

Children at work

(Note: This is a continuation of the story given as assignment of last week.)

III

- There is a row of huts near some dirty puddles.
- Outside one of the huts, Jaya dumps her sack.
- Grateful to his friend, Velu thinks of the days ahead.

Jaya and Velu walked along the roads for half an hour, until they came to a bridge across a dirty trickle of water. " We are in Triplicane now. See, that's Buckingham Canal," said Jaya.

Velu stared. This was a canal? Near some puddles of water was a row of the strangest huts he had ever seen. They were built out of all sorts of things — metal sheets, tyres, bricks, wood and plastic. They stood crookedly and looked as if they would fall any moment. "Is this where you live? These houses are strange!" said Velu. "In our village, the houses are made of mud and palm leaves."

Jaya went around to one of the huts and dumped her sack outside. Then she picked up an empty one.

"Let's go." She turned to Velu and gave him a shove. "At least help me now. Here, wear these and come with me."

She threw him a pair of old shoes without laces and pushed a sack and a stick into his hands. Velu was confused. What work did she want him to do with these things? The only work he had ever done was on the landowner's farm, weeding and taking cows out to graze.

"Are there any farms in the city?" he asked Jaya.

She laughed and thumped her stick on the ground. "Farms! There are no farmers here. We are ragpickers."

"Ragpickers?"

"See my sack? Full of things I collected." "Collected? From where?" asked Velu. "From rubbish bins, where else?"

"You collect rubbish?" Velu had never heard of such a thing

"*Ayye*, blockhead. It's not any rubbish. Only paper, plastic, glass, such things. We sell it to Jam Bazaar Jaggu."

Velu was puzzled. He had heard of people throwing away rubbish.

But why would anyone want to buy rubbish?

"Who's Jam Bazaar Jaggu? Why's he buying all this?"

"You think he buys it for show? He sells it to a factory. Come on, I don't have time to waste, like you."

Velu did not move. He hadn't run away and come to this new

place to dig through garbage bins. Jaya poked at him with her stick. "Look here!" she shouted. "If someone gets there before us we don't get anything. Don't just stand there, posing. Big hero. I'm trying to help you. Who filled your stomach today?"

Velu scratched his head and sighed. I'll do it for now, he thought, until I find a better job.

GITA WOLF ANUSHKA RAVISHANKAR

ORIJIT SEN

From Trash — on Ragpicker Children and Recycling

After reading the above story answer the below:

1. (i) What material are the 'strange' huts made out of?
(ii) Why does Velu find them strange?
2. What sort of things did Jaya and children like her collect and what did they do with those things?
3. Is Velu happy or unhappy to find work? Give a reason for your answer.
4. Is Velu a smart boy? Which instances in the text show that he is or isn't?
5. Do you think Jaya is a brave and sensitive child with a sense of humour? Find instances of her courage, kind nature and humour in the text.
6. What one throws away as waste may be valuable to others. Do you find this sentence meaningful in the context of this story? How?
7. Write a paragraph of about 100-150 words on life of these street children at work and suggest some measures to overcome this issue.