

**THE BLISS AND WONDER OF CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE IN  
*SEVEN SUMMERS***

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Indian English fiction abounds in the depiction of adult experience consisting of youth, job, marriage, children and even grandchildren. But the depiction of childhood experience is conspicuously rare due to a variety of reasons. Children's literature need not necessarily be about childhood experience by children themselves. In fact childhood experience can be depicted properly only by a grown-up man and that too retrospectively in the light of his subsequent and deep experience of life, knowledge and reading etc. When a man is still a child he can have his childhood experience without being able to understand and analyze it properly at that time. But his experience is stored rather vaguely in the storehouse called his memory until the flowering of his intelligence, which enables him to understand, analyze and depict it in a retrospective and coherent manner. In recent years Ruskin Bond has written some novellas like *A Room with a Roof* and *Vagrants of the Valley* depicting some of his boyhood experiences. But there is definitely some difference between childhood experiences and boyhood experiences. Mulk Raj Anand's *Seven Summers* (1951) is a significant work of art in the sense that it is not a biographical but autobiographical novel dealing with his own childhood experiences. Childhood experience may involve the growth of one's personality from innocence to experience involving the concurrent bliss and pain and wonder and shock and an interrogative spirit silenced by a sense of mystery of the whole life. Hence this work provides ample material to modern psychologists, who are interested in the description of psychological development of a child from his birth up to his old age.

Any childhood experience can begin only with the emergence of consciousness of the world and clear memory of things, beings and events. The emergence of consciousness takes place around sixth or seventh year after birth when a child is forced to be sent to school. The child begins to open its mind to the phenomenal world around it and absorb the experience as much as possible and gradually. Quite in keeping with this principle, the boy Krishna, the protagonist of the autobiographical novel, *Seven Summers*, observes the immediate environment including his house and its surroundings which happen to be the first vivid memory of his life:

“Sunshine scatters like gold dust. A buzz in the air, as though the pinpoints of gold are flying hither and thither. The green trees of the grove spread the shadow of their protection on the white-bearded spirit of Mian Mir which, mother has told me, lives in

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the Persian wheel well. On one side of our house are the straight barracks, where soldiers live, on the other side are the bungalows of the Sahibs, with their gardens, white-washed and still, and hazy with their mysteries before my eyes. Dividing the barracks and the bungalows is the road, lined with casuarinas trees, which stretches from end to end of the horizon. I stand for a long while with my thumb in my mouth wondering where it comes from and where it goes. Then I run round in circles on the little clearing under the grove surrounding the Persian wheel well in a wild delirium of movement, oblivious of the past and the future, excited by my own happiness at finding myself wandering freely in the wide open world..." (P.7).

The boy's first interaction with persons other than his parents, begins with the gardener, who takes up the child in his arms and tosses him in the air, thereby giving him a hilarious experience. He has observed his younger brother, Prithvi lying by the side of his mother. As the developmental psychologists declare, the child is especially attached to its mother physically for milk and affection and emotional security. Attachment is described as a biological system or powerful survival impulse that evolved to ensure the survival of the infant. A child who is threatened or stressed will move towards caregivers who create a sense of physical, emotional and psychological safety for the individual. Attachment feeds on body contact and familiarity. There are four types of attachments styles: 1) secure, 2) anxious-avoidant, 3) anxious-resistant and 4) disorganized. Krishna's attachment with his mother is easily the healthy and secure one. The first animals that he sees is the camel and wonders at their long necks and legs. Similarly his sense of wonder is awakened by the sight of an Indian sepoy and a British Saheb, "a pink man in khaki clothes" (P.9).

The child's experience of plucking a rose in the garden and being pricked by the thorns is also a new one for him. At the same time his sense of possessiveness may be seen in holding the flower in his hand.

The joy of playing and the attendant accidents and agonies may be seen in Krishna's life. For example, Krishna is eager to play and indulge in childish pranks, falls on the earth, hurts his knees and finally consoled by his mother's affectionate hug. The child is always parasitical and depends upon elders, especially mother or elder brother or father. Thus the experience of the protective care and concerns of the parents gives the child a sense of security.

After the affection of his mother, Krishna enjoys the affection of his father and appreciates his bushy moustaches. He remembers the kisses received from his father from under his ticklish moustaches and the nickname of 'Bully' given by the latter. At the age of about 4 or 5, his father had come to be a legendary to him, an avatar of Raja Vikram. "Culled from the gossip and rumours current in the household were various other myths and legends about my father, but the ceremony of jinns and *bhuts* and fakirs dominated them all" (P.13). As life seems to be very mysterious to him he cannot understand it totally at that age.

