**PST ASSIGNMENT**

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**Section: H**

**IQBAL MASIH: The Little Hero**

Iqbal Masih was born in 1983, in Muridke, a small village in the outskirts of Lahore, Pakistan. After Iqbal’s birth his father deserted the family and his mother worked to make ends meet. In 1986, when Iqbal turned 4, his father needed money for the wedding of Iqbal’s older brother. So he borrowed 600 rupees from a man who owned a carpet weaving business and in return, Iqbal was required to work as a carpet weaver until the debt was paid off. In short, Iqbal was sold into bondage by his family. Iqbal would start his work from 4 o’clock in the morning till 7 o’clock in the evening and this routine continued for about six years. While he was there his loan grew to 13,000 rupees due to the additional costs that were being added to the loan such as the cost of the food he ate, the tools he used, and he was also fined for making mistakes. During this time his family borrowed more money too. Iqbal would work day and night in a closed stifling hot room which had only one light bulb, along with many other bonded children. The children were also punished for disobedience. These punishments included severe beatings, extended periods of isolation in a dark closet, being chained to their loom, being hung upside down and were also threatened to be thrown in boiling oil. Iqbal received numerous punishments for talking back or his disobedience.

One day Iqbal heard about a meeting of the Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BLLF) which was working to free and help children stuck in slavery. Iqbal snuck away and attended this meeting where he learned that the government had outlawed bonded labour system in 1992 and had also cancelled all the loans to these employers. After this discovery, Iqbal got the paperwork he needed to set himself free from his master and finally ended his life period as a slave. Iqbal started studying very hard in the BLLF School where he finished four years of school in just two. Soon Iqbal began speaking at BLLF meetings and to international activists and journalists, and even began writing his own speeches. He spoke about his own experiences as a bonded child labour, his story words would bring tears into the eyes of the crowd. He was not satisfied with his freedom he wanted to set all the other children like him free, he wanted to put a stop to child bondage. Iqbal spoke to children about their rights under laws that outlawed bonded labor, and he helped free 3,000 children from bondage. As his popularity rose he was invited to deliver speeches in the USA and Sweden. At the age of 12, Iqbal went to US to receive his Reebok Human Rights Award.

On April 16, 1995, Iqbal was visiting his relatives in Muridke. He was out in the fields playing with his cousins when a man belonging to the carpet mafia shot him with a shotgun. Iqbal died at the tender age of 12. His funeral was attended by approximately 800 mourners. Iqbal Masih became a symbol for the fight against child slavery and was honoured with several awards. Such as Reebok Youth in Action Award’ in 1994. On 16 April 2012, the Council of Santiago inaugurated a Square named after Iqbal in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Kailash Satyarti dedicated his Nobel Peace Prize 2014 to Iqbal and other martyrs. On 17 April 2017, the University of Salamanca decalred that they would celebrate every 16 April as a Day against Child Slavery on behalf of Iqbal Masih. In 2009 the US congress established the annual Iqbal Masih Award for the Elimination of Child Labor. 16th of April is also is celebrated as International Day against Child Slavery in Spain and South America. Iqbal might be dead but his legacy is still alive and a source of inspiration for the world. His struggle against child slavery did not go in vain and BLLF succeeded in freeing more than 30,000 bonded labours from all over the Pakistan.

**Word Count: 676 words**