

Memoona, Pakistan

Memoona, 14, lives in Kasur, Pakistan with her mother, three sisters, and grandmother. Her sisters, Aneesa, Beenish, and Sneha, are ten-, eight-, and one-year(s)-old, respectively. Memoona's grandparents are uneducated agricultural workers. Her father is a *kochwan*, a man who drives a *tonga ban* or horse-driven cart, which carries either people or goods. This trade has been passed down through the generations in his family. He has never been to school. A year after her parents were married, Memoona's father got involved with drugs and became an addict. Since then, her mother has worked to support the family. She works in other people's home in the morning and makes kites at home in the afternoon. Memoona's father does not contribute any income to the family.



Memoona (left), 14, and Zahida (right), 13, Children's World Congress on Child Labor and Education, New Delhi, India, September 4-8, 2005

Memoona is in seventh grade. She attends a public school from 7:30 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. Aneesa and Beenish also go to school. After school, Memoona makes kites at home with her mom and two sisters. Memoona has been helping to make kites since she was five-years-old. The kites are made with thin, spring-colored tissue paper and bamboo sticks.

Every February, the Festival of Kites, called *Basant*, is celebrated for three days with a lot of zeal in Lahore. In the other cities, like Karachi, the festival lasts for just one day. The sport of kite flying originated in China about 5,000 years ago. Pakistanis celebrate *Basant* by flying different kinds of kites, wearing colorful clothing, dancing, and preparing special dishes. People traditionally flock to the rooftops of residences and buildings to enjoy kite competitions. Kite flyers cunningly apply bits of ground glass to their own kite strings to cut the strings of other teams and reign victorious over any kites in reach of their own.

However, this joyful and popular festival has a dark side. Kite flyers are often injured by falling off roofs and children are sometimes hit by cars while running down streets and watching kites. While using steel and glass-edged *metal wires* for kite-flying is banned, they are still being used. People, including children, have had their throats slit by metal kite strings.

While Memoona makes kites all year long, *Basant* is a time when there is a high demand for kites throughout the country. She does not like their boss, who always pressures them to finish the kites faster. Her boss requires the family to produce 300 kites per day in the months leading up to the festival. During the rest of months the kite quota is less, but they the family is involved in other income generating activities. Sometimes Memoona and her family work until midnight to try and reach the quota. This is hard for Memoona

during examination time. The whole family earns 900 Pakistan rupees (\$15 US dollars) per month. Memoona generally earns 10 Pakistan rupees (16 US cents) for finishing 100 kites.

When she grows up, Memoona would like to be a journalist.