As the boy's consciousness of the world begins to open up, Krishna becomes aware of his three brothers at home: little brother Prithvi, brother Ganesh and eldest brother, Harish. Even at that young age. Krishna notices certain qualities (both physical and behavioural) of his brothers. For example, his little brother, Prithvi was a pale and shriveled up creature, who had an angular face with high cheekbones and was frightening to him. His elder brother Ganesh was jealousy pure

and simple. He had a fiery temperament behind the outer façade of a saint. Krishna feels more adolatrous towards his eldest brother. Harish was tall, lanky and came riding his steel-horse (i.e. cycle).

Even As a child, Krishna notices the contrast between his mother and aunt, who were so different from each other. “My mother was, as I have noticed before, milk and sugar, but my aunt Aqqi was like the essence of curds” (P.16). Krishna describes the motherly affection in the hug of his mother and aunt and how he was nicknamed as Bully. Krishna likes his uncle, Jhanda Singh (shortened as Jai Singh) who became his friend as he brought the first kite for Krishna and helped him to fly it high in the sky.

Another person that Krishna comes to know and love early in his life, was Gurdevi, the wife of Baba Chattar Singh, the Quartermaster’s clerk in his father’s regiment. He is taught by his father not to call them big names, but to consider them as ‘little mother’ and ‘little father.’ Slowly Krishna learns the social etiquettes and fine manners, as part of the growth of his personality.

While Krishna is immersed in the radiant childlike happiness he is jolted into the shocking experience of seeing the first death in his family after his birth. The death of his little brother Prithvi makes him vaguely aware of the miserable and frightening thing called ‘death’. “I did not know the name of this shadow. Nor could I see it. I only heard its name spoken in lowered tones and hisses by the people who thronged at the door outside our house as I came back after a whole morning during which my brother Ganesh and I seemed to have slept on a charpoi in the verandah of Babu Chattar Singh’s house, fanned by ‘little mother’ Gurdevi”(P.21). Mulk Raj Anand describes the dismal and mourning atmosphere in the house meticulously.

Acquaintance with new persons, who may be relatives or friends, is obviously part of extension of one’s awareness of the world. Now Krishna comes to know his uncle, Pratap and aunt Devaki, who come from Amritsar to offer their condolences to his family. But the departure of his elder brother Ganesh to Amritsar along with his aunt and uncle, gives an experience of oppressive and miserable loneliness. He, therefore, pontificates about childhood, which is not always happy. “ In the light of those days I am now inclined to think that childhood is not altogether the happy, golden time sentimentalists make it out to be, as a compensation for the rigours of the grown up world, but that it is characterized by long patches of loneliness when children are condemned , for good or ill, to the prisons of their own sensibilities, exiled from the adult world and left to their own devices if there is not available a crèche or a kindergarten or swing and the company of their children”(P.27).

He also thinks about the mystery of the past and future of his life. “Still there seemed to me from this period, apart from the misery of solitude, a peculiar strength of temperament. I learned to live on my own resources and to be in tune with the shade of the dense trees in the grove where I roamed, the grasses and flowers of the Sahib’s garden, where I occasionally strayed, and the ever-changing life of the road – the road which I crossed from the protection of one line of casuarina trees, stirred by the nimble breeze, to the other, the road in whose dust I rolled, the road where I held conversation with men and beasts and birds, the road which dominated my life with its unknown past and its undiscovered future” (P.28). The boy’s brooding over the mystery of the past and the uncertainty of the future is at once poetic, symbolic and philosophical.

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Childhood has its childlike delights and pleasures which cannot be laughed at or wished away. Krishna's sight of a juggler accompanied by a black bear gives him a lot of childlike pleasure and extends his experience of life. He describes the juggler's performance so vividly that even the western readers may visualize and enjoy it:

The madari sang and talked to his hero in absurd musical phrases: "Oh, show them the dance, the dance celestial, oh hero! Look how green are the leaves in the grove, and how the light comes streaming on through the trees, the light of heaven!

"Oh, dance, dance, ohe Baloo, ohe Ladhia, for they will give me a cast-off coat, the Havildars! They will donate me the oil passed over their heads to appease their sins. And they will give me the stale bread which no one eats from their larder! Don't leer at the skirts of the washer woman, for that is rude, and I will get you a bride as black and as hairy as you, with a pig's snout like the one which thrusts itself from your face!

Oh, dance, dance, ohe Ladhia, and turn your sly eyes away from the sweeper woman and let me earn the reward of a uniform of the Sarkari foj. Ohe, stop your obscene laughter!..."

All these words seemed so funny that I learned to recite them without grasping the meaning of the sly cunning behind them.

Below the hissing of the fiery breath of the bear, underneath his majestic black presence, I watched the tinkling of the bells and the motion of his stumpy little legs. And I felt like dancing to the same rhythm as the Baloo. But the cunning juggler, who wanted to assure himself of his reward before giving the full benefit of the bear's performance to the audience, stopped beating the hand drum. And the hairy monster descended to all fours and the undulating swell of the earth fell back to the squat even surface it usually is. (Pp.29-30)

The graphic and microscopic description of the jugglers' language and the bear's performance is very interesting, especially from a small boy's point of view. Such minute descriptions are generally seen in the writings of Anglo-Indian writers, who were surprised and tickled by the strange sights in colonial India.

