

Lost Spring: Explanation

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Instructions for the students: Students are asked to go through the text with the explanation of the text. The red coloured portion carries the explanation of the lesson. The meanings of difficult words are also included. Students are asked to contact the teacher if any difficulty is found.

Part 2 - "I want to drive a car"

Mukesh insists on being his own master. "I will be a motor mechanic," he announces.

The writer met a boy named Mukesh who aspires to be a motor mechanic.

"Do you know anything about cars?" I ask.

She asked him if he knew anything about cars.

"I will learn to drive a car," he answers, looking straight into my eyes. His dream looms like a mirage amidst the dust of streets that fill his town Firozabad, famous for its bangles. Every other family in Firozabad is engaged in making bangles. It is the centre of India's glass-blowing industry where families have spent generations working around furnaces, welding glass, making bangles for all the women in the land it seems.

looking straight into my eyes – with confidence and determination

looms like a mirage - seems that it will be true in the future but actually it will not be so

amidst – in the middle of

glass-blowing industry - industry related to making glass

furnaces - a closed room or container where heat is produced

welding - the process of joining metal or glass pieces by heating them

The boy is confident and replies that he will learn to drive a car. His dream is far away from reality and although the boy is confident, it seems he would succumb to the societal pressures. He lives in Firozabad which is famous for glass bangles. The writer feels that the boy's dreams will not materialize and gradually get influenced by the dusty streets of Firozabad. She wants to say that as every family in the town of Firozabad is involved in the glass bangle industry, so will Mukesh do with the passage of time. She tells us that Firozabad is the main town of India for the glass – blowing industry. The families have been involved in making bangles for generations. They make so many bangles that it seems that they make bangles for all the women of the world.

Mukesh's family is among them. None of them know that it is illegal for children like him to 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.

Dingy – dark, dim

Slog – work hard

Daylight hours - hours of the day when there is sunlight

Brightness of their eyes - here, refers to the power to see

Mukesh's family is also involved in the profession of making glass bangles. They are not aware of the law. They do not know that it is unlawful to force children to work in such glass furnaces.

The work places are hot, dark closed rooms without ventilation. The writer feels that if the law would come into force, it will rescue almost twenty thousand children from these inhuman places where they are forced to work hard during the daytime. They often end up losing their eyesight also.

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, bangs a wobbly iron door with his foot, and pushes it open.

Beam – shine brightly

Volunteers - freely offers to do something

Stinking – bad smell

Choked – blocked

Hovels – slums

Crumbling – falling down

Wobbly – unsteady

Coexisting - present at the same time and place

Primeval – prehistoric

Bangs – hits

Mukesh is happy as he take the writer to his home. He feels proud as he informs her that it is being renovated. They walk down streets which are full of garbage and give foul smell. The streets are lined with slums which are unsteady. The walls are falling apart, the doors are unsteady, there are

no windows and are full of families where people lived along with animals. Mukesh stops in front of one such door, hit it hard with his foot and pushes it open.

We enter a half-built shack. In one part of it, thatched with dead grass, is a firewood stove over which sits a large vessel of sizzling spinach leaves. On the ground, in large aluminium platters, are more chopped vegetables. A frail young woman is cooking the evening meal for the whole family. Through eyes filled with smoke she smiles. She is the wife of Mukesh's elder brother. Not much older in years, she has begun to command respect as the bahu, the daughter-in-law of the house, already in charge of three men — her husband, Mukesh and their father.

Shack – a roughly built hut

Thatched – covered with dry grass

Vessel – container for cooking food

Sizzling - make a hissing sound when frying or cooking

Platters – large plates

Chopped – cut finely

Frail – thin, weak

eyes filled with smoke - her eyes are filled with the smoke coming out of the firewood stove

command respect - she is worthy and so, is respected

The house where Mukesh lives is a partially constructed hut. In one corner is a firewood stove made with dead grass. A vessel with spinach leaves is kept on it. On the ground, there are more plates with chopped vegetables on them. There is a thin, young woman cooking the evening meal for the family. Her eyes are full of the smoke emanating from the stove but she is still cheerful and smiled to see the writer. She is the wife of Mukesh's elder brother. Although she is not much older than Mukesh, she is a responsible person and is worthy to get respect from the family as the daughter-in-law of the family. She takes care of three men – her husband, Mukesh and their father.

