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CHAPTER

The Lost Child

Mulk Raj Anand

➔ About the Author

Mulk Raj Anand has a distinguished place among the Indian writers. He was born in 1905 in Peshawar. He was educated in Amritsar. He was sent to England on a scholarship to study philosophy at London University in 1925. He got a doctorate from Cambridge. He is famous for his style and expression. His famous works are — The Big Heart, The Sword and the Sickle, Across the Black Waters, The Coolie and The Untouchable. 'The Lost Child' is one of his famous stories.



➔ About the Story

The Lost Child is the story of a child who goes to a fair with his parents. He is attracted by the toys, sweets, flowers, garlands, balloons and the round about in the fair. But his parents did not fulfil any of his desires. All of a sudden, he is lost in the crowd. What is the condition of the child after he is separated from his parents in the fair ? Does he find his parents? Read the story to get the answer of these questions.



It was the festival of spring. From the wintry shades of narrow lanes and alleys emerged a gaily clad humanity, thick as a swarm of bright coloured rabbits issuing from a warren. They entered the flooded sea of sparkling silver sunshine outside the city gates and sped towards the fair. Some walked, some rode on horses, others sat, being carried in bamboo and bullock carts. One little boy ran between his parents' legs, brimming over with lie and laughter. The joyous morning gave greetings and unashamed invitations to all to come away into the fields, full of flowers and songs.

"Come, child, come", called his parents, as he lagged behind, arrested by the toys in the shops that lined the way.

He hurried towards his parents, his feet obedient to their call, his eyes still lingering on the receding toys. As he came to where they had stopped to wait for him, he could not suppress the desire of his heart, even though he well knew the old, cold stare of refusal in their eyes.

"I want that toy," he pleaded.

His father looked at him red-eyed in his familiar tyrant's way. His mother, melted by the free spirit of the day, was tender, and giving him her finger to catch, said : "Look, child, what is before you".

The faint disgust of the child's unfulfilled desire had hardly been quelled in the heavy,

pouting sob of a breath, 'm-o-th-e-r', when the pleasure of what was before him filled his eager eye. They had left the dusty road on which they had walked so far. It wended its weary way circuitously to the north. They had come upon a footpath in a field.

It was a powering mustard field, pale like melting gold as it swept across miles and miles of even land — a river of yellow liquid light, ebbing and falling with each fresh eddy of wild wind, and straying in places into broad rich tributary streams, yet running in a constant sunny sweep towards the distant mirage of an ocean of silver light. Where it ended, on one side stood a cluster of low mud-walled houses, thrown into relief by a dense crowd of yellow-robed men and women from which arose a high-pitched sequence of whistling, creaking, squeaking, roaring, humming noises, sweeping across the groves to the blue-throated sky like the weird, strange sound of Siva's mad laughter.

The child looked up to his father and mother, saturated with the shrill joy and wonder of this vast glory, and feeling that they, too, wore the evidence of this pure delight in their faces, he left the footpath and plunged headlong into the field, prancing like a young colt, his small feet timing with the fitful gusts of wind that came rich with the fragrance of more distant fields.

A group of dragon-flies were bustling about on their gaudy purple wings, intercepting the flight of a lone black butterfly in search of sweetness from the flowers. The child followed them in the air with his gaze, till one of them would fold its wings and rest, and he would try to catch it. But it would go fluttering, flapping, up into the air, when he had almost caught it in his hands. One bold black bee, having evaded capture, sought to tempt him by whining round his ear and nearly settled on his lips, when his mother gave a cautionary call; "Come, child, come, come on to the footpath".

He ran towards his parents gaily and walked abreast of them for a while, being, however, soon left behind, attracted by the little insects and worms along the footpath that were teeming out from their hiding-places to enjoy the sunshine.

"Come, child, come," his parents called from the shade of a grove where they had seated themselves on the edge of a well. He ran towards them.

An old banyan tree outstretched its powerful arms over the blossoming jack and jaman and neem and champak and scrisha and cast its shadows across beds of golden cassis and crimson gulmohur as an old grandmother spreads her skirts over her young ones. But the blushing blossoms freely offered their adoration to the sun in spite of their protecting chaperon; by half covering themselves, and the sweet perfume of their pollen mingled with the soft, cool breeze that came and went in little puffs, only to be wafted aloft by a stronger breeze.

A shower of young flowers fell upon the child as he entered the grove and, forgetting his parents, he began to gather the raining petals in his hands. But lo ! he heard the cooing of the doves and ran towards his parents, shouting : "The dove! The dove!" The raining petals dropped from his forgotten hands. A curious look was in his parents' faces till a koel struck out a note of love and released their pent up souls.

"Come, child, come!" they called to the child, who had now gone running in wild capers round the banyan tree, and gathering him up, they took the narrow, winding footpath which led to the fair through the mustard field.