During his loneliness Krishna befriends Ali and indulges in some misadventures like eating the earth and the cactus fruit and being pricked by thorns. He is rightly rebuked by his parents for such risky escapades.

Animals, whether big or small, have the qualities of capturing the hearts of children. Krishna is attracted towards 'a house cat and its kittens'. Riding on the back of a black mare is another exciting experience for Krishna. He is described as a parrot in speech and a lemur in movement. Krishna's visit to a Sparrow House (or zoo), sight of monkeys, a zebra, kangaroo are all typical details of childhood experience and its delights.

Dreaming is an important experience of childhood. Perhaps no normal child is free from this delightful experience or wish fulfillment. "Obviously, in those days I was my own master, supreme ruler of the phantasmagoric kingdom of my strange visions and stranger dreams" (P.52). Sigmund Freud has already shown the extraordinary importance of dreams and fantasies in human life.

In the second part of his autobiography Mulk Raj Anand narrates the next stage of his childhood experience. When the child's intelligence is awakened, his curiosity about his own

origin and past is naturally aroused in him. The child therefore begins to ask such fundamental but embarrassing questions to his parents. One is quite familiar with such situations in Tagore's poetry, especially *The Crescent Moon*. Mulk raj Anand presents a similar situation here. One afternoon Krishna asks his mother, "Where did you find me, Mother? Where did I come from? (P.53) But the mother invents a fairy tale manner and answers him thus, "You were in my soul, my darling hidden like a secret. You were in my body like a pearl in a mother of pearl. You were my innermost desire. And I tried to find you. But I searched and searched and couldn't see you anywhere. So I prayed to God to give you to me. And God being a very kind person made you for me and put you in a little alcove in our house at Peshawar..." (P. 53).

Then Krishna asks the next but philosophical question, "Who made God, Mother?" (P.53) Then he wants to see the fairy godmother. Like this, Krishna goes on asking a number of questions, which is in keeping with the awakening of intelligence in most of the children. It easily shows the child's quest for knowledge and a desire to understand the mysterious world into which he has come to take his birth.

The child has a right to play to fulfill his hidden dreams and desires and to while away his time joyfully. Krishna takes up a bamboo pole and rides it like a horse. Perhaps there is no child in the world who has not played this game. The mock experience of riding a pole naturally shows his dream of riding a real horse in his later life or his adventurous spirit.

Krishna seems to be a precocious child. His father considers him to be an auspicious child and a man of destiny and therefore thinks of sending him to *vilayat*. Because of the cultural contrast between Hindu culture and the British culture that was found in the regimental atmosphere, Krishna had developed an exaggerated respect for the West, the blessed isles.

Perhaps there is nobody closer to the child both physically and cordially than his mother. Krishna has observed his mother closely and understood her nature in general. What he learns from his mother is that she hailed from a strict religious and disciplinarian background of patriarchal Sikh society. The details of her life provide a sharp contrast to those of a Western mother. "In these years my mother too, often used to tell us the story of her own life. She herself had been married early. She had been a wild child in the village home of her parents, head bare and feet unshod, till the responsibility of helping her mother to look after younger brothers and sisters fell upon her, as she was the eldest child of the family. Then the shadow of her impending separation from her family had descended on her, for she was engaged to be married to my father before she was eight, and the responsibility of preparing for the marriage weighed heavily on girls in those days as they had to make their own trousseau. But she had borne the burden of all her duties quietly enough, because hers was a home of perfect worship. Her father was a devout Sikh peasant-craftsman, lost in the love of God. He always had holy men come to stay in his house, and as the personal care and service of these, the feeding and tending, devolved upon the household, my mother had learnt many a sage truth before she was in her teens"(P.68). This shows the early marriage so common in Indian society and the strict discipline forced upon children.

Krishna tells us further about his mother, who was brought up in a religious atmosphere of high ideals, which bordered on the religious. "Be like Savitri,' had been her father's blessing, 'be like the suttees of the gurus, loyal to your husband unto death.' And her mother had told her stories and sagas of gods and goddesses and devoted wives. She had been imbued with the sense of responsibility that it has been customary to inculcate into the minds of young brides. She was

to go to her husband's home as to a temple. And she had promised to live up to all this advice when she took her bridal farewell between tears, except that she had felt then what she had never told anyone else, a sense of strangeness at going to the house of a man whom she had never seen. Mixed with the fear that he might hate her, because she was not beautiful and leave her to bear the consequences of his desires. Only her mother's injunctions about serving her lord and master without any expectation of reward and living by the happiness of having children and bringing them up, had smothered that feeling till now; she had forgotten that she had ever been a young girl who wanted to live by love and not by the duty to the unborn" (Pp.68-69). Her story shows the sanctity of marital life and the great responsibility of a wife in the family, who has to become a cog in the wheel by living for others and enhancing the happiness of others in the family like husband and (unborn) children. This ideal of a Sikh wife provides a sharp contrast to the modern feminist ideal which teaches a young wife to assert her identity and live for herself primarily and for others only secondarily.