When the older man enters, she gently withdraws behind the broken wall and brings her veil closer to her face. As custom demands, daughters-in-law must veil their faces before male elders. In this case the elder is an impoverished bangle maker. Despite long years of hard labour, first as a tailor, then a bangle maker, he has failed to renovate a house, send his two sons to school. All he has managed to do is teach them what he knows — the art of making bangles.

Withdraws – goes back

Veil - a piece of fine material worn by women to protect or hide the face, cover or hide

Impoverished – very poor

Labour – hard work

Renovate - repair

As Mukesh's father enters the house, the daughter-in-law hid behind the wall and covers her face behind her veil. It is a tradition for the daughter-in-laws to hide their face in the presence of the older male members of the family. The elder here is a poor bangle maker. He had worked hard all his life – first as a tailor, then as a bangle maker. He is still not able to either renovate the house or send his sons to school. He has just managed to teach him the skill of making bangles.

“It is his karam, his destiny,” says Mukesh's grandmother, who has watched her own husband go blind with the dust from polishing the glass of bangles. “Can a god-given lineage ever be broken?” she implies.

Destiny – fate

God-given lineage - here, a profession carried on through the generations of a family – glass bangle making

Mukesh's grandmother justifies her son by saying that he is destined to make bangles as it has been their family profession. She has seen her husband become blind due to the dust from polishing the glass bangles. She says that their family has got this art of bangle making from God and so they have to carry on the tradition.

Born in the caste of bangle makers, they have seen nothing but bangles — in the house, in the yard, in every other house, every other yard, every street in Firozabad. Spirals of bangles — sunny gold, paddy green, royal blue, pink, purple, every colour born out of the seven colours of the rainbow — lie in mounds in unkempt yards, are piled on four-wheeled handcarts, pushed by young men along the narrow lanes of the shanty town.

Yard – the open area at the back of the house

Mounds – heaps

Unkempt – not taken care of

Piled – kept one on top of the other

Shanty town - a town that is full of small, roughly built huts

They are born in a particular caste which has to follow the profession of bangle making. All their life they have just seen these glass bangles. They are everywhere – in the backyard, in the next house, in their yard and even in the streets of the town. There are huge spiral bunches of bangles in different colours like gold, green, blue, pink, purple. There are bangles of all the colours of the rainbow. Further, the writer says that there are bangles in the neglected yards also. They are dumped on handcarts for sale. The carts are pushed by men along the streets of Firozabad.

And in dark hutments, next to lines of flames of flickering oil lamps, sit boys and girls with their fathers and mothers, welding 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.

Welding – joining

The writer describes the environment where these bangle makers work. They are small, dark huts. The children would sit next to a line of oil lamps whose flames are unsteady. They, along with their parents join the pieces of coloured glass into circles called bangles. As they spend a lot of time in the dark, their eyes would not adapt to the bright sunlight. Many of them loss their eyesight before reaching adulthood.

Savita, a young girl in a drab pink dress, sits alongside an elderly woman, soldering pieces of glass. As her hands move mechanically like the tongs of a machine, I wonder if she knows the sanctity of the bangles she helps make. It symbolises an Indian woman's suhaag, auspiciousness in marriage.

Drab – faded, colourless

Soldering – joining

Tongs - an instrument with two moveable arms joined at one end

Sanctity - the state of being sacred or holy

Auspiciousness – good omen

There is a young girl by the name of Savita. She has worn a faded pink coloured dress. She is sitting with an elderly woman and they are joining pieces of glass to make bangles. Her hands

move like a machine just like the tongs of a machine. The writer wonders if Savita knew that bangles are considered sacred. They are a good omen for a woman's wifehood.

It will dawn on her suddenly one day when her head is draped with a red veil, her hands dyed red with henna, and red bangles rolled onto her wrists. She will then become a bride. Like the old woman beside her who became one many years ago. She still has bangles on her wrist, but no light in her eyes.

Dawn on her – she will realize

Draped - covered

She thinks that Savita will realize this when she will become a bride. That day she will cover her head with a red coloured veil, colour her hands with henna and wear red coloured bangles on her wrist. The elderly woman sitting next to Savita also became a bride many years ago. She is still wearing the glass bangles but has lost her eyesight now.

“Ek waqt ser bhar khana bhi nahin khaya,” she says, in a voice drained of joy. She has not enjoyed even one full meal in her entire lifetime — that's what she has reaped! Her husband, an old man with a flowing beard, says, “I know nothing except bangles. All I have done is make a house for the family to live in.”

Ser – a unit of measuring quantity

Reaped – received as a benefit

The elderly woman complains that she has not eaten even a ser of food. Ser is a unit of measuring quantity. The woman wants to say that they are so poor that they cannot eat enough food. That is the curse that she has received by adopting the profession of bangle-making. The woman's husband has a flowing beard. He says that he does not know anything other than bangle – making. All that he has been able to accomplish is to make a house for his family to live in.

Hearing him, one wonders if he has achieved what many have failed in their lifetime. He has a roof over his head!

The writer wonders that probably the old man has achieved something which many other people have not been able to achieve. At least he has been able to secure a shelter for his family.

The cry of not having money to do anything except carry on the business of making bangles, not even enough to eat, rings in every home. The young men echo the lament of their elders. Little has moved with time, it seems, in Firozabad. Years of mind-numbing toil have killed all initiative and the ability to dream.

Rings – a sound which is repeated

Echo – repeat

Lament – complaint

Mind – numbing – boring

Toil – physical hard work done to earn a living

This problem is prevalent in all the homes which carried on the profession. They do not know anything else other than bangle-making and it does not even provide them enough to eat. The young men who have entered the traditional profession also have the same complaint. With the passing time there is no improvement in their condition. As they have been doing hard work for countless number of years, they do not have any ability to do something else or to dream of it.

“Why not organise yourselves into a cooperative?” I ask a group of young men who have fallen into the vicious circle of middlemen who trapped their fathers and forefathers. “Even if 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.

Vicious – cruel

Hauled up – dragged, taken away

The writer suggests them to form a cooperative. She talks to a group of young men to get out of the clutches of the cruel middlemen who have trapped their elders. The men say that if they dares to do something like that, they will be dragged and beaten up by the police and sent to jail. Their acts would be termed to be unlawful. The writer feels that as they have no leader, they can not think of doing things differently. They all are so tired – the men and their fathers.

They talk endlessly in a spiral that moves poverty to apathy to greed and to injustice. 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 sahkars, 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.

Spiral – here, a never-ending continuous process

Apathy – lack of concern

Greed – intense and selfish desire for something

Distinct – separate

Stigma – dishonor

Bureaucrats – government officials

Imposed – forced upon

Baggage – burden

To dare – do something courageous

The men complain that it is a continuous process. Their poor condition lead to lack of concern for their problems. This make them greedy and led to injustice. The writer envisions that there are two separate worlds – one is of such families who are stuck in poverty and the pressure of doing the traditional profession according to the caste in which they are born. The other world is a never-ending cycle of moneylenders, middlemen, policemen, law keepers, government officials and politicians. Both of these worlds have forced the young boys to follow the family traditions. The

young boys get into the profession and become a part of the vicious cycle even before they realize it.

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.

Hurtling down – moving around

The boys have not been reared up to be bold so that they could dare to go against the system. The writer is happy to sense that Mukesh has the spark in him. He repeats that he would be a motor mechanic. He wants to go to a garage and learn the job. The writer asks that as the garage is at a distance from his home, Mukesh insists that he will walk up to it. She asks him if he dreams of flying planes. The boy become silent and refused. He does not know about them as he does not know about planes. Not many planes fly over Firozabad. As he has only seen cars moving around in Firozabad, his dreams are restricted up to them.