड़ा मिलकर कोई अर्थ नहीं था, करने पर तन्वित होते हुए मैंने कहा। परन्तु मेरे जैसे बच्चे उसके गोरम संसार के अत्यंत बच्चे में प्रचुर मात्रा में हैं।

After months of knowing him, I ask him his name. "Saheb-e-Alam," he announces. He does not know what it means. If he knew its meaning - lord of the universe - he would have a hard time believing it. Unaware of what his name represents, he roams the streets with his friends, an army of barefoot boys who appear like the morning birds and disappear at noon. Over the months, I have come to recognise each of them.

"Why aren't you wearing chappals?" I ask one.

"My mother did not bring them down from the shelf," he answers simply.

... (Hindi text) ...

... (Hindi text) ...

... (Hindi text) ...

I remember a story a man from Odisha once told me. As a young boy he would go to school past an old temple, where his father was a priest. He would stop briefly at the temple and pray for a pair of shoes. Thirty years later I visited his town and the temple, which was now drowned in an sea of squalor. In the backyard, where lived the new priest, there were red and white plastic chairs. A young boy dressed in a grey uniform, wearing socks and shoes, arrived panting and threw his school bag on a folding bed. Looking at the boy, I remembered the prayer another boy had made in the goddess when he had finally got a pair of shoes. "Let me never lose them." The goddess had granted his prayer. Young boys like the son of the priest now wore shoes. But many others like the ragpickers in my neighbourhood remain shoeless.



... (Hindi text) ...

My acquaintance with the barefoot ragpickers leads me to Seemapuri, a place on the periphery of Delhi yet miles away from it, metaphorically. Those who live here are squatters who came from Bangladesh back in 1971. Subeh's family is among them. Seemapuri was then a wilderness. It still is, but it is no longer empty. In structures of mud, with roofs of tin and tarpaulin, devoid of sewage, drainage or running water, live 10,000 ragpickers. They have lived here for more than thirty years without an identity, without permits but with ration cards that get their names on voters' lists and enable them to buy grain. Food is more important for survival than an identity. "If at the end of the day we can feed our families and go to bed without an aching stomach, we would rather live here than in the fields that gave us no grain," say a group of women in tattered saris when I ask them why they left their beautiful land of green fields and rivers. Wherever they find food, they pitch their tents that become transit homes. Children grow up in them, becoming partners in survival. And survival in Seemapuri

means rag picking. Through the years, it has acquired the perspective of a few men. Garbage to them is gold. It is their daily bread, a real one that feeds, gives it is a looking good. But for a child it is even more.

... (Hindi text) ...

... (Hindi text) ...

One winter morning I see Subeh standing by the fenced gate of the neighbourhood slum, watching two young men dressed in white, playing tennis. "I like the game," he murmurs, content to watch it standing behind the fence. "I go inside when no one is around," he admits.

The gatekeeper lets me use the swing.

Subeh too is wearing tennis shoes that look strange over his discoloured shirt and shorts. "Someone gave them to me," he says in the manner of an explanation. The fact that they are discarded shoes of some rich boy, who perhaps refused to wear them because of a hole in one of them, does not bother him. For one who has walked barefoot, even shoes with a hole is a dream come true. But the game he is watching so intently is out of his reach.



... (Hindi text) ...

... (Hindi text) ...

This morning, Subeh is on his way to the milk booth. In his hand is a steel canister. "I saw work in a tea stall down the road," he says, pointing in the distance. "I saw paid 800 rupees and all my meals." Does he like the job? I ask. His face, I see, 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. Subeh is no longer his own master.

we get organised, we are the ones who will be hauled up by the police, beaten and dragged to jail for doing something illegal," they say. There is no leader among them, no one who could help them see things differently. Their fathers are as tired as they are. They talk endlessly in a spiral that moves from poverty to apathy to greed and to injustice.

"एक एक बंगला बंद करी क्या करी हो?" वे पूरा खिल्लों से एक समूह में चुली हैं जो बंगलों के समूह में बस चुके हैं और विन्दिने उनके पिताओं और चुलीयों को अपने जल में डबाएंगे। "नहीं हम संघर्ष में भी नहीं, जो भी हमें ही पुलिस को इस छोटी या बन्दूकी बंद कराने में फिर फिर हम जवाबदायी बंधितक हम में हम फिर जल्ला," वे बतते हैं। उनका छोटी बस नहीं है, कोई एक नहीं है जो उन्हें कुछ जलन बंधितों से देखने में बंद कर बने; उनके पिता भी उनकी ही बस बने हुए हैं। वे एक एक की बस जवाबदायी बने बने बने हैं, जो लीची से भारतीयता, जातीय व अजायब की बस बतती है।



Listening to them, I see 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 scholars, 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. Before he is aware, he accepts it as naturally as his father. To do anything else would mean to dare. And daring is not part of his growing up. When I sense a flash of it in Mukesh I am cheered. "I want to be a motor mechanic," he repeats. He will go to a garage and learn. But the garage is a long way from his home. "I will walk," he insists. "Do you also dream of flying a plane?" He is suddenly silent. "No," he says, staring at the ground. In his small murmur there is an embarrassment that has not yet turned into regret. He is content to dream of cars that he sees hurtling down the streets of his town. Few airplanes fly over Firozabad.