His mother hails from Daska. Krishna suggests the fact of a woman's displacement in his mother's coming from Daska to Amritsar. "Coming with all the shyness of the rustic from the open skies and landscapes of Daska to the four-storied house of her husband in the narrow alleyways of Kucha Faqir Khana at Amritsar, she had been disillusioned first by her environment, then by the treatment of her mother-in-law and her husband" (P.69). Krishna describes the patriarchal role played by his mother and father in the house without any demur or choice. Both his father and mother had accepted their irreversible fate as there was no concept of divorce in the Hindu or Sikh laws. "And there could never have been any idea of divorce between them, because there was then no divorce in the laws of Hindus and because the most ill-matched couples compromised and accepted the fate which willy-nilly put them together, my mother and father had accepted quite so ill-matched: she obeyed her lord and master; he recognized her homage by taking her for granted, so that she was lifted from complete servitude and placed on a kind of fictitious throne" (P.72). In other words the marriage of his parents happened to be an inescapable prison.

Now Krishna attains the school-going age. He starts going to the school. "For, to go to school had been my ambition of my life during the whole of the previous year" (P.76). As he is quite short, he always worries about his height. "I had secretly wished and prayed to god to make me grow to the same height as my elder brother somehow, except that I was afraid that if my prayer was granted and I did grow up overnight to be like Ganesh I might find that I had acquired his flat nose, his shapeless ears and his general angularity into the bargain. But I had not seen any appreciable change in my height corresponding to my prayers to God" (P.77). This shows his anxiety about his physical development. Krishna's desire to grow and belief that his prayer may help him accomplish his task instantly or immediately show his childlike innocence and ignorance of the hard and harsh realities of life.

Another detail of Krishna's childhood experience happens to be a new awareness of the cultural difference between Hindus and Muslims. For example when he goes to his friend Ali's house and, being attracted by the colourful chicks and tries to catch one of them, Ali's mother warns him, "You Hindus must not kill little chicks; they are for us Musulmans to eat" (P.79). For the first time Krishna becomes aware of the difference of the eating habits of Hindus and Muslims and this awareness helps him to grasp the consequent cultural contrast between the two in so many details later on. Krishna constructs knowledge through the cognitive processes of his

own experiences rather than by memorizing facts provided by others. His construction of knowledge of the difference between Hindus and Muslims is both individual and social.

Another cultural difference between Hindus and Muslims that Krishna observes is that the Muslims do not believe in taking bath every day compulsorily. He confirms this fact by observing his friend, Ali. “Ganesh stood talking to Ali, who crouched on the dust gingerly sprinkling water on his hands and his face from a big kettle-like copper jug, as if he were afraid of the water, which he was, for, unfortunately, Islam does not enjoin daily ablutions as a religious duty” (Pp.79-80).

One more cultural difference between Hindus and Muslims that Krishna observes is regarding their eating habits. Whereas the Hindus eat from separate plates, the Muslims eat from a common plate and common bowl. “Ali now sat with his sister Ayesha and his little brother, Akbar, eating out of a bowl full of steaming hot mutton curry and a basketful of chapattis, They would break a piece of bread from the basket with the five fingers of their right hand, dip it into the gravy, which was plentiful, and put it into their mouth” (P.80). Krishna feels rather disgusted with this sight. He, therefore, says, “Trained to the snobbery of a daintier code of manners by mother, who was over-scrupulous about cleanliness, I looked away from this community meal” (P.80).

After observing the cultural contrast between Hindus and Muslims, Krishna happens to observe a similar contrast between the Indians in general and the British rulers. The British Rule in India had necessitated the colonial juxtaposition of Indians and the British people in India. The contrast between Western culture and eastern culture was especially conspicuous in the regimental life in which Krishna’s father had been working. Krishna, therefore, notices the contrast between the two cultures quite early in life. He observes the British officers or *Sahib log* and their way of life with great curiosity. He observes many aspects of British/Western life with initial incomprehension and subsequent appreciation. Thus attraction and disillusionment with Western culture go on alternating in his approach. For example, the first thing that puzzles him is the Western music which looks like meaningless noise. But when he is initiated into it by Mr. Clayton, he begins to understand and appreciate it. “The regimental band practiced as a full orchestra under the shadow of a porch, morning, noon and afternoon, about fifty yards away from our house. At first I was struck by the meaningless noise of angrezi music. Then when I had persuaded Clayton to teach me to read the hieroglyphs on the books from which he played his flute, and when I had been privileged by the Drum Major to beat the drum with my own hands, my feet began to thump to the tunes of the waltzes, fox-trots and march-music like those of a wild animal and my body swayed to the airs of “Home Sweet Home,” “God save the King,” which, along with a few others, constituted the main items in the repertoire of the regimental band. And the clarinets, the saxophones and all the strangely shaped brass and ebony instruments looked so polished and fine, and the sight of Mishta Jones, the Indian Christian bandmaster, standing on a raised box and waving his pointer up and down in zig-zag curves over the loose leaves spread on the iron rests before him, looked too ridiculous and sublime not to be the favourite item in the repertoire of my own mimes. I kicked up a continuous row with my shrill squeaks, loud raucous noises, beatings of an empty kerosene oil tin, and often brought the house down” (P.97).