As they neared the village, the child could see many other footpaths full of thorns,

converging to the whirlpool of the fair, and felt at once repelled and fascinated by the confusion of the world, he was entering.

A sweetmeat seller hawked : 'Gulab-jamun, rasgulla, burfi, jalebi', at the corner of the entrance, and a crowd pressed round his counter at the foot on an architecture of many-coloured sweets, decorated with leaves of silver and gold. The child stared open-eyed and his mouth watered for the burfi that was his favourite sweet. 'I want that burfi', he slowly murmured. But he half knew as he begged that his plea would not be heeded because his parents would say he was greedy. So without waiting for an answer, he moved on.

A flower-seller hawked : 'A garland of gulmohur, a garland of gulmohur'. The child seemed irresistibly drawn by the implacable sweetness of the scents that came floating on the wings of the languid air. He went towards the basket where the flowers were heaped and half murmured, 'I want that garland'. But he well knew his parents would refuse to buy him those flowers because they would say they were cheap. So without waiting for an answer, he moved on.

A man stood holding a pole with yellow, red, green and purple balloons flying from it. The child was simply carried away by the rainbow glory of the silken colours and he was possessed by an overwhelming desire to possess them all. But he well knew his parents would never buy him the balloons because they would say he was too old to play with such toys. So he walked on farther.

A juggler stood playing a flute to a snake which coiled itself in a basket, its head raised in a graceful bend like the neck of a swan, while the music stole into its invisible ears like the gentle rippling of a miniature waterfall. The child went towards the juggler. But knowing his parents had forbidden him to hear such coarse music as the jugglers played, he proceeded farther.

There was a round about in full swing. Men, women and children, carried away in a whirling motion, shrieked and cried with dizzy laughter. The child watched them intently going round and round, a pink blush of a smile on his face, his eyes rippling with the same movement, his lips parted in amazement, till he felt that he himself was being carried round. The ring seemed to go fiercely at first, then gradually it began to move less fast. Presently the child, rapt, finger in his mouth, beheld it stop. This time, before his overpowering love for the anticipated sensation of movement had been chilled by the thought of his parents' eternal denial, he made a bold request : "I want to go on the roundabout, please, father, mother."

There was no reply. He turned to look at his parents. They were not there ahead of him. He turned to look on either side. They were not there. He looked behind. There was no sign of them.

A full deep cry rose within his dry throat and with a sudden jerk of his body, he ran from where he stood, crying in red fear, 'Mother, father!' Tears rolled down from his eyes, hot and fierce; his flushed face was convulsed with fear. Panic-stricken, he ran to one side first, then to the other, hither and thither in all directions, knowing no where to go. 'Mother, father!' he wailed with a moist, shrill breath now, his throat being wet with swallowing the spittle. His yellow turban came untied and his clothes, wet with perspiration, became muddy where the dust had mixed with the sweat of his body. His light frame seemed heavy as a mass of lead.

Having run to and fro in a rage of running for a while, he stood defeated, his cries

suppressed into sobs. At little distances on the green grass he could see, through his filmy eyes, men and women talking. He tried to look intently among the patches of bright yellow clothes, but there was no sign of his father and mother among these people, who seemed to laugh and talk just for the sake of laughing and talking.

He ran hotly again, this time to a shrine to which people seemed to be crowding. Every little inch of space here was congested with men but he ran through people's legs, his little sob lingering 'Mother, father!' Near the entrance to the temple, however, the crowd became very thick, men jostled each other, heavy men, with lashing, murderous eyes and hefty shoulders. The poor child struggled to thrust a way between their feet but, knocked to and fro by their brutal movements, he might have been trampled underfoot had he not shrieked at the highest pitch of this voice : 'Father, mother!' A man in the surging crowd heard his cry and, stooping with very great difficulty, lifted him up in his arms.

"How did you get here, child ? Whose baby are you ?" the man asked as he steered clear of the mass. The child wept more bitterly than ever now and only cried : "I want my mother, I want my father !"

The man tried to soothe him by taking him to the roundabout. "Will you have a lift on the horse ?" he gently asked as he approached the ring. The child's throat tore into a thousand shrill sobs and he only shouted : "I want my mother, I want my father !"

The man headed towards the place where the juggler still played on the flute to the dancing cobra. "Listen to that nice music, child" he pleaded. But the child shut his ears with his fingers and shouted his double-pitched strain : "I want my mother, I want my father !" The man took him near the balloons, thinking the bright coloured of the balls would distract the child's attention and quieten him. "Would you like a rainbow-coloured balloon ?" he persuasively asked. The child turned his eyes from the flying balloons and just sobbed : "I want my mother, I want my father."

The man, still importunate in his kindly desire to make the child happy, bore him to the gate where the flower-seller sat, "Look! Can you smell those nice flowers, child ? