

Children at Work

Summary of the Chapter

- Velu is an eleven year old child who runs from home and reaches Chennai central in Kanyakumari Express without a ticket. Without any money to buy ticket, he travels in the train, but luckily the ticket collector doesn't come to the compartment he is sitting in. He tries to sleep near the door of the train, but a group of men playing cards there, make it impossible for him to do so. Lack of sleeplessness makes him feel tired and exhausted, as he is empty stomach and has eaten only peanuts and jaggery from the last two days. He is then awakened by a noise and when open his eyes sees a girl of his age standing in front of him. The girl wears a long baniyan till her knees. Her hair was stiff and brown, and she had a rack on her shoulders.

- She was picking dirty plastic cups from the floor and stuffing it in the rag. The girl asks Vellu's name and asks him if he had run away from home. But Vellu doesn't trust a stranger with his secrets. His father was a drunkard, and abused his children, and also spent all the money in drinks earned by the children. The girl asks Vellu about his plans, and doesn't get an answer. Hunger starts pinching Vellu, and the girl offers him some food. When the sun rose, Vellu's feet burned with the glaring of the sun and he was soaked with sweat. His mind reeled over food, and they stopped before a big building which was an auditorium. There was a wedding going on there and the name of the bride and the groom were written outside.

- The girl asks Vellu to come inside, and Vellu becomes nervous by seeing the huge venue and inquires whether they would be eating there. The girl leads him towards the backyard of the hall where a huge garbage bin overflows with rubbish, wherein two goats stand fighting over a banana leaf, and the girl picks up a squashy banana and gives it to Vellu for eating. Vellu then remarks that the houses in the village appear to be strange as they are made of mud and palm leaves. The girl Jaya, goes around one of the huts and dumps her sack and picks up an empty one. She then throws a pair of old shoes towards Vellu, hands him over a sack as hers and asks him to come with her. Vellu is a little confused by the work he has been assigned with, as he had only worked on a landowner's farm, weeding and grazing cows.

- Velu asks if there were any farms in the city, to which Jaya replies that there are no farms in the city and they were rag pickers. Vellu had never done such a thing and is very skeptical about picking rubbish. Jaya then explains Vellu that they will only be picking paper, plastics and glass bottles, and Vellu becomes even more confused when he knows that they are to sell these things to Jam Bazaar Jaggu. he enquires Jaya as to how the person is ready to buy the rubbish and who the person was, to which she replies that Jaggu would sell the items to a factory. Jaya feels that Vellu is wasting time thinking about whether to do the job or not, but Vellu is adamant about doing such a job of picking up garbage.

Theme of the Chapter

- There are many reasons why children have to work. Some help their family make a livelihood. Others run away from unhappy homes and need to support themselves. Children who have to work, like Velu and Jaya, can't go to school and play like other children.

- Moral:

Children who have to work lead lives very different from those led by other children.