The systematic drill of soldiers captures the attention of Krishna. Consequently he wants to become a soldier. Sometimes he wants to join a circus. Some other time he wants to be like

Angrezi sahibs. His desire to become like everyone, who is attractive or important, is in keeping with child psychology. A child has unlimited ambition to achieve everything without knowing the practical difficulty of doing so. The contrast between British things and Indian ones is noticed by him conspicuously. The British items like bicycles, motor-cycles, felt-hats, pistols, forks, knives, cricket bats – create a deep impression on him and he feels that Indian life looks sordid by contrast.

Because of his attraction for the strange nature of the British Sahibs he dreams of going to the West and becoming like them. “Compared with my own people, however, my parents, the sepoys, the bandsmen, the followers, the banias in the bazaar and the shopkeepers in the town, the Angrez Sahibs seemed so remote and romantic that I soon wanted to be like them even as I wanted to go to Vilayat. Possessed by this sense of sense of otherness, I had come one day and asked my mother to get me ‘one of the *topees* which the Sahibs wore.’ ... As I waited for the fulfillment of my desire for the Western hat, I built up an idea of Englishness in the light of which all the details of mu home like seemed a sordid drudgery, an interval of lusterless natu existence, relieved only by the few rays of the exotic which entered our home. My mind devoured the pictures of Englishmen in raincoats, of Englishwomen in lingerie and of English children in Eaton collars and school kits and of all the appearances of Anglo-Indian existence, boots, shoes, hats, pistols, forks and knives, push bikes, motor bikes, cricket bats and the rest in the catalogues of Whiteaway Laidlaw and Company and other firms, which flooded in by every mail for the British officers from Bombay, Calcutta and London... These wonderful products of western civilization illuminated the course of my imaginings so intensely that I built up a vivid dream-world Vilayat on the basis of this rubbish and went about dressed in paper clothes cut to the English pattern and ordered about dummy figures of fuel wood as if I were a full-blown Sahib. The fervor of these early desires sank into the labyrinths of my mind, soaked me in the colours of this fantasy and filled me so that though it became a less superficial and more conscious inclination afterwards, my first goings inwards into dreams had made inevitable the course of my later destiny” (Pp.98-99). It is quite satisfying to know that the initial, superficial and fantastic dreams of Krishna were materialized in his later life in a very serious way.

Krishna’s visit to Delhi along with his father and the latter’s regiment to witness King George V and Queen Mary, who had come to India to officially inaugurate the transfer of Indian capital from Calcutta to Delhi is quite interesting. He is awed and impressed by the sight of marching soldiers, battery and horsemen. This experience is both thrilling and frightening at the same time for Krishna. “The strangeness I felt with these aliens baulked all the pleasures of the spectacle of Coronation Delhi, though so voracious a curiosity as mine could hardly be completely crushed. My all-seeing eyes, which never tired of looking, looking, feasted on the welter of confusion, saturated themselves with visions of the immense pavilions glistening in the nimble sun of the cold morning as I progressed in a *tonga* with my guardian on the smooth, well-oiled road, bordered by beds of chrysanthemums and stretches of grass, through the giant entrance courtyards of the camps of princes and noblemen, more sparkling and resplendent and huge than anything I had ever seen before.

“While we were yet on the way to the town there was the reverberation of innumerable guns booming out somewhere. Babu Haveli ram assured me that it was the Royal Salute being fired.

“Just as there is a salute offered to the Jarnel Sahib at Nowshera, Uncle?” I asked.

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“To be sure, but this salute is being fired in honour of the greatest Jarnel that there is in the world, the Badshah George Panjam,” he said. And in order to prevent me from being frightened, he continued:”Look, the guns are in the fort thee” (P.101).

Krishna is deeply impressed by the gorgeous spectacle of King George V and Queen May being received with all the military pomp and grandeur.

He gets lost in the crowd temporarily and experiences a sort of forlornness and loneliness. (Perhaps Mulk Raj Anand developed this theme in his story, “The Lost Child” later.) Krishna finds himself lost in the crowd and cannot trace his companions. But when somebody identifies him and takes him to his father, he learns that his gold bangles are also lost. Later his gold bangles are recovered with great difficulty. But this experience caused a good deal of tension to the boy as well as his father and his caretakers. At the end of the programme, the transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi is announced by the Viceroy.

This gorgeous programme is not without its dangers. Krishna witnesses an explosion of a bomb near the place where King George V and Queen Mary were to be taken in a grand procession.

A few days after this grand function at Delhi, Krishna sees his father’s anxiety about another incident, i.e. the Pathans stealing about seventy guns from their regiment.”For one day, suddenly some Pathans descended from the low-lying hills beyond our barracks, disguised so as not to arouse the least of suspicion, at a time when the chill mist had settled on the dry river bed which separated the barracks from the hills. It was said that they bound and gagged the sepoy on ‘sentry-go’ at the quarter guard, looted seventy rifles from the magazine and disappeared into the hills” (P.113). This incident disturbs Krishna’s father deeply and consequently he begins to suffer from a sort of persecution mania. After a few days Krishna witnesses the celebration of the Bara Din i.e. Christmas Day by the regimental staff and enjoys its various aspects.

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In the next phase of his life, Krishna notices a conspicuous change in his father’s relations. He is beaten by his father for stealing a mango. He experiences a sort of humiliation both at home and at school, where he is flogged by his classmates as ordered by his teacher. The loss and recovery of a silver spoon, the performances of a legendary man called Dumri in the lanes, his going into somebody’s maize field and getting bound hand and foot, and events such as these go on happening in Krishna’s life. His horizon of experience has been widening slowly. Meanwhile his mental powers are growing and propelling him to pose deep philosophical questions to his father, who cannot answer them easily at all. “Father, why are there so many things in this world? Who made the world? And why is not possible to know everything?” My father merely smiled at my impetuosity and patted me affectionately in a way that seemed to indicate that he was please with me” (P.146).

Krishna happens to be adventurous in spirit. Although quite young, he used to accompany the bigger boys and sit near them while they played. Once it so happened that a friend pelted a stone at somebody, but it hit Krishna’s head and wounded him mortally. Consequently he was hospitalized and had a vicarious experience of death. “I seemed to have a strong enough hold on life, however, somewhere in my bones. For as I was carried to the operation table from time to time and Colonel Bailey...leaned on me, unwrapped my wound and probed it with a long needle and dressed it, I lay fear-stricken but patient, as if with fear of death

before me I had ceased to be whiner” (P.157). When anesthesia was given to him in the hospital he experiences a fantasy of fighting with and conquering the witch of death, which is quite interesting from the viewpoint of child psychology: “Helpless under the gas, my brain wheeled and fought imaginary battles with an imaginary knife. One of these aberrations I still remember vividly: A dark, ugly witch with flashing white teeth was coming towards me as I sat by a steaming cauldron. I felt that she was going to throw me into this sizzling pan by rolling me, as I had grown very strong and heavy, across a board. But I was determined that I would do her and, putting my leg across her as the sepoy wrestlers did to their adversaries, threw her into the cauldron instead. She was coming. There I had caught her. Heave, push, strain and lo, I had toppled her over into the pan. She was frying in the grease. And I laughed but – ‘There now, you will be all right,’ Colonel Bailey was saying in his queer Hindustani. And the stretcher was being brought to the table, and sleep was creeping into the pupils of my eyes... And I woke later to find my mouth parched, my nostrils dilating, my heart beating eagerly, my eyes exploring the room to find someone to touch, to contact, to hold. I was beginning to conquer Death” (P.158).

Although in his world of fantasy Krishna seemed to conquer Death, in his post-illness period he a fear of death. “The illness left a permanent mark on me, however. I felt a curious dread of everyone and everything, and became touchy, like a sensitive plant, so that tears would spring to my eyes at the least little thing. I was never to be the bonny, healthy child again and was always overshadowed by the fear of death, a kind of horror, which this illness left as a black mark on my soul, intensifying my eagerness, my impetuosity and zest for experience, making me grasp at life with both hands and yet having my nerves taut, my body unworkable to manual labour” (P.161).

Interrogation, the articulation of the growth of one’s mind is part of one’s childhood experience. Krishna goes on asking a number of fundamental, philosophical questions to his mother now, although she cannot answer all of them satisfactorily. Mulk Raj Anand not only narrates his childhood experience, but also analyzes it retrospectively and microscopically with his subsequent mature knowledge of life. “My curiosity became devouring. After the earlier phase of life when I had been more or less egocentric, regarding the whole world as an extension of my wishes, when people and things outside were grasped with the natural warmth of the hand and the eye, through the stage when I had begun to cultivate the gift of speech, but exercised it only to express myself, I now began to evolve a cocoon of self-intoxication by absorbing the outside world more intensely through my whys and wherefores. I was going to leave nothing to chance” (P.162). As a result of his devouring curiosity, he goes on asking a series of questions to his mother. For example, ‘What are the stars, Mother? And how can the sun move all day without any feet? Where do the clouds go? What is beyond the sky?’ Perhaps every sensitive child wants to know the answers to these questions.