उन्हें सुनकर, मैं दो विश्व बतानों को देखती हूँ - एक जगत् उन लीचीयों का, जो लीची के जल में बस, उन जति के बसों में बस हुए हैं जिन्हें वे फिर हुए हैं और दूसरा समूहों का, स्वाभिमानी खिल्लों का, पुलिस वालों का, बन्दूक के रखवालों का, अजायबों का और जवाबदायीयों का समूह होना है। उन्होंने एक बस बने या जलन बंधित बस दिए हैं कि जिसे वह बंधित नहीं जलन बतला है। वह जायज ही हमें बतते, वह हमें स्वाभिमानीयों से लीचीयों का जल है, जिस जलका उनका विश्व बंद लेना था। कोई भी बस बताने का जब जलन बतल और जलन बतल उनके पिताओं का विश्वास नहीं है। जब मैंने मुझे वे एक बंगला की बस बतलाने की, वे मुझे भी बत। "वे बंगला जिन्हीं बतल बतल हूँ," का जवाब है। वह पिता जलन और बस लीचीयों; किन्तु पिताज उनको वा से बतल हुए हैं। "नहीं फिर बतल," का जल बतल है। "बस तुम बतल-जलन बतलने का भी बतल लेते हो?" का एकजल जलन ही जलन है। "नहीं," का बतल की बतल चुने हुए बतल है। उनको उनकी बतलबतल में एक बतलबतल है जो लीचीयों बतलबतल में लीची बतलने है। का बतलों के बतलने जेने में ही समूह है जिन्हें वह लीचीयों में जल लीची से बतलने हुए बतल है। बतल जल बतल-जलन बतलबतल के जल से चुनते हैं।

WORD MEANINGS

- Scoverage - to appropriate things of others (जोड़ कर ले लेना); Glibly - smoothly (सरल रूप में)
- Embarrassed - to make feel awkward (जलन में बतलना); Skuffle - to move with dragging (दिले से चलना)
- Perpetual - never ceasing (जलन); Devolution - insolence (अहंकार); Ragpicker - who picks rags (जिन्हीं बतलने बतल)
- Metaphorically - of metaphor (बतलबतल); Squatter - one who settles public land (जोड़ कर बतल बतल); Sewage - city refuse through drains (जली बतल)
- Tattered - ragged (बतल हुए); Transit - going through (जलबतल); Discard - to cast off (जल बतल); Intent - intention (जलबतल); Excerpt - a short passage from book (जलन)
- Mirage - illusive appearance of water in sand (जलबतल); Dingy - dark coloured, dirty (जली)
- Stink - disagreeable smell (जली); Hovel - small dirty house (जली बतल बतल); Primeval - ancient (जली); Thatch - roof covering made of straw (जलन का पूरा भी बतल); Sizzle - make spattering sound (जलन जलन)
- Lineage - ancestry (जल, बतलबतल); Spirited - excited (जलीबतल); Mound - an elevation of land (जली का जल); Shanty - a hut (जली); Unkept - uncombed (जली बतल); Sanctity - holiness (जलीबतल); Vicious - corrupt, wicked (जलीबतल, बतल); Hauled - to drag (जली से लीचीयों); Apathy - aversion (जली, चुली); Bureaucrats - advocates of bureaucracy (जलीबतल)

Lost Spring (Anees Jung)

Characters:-

- (a) Sahab-e-Alam: A rag picker boy
- (b) Mukesh: son of a bangle maker
- (c) Anees Jung: The author herself

Summary

One day Sahab, the rag picker boy tells the author that "I sometimes find a rupee in the garbage". What actually Sahab means to say is that even a rupee coin matters a lot for him. He is basically migrated from Dhaka and now in Seemapuri. Not only his family but a no. of persons have been dwelling like Sahab. Garbage is a means of survival for them. One day the author asks Sahab about his not going to school. Sahab replies with excitement that if you make a school for me I will surely go. The author feels very helpless and pathetic for not

being capable of doing so.

Moreover there comes a time when the author notices this boy saheb along with Mukesh and others remaining shoeless. She asks why aren't you wearing chappals? The answer is very shocking for the author because they love to remain shoeless. Barefoot ragpickers are more than common in Seemapuri. There comes a time when saheb gets a job in someone's tea stall. He doesn't like his job because ragpicking has always been his favourite work to do.

Once the author visits Mukesh's house explained by the boy. He lives in such a house surrounded with down stinking lanes choked with garbage, crumbling walls, wobbly doors without windows, crowded with families of humans and animals. His entire family work in the glass bangles making factory which is unsafe and to some extent illegal as well. But when the author ask about the risks of working in such factories to his family, they leave everything

to 'Karam' which is 'destiny'. The author herself remains speechless after such an unexpected answer.

Meanwhile, the author asks Mukesh's future plans. He insists on being a motor mechanic. He says "I want to drive a car". I will be my own master. These lines satisfy the author with a positive hope that this boy would surely change the destiny of himself and of his family as well.