Another aspect of childhood experience happens to be the desire to listen to fairy tales and stories of fantasy. Pestered by Krishna, his mother tells him many fairy stories including the one about Raja Rasulu. These stories indirectly help him to develop his moral sensibility, high ideals and a sense of adventure in his later life.

Playing the games of different kinds is part of childhood experience, as it gives the child a vicarious experience of wish fulfillment. For example, Krishna plays the game of cooking with Rukmini and war-games with his friends. He expresses his adventurous spirit by entering the forest area and encountering with a deadly cobra.

As he is growing older biologically he begins to enjoy the sensuous pleasure of touching or being touched by members of the opposite sex. For example, whenever Rukmini, a twelve year girl hugs him or touches him he feels an unmentionable thrill. In Freudian terms, it may suggest the awakening of his sexual awareness and point to his psycho-sexual development. But we cannot stretch it far in the Indian context.

Going to school, being taught as well as punished by teachers and being loved helped and harassed by classmates in part of childhood experience of any child in the world. In accordance with this general rule, Krishna is admitted into the local school and he takes some time to acclimatize himself to the school atmosphere and earn the love of his class teacher. His father teaches him arithmetic at home. Finally Krishna passes in the examination, which makes his father proud. He learns and improves his language remarkably. Language learning is an important stage in the development of a child. Through the cumulative experiences of his life, Krishna has been forming his sense of identity stage by stage.

Meanwhile the family of Krishna is deeply worried about Harish's ingratitude. Although Harish is encouraged to study medicine, he has to discontinue it due to the pressure of his wife to be near him.

A new chapter opens in Krishna's life when he visits his mother's parental home at Daska to attend his Mama's wedding. There he meets his maternal grandfather and maternal uncle Sharam Singh. This place is quite different from Nowshera where there is a colonial atmosphere. Daska happens to be a country side place with its own beauty, abundance of Nature and natural resources. His visit to Daska gives him some thrilling experience. He learns that his grandfather fought for Khalsa and appreciates his patriotism. He likes the friendly nature of his Mama, Sharam Singh. He has some other memorable and thrilling experiences of his childhood. For example he likes his Mama's buffalo and rides on its back and is about to be drowned in the water of River Lunda when the buffalo dashes into the mid-water of the river. But he is saved by Sharam Singh. He swims in the River Lunda and enjoys the new experience. He hears the Durgi songs sung by the relatives of his mother. He listens to the story of Hir Ranjha (composed by Waris Shah) recited by Uncle Sardar Singh. In addition to these thrilling experiences, he has a bit of disconcerting experience also. He observes the misunderstanding between his mother and her sister and the quarrel, which were rather jealousy-oriented. He is happy to see the quick reconciliation also between the members. Finally Krishna attends the marriage of his Mama, enjoys eating a number of sweets. Then he returns to Nowshera with a heavy heart by bidding farewell to his mama and grandfather. All these experiences hold mirror to his emotional development by helping him to interact positively with his blood-relatives on his mother's side.

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After returning to Nowshera Krishna observes the condition of his family closely and notices the hypocrisy of family honour. Although his family boasts of being a combatant dynasty now, he learns that originally they were not combatants but only craftsmen (like silversmiths/coppersmiths). The honesty and frankness of Mulk Raj Anand has to be appreciated in recording his childhood experiences without hiding anything that is unsavourable. "I was vaguely conscious of my father's position. Of course, we all like to feel a bit superior, and out of the kind of pride that derived from my hero-worshipping attitude to my father I took it for granted that ours was the most distinguished family in the brotherhood of silversmiths and coppersmiths in Amritsar, and that my father was a highly esteemed and influential Babu, a

learned man. But with that naive, frank eye of the observant child, quick to see the hypocrisy of our prestige. I noticed the contrast between the poor standard of life in our household and the comparatively luxurious fare which even the bandsmen in the followers' lines enjoyed" (P.219) Krishna confesses that the standard of life in his house was not high, but quite ordinary, which was marked by the simple food, simple clothes and simple shoes that they had.

Krishna happens to be an adventurous and ambitious boy, who feels that his dreams are suppressed by his family. There is a streak of frustration in his childhood experience. "All my wild dreams and fancies, all the fugitive emotions that welled up in my mischievous frame were suppressed and the hours stretched into days, days into other days, long, long and interminable, and it seemed it would be ages before I would grow up to be tall and free... Of course, in spite of the fear of being taken to task, I did not obey the injunctions strictly... My impressions of the surreptitious adventures on which I went were some of the most intense of my life, yet they were all baulked by an inner fear, by the oppression of that home discipline which derived not a little of its severity and harshness from the effect of the British Army code on my father's mind" (P.220).

In the last part of his autobiographical novel, Mulk Raj Anand thinks seriously about the seven years of his childhood that he has spent and tries to analyze his psychology. He learns that he has not developed any definite plan or goal in life and that his future is still uncertain and without any particular direction. "I really see a child nowadays without wondering on what mysterious course or violent act his mind is drifting, what strange and unforeseen adventure he is deliberating, how the colours of his soul are changing. For, as I look back upon the first seven years of my own half unconscious and half conscious childhood, I see myself, despite the rigours of the restricted, narrow routine world of the cantonment with all its taboos, flowing like a stream, now bright and vivacious with the sunbeams which played upon it, now gloomy with the tears of my sorrow, but always flowing, trickling through the dams and barriers placed in my way, or charging across them so as to demolish them and sweep them aside, lean and starved by the majesty of the sun or swollen and blustering, but unstayed. I did not, of course, know the direction in which I was going, and often I was apt to change my course, but in the main I flowed with the other streams which flowed by me, as if, I and the deep creative urges in me, were drawn by some inner magnetic attraction to each other and to the big broad river of life which flowed not far away" (P.230). Although Krishna has not found his direction yet, he has to flow with the current of time until things become clear to him with the growth of his age, intelligence and comprehension of life. Until then he continues to observe the life around him.

He observes the beauties and horrors of frontier landscape. Although he does not remember exactly when he observed them, they remain as indelible impressions on his mind and influence his later life also. "But I know that when I was nearing the age of seven, certain sights and sounds became indelibly fixed on my mind and formed the stable background of all my memories of later years. So vivid, indeed are these impressions that even now, if I close my eyes, I can beckon the exact texture of the atmosphere at noon in the Nowshera cantonment, with all the minute rainbow-coloured particles of light revolving before my eyes almost as though in a kaleidoscope. And of course, the bigger things in that landscape are to me now like fables of my early imaginings which can never grow old with repetition" (P.231). For example, he observes the magnificent beauty of the ranges of the Hindu Kush Mountains, which he describes as 'ladders of heaven', the Pathans putting the ghosts of the Tommies that they have killed into the

scarecrows, the caravan of donkeys, the metalled Grand Trunk Road, the tonga carts in higgledy-piggledy confusion in Sadar Bazaar, the meat market, the barbers and the wayside whores. He enjoys his picnic on the bank of River Lunda. Thus Krishna's childhood experiences of joys and sorrows and surprises and adventures come to an end when war is declared between two groups of nations. Krishna's son explains the details of the war as follows: "Son, the Kaiser of Germany, the Sultan of Turkey and the Badshah of Austria, are on one side and the Angrezi Badshah and the whole world are on the other side" (P.236). Krishna's father fears that he may have to go to the war by leaving his entire family and country and not sure of returning alive or safe. He does not want to go to the war, but rather retire and be safe. "Unlike the time after the outrage on Lord Hardinge, when he had wished and prayed that he might not be out of favour with the Sahibs, he now earnestly wished that they might dismiss him or ask him to retire" (P.238). When Krishna's mother tries to offer a mythological interpretation of the war, his father dismisses it outright. "Apparently her prognostications seemed not to come true, for my father received orders that he was to stay with the depot at Malakand in the Frontier. As my father knew that his war service would be an important asset when he returned from abroad, he was a trifle disappointed. In fact, however, he did not seem to care about anything as he seemed relieved to get the news and to end the suspense and he resigned himself to all the readjustments by this event" (P.238).

Although autobiographies are in quite a large number in Indian English written especially by national politicians, those written by non-politicians are rare. But those written by academic scholars exclusively about their childhood days are rarest still. From this point of view Mulk Raj Anand's *Seven Summers* happens to be an important contribution to the genre of autobiography of one's childhood. It is highly perceptive in its recording of childhood experiences with graphic details. It is at once realistic and poetic and philosophical. In it Mulk Raj Anand not only narrates his experiences, but also analyses and interprets them in the light of his later mature philosophical and psychological knowledge. *Seven Summers* offers a great wealth of material for the child psychologists to build up their theories or revise them also in the light of the novelist's childhood experiences. In revealing his childhood experiences, Mulk Raj Anand reveals a chunk of colonial and regimental history North-Western part of India also. Since the novelist happens to be the son of a military employee, he had the opportunity to observe and live in the company of the British officers and able to comprehend the cultural contrast between Indian/Hindu/Sikh culture and the British/Christian culture also from a boy's point of view and microscopically. It is not a priestly experience of going to the temple and worshipping the dead icons of gods and dealing with only flowers and coconuts, but something robust and rigorous that is rare in Indian English Literature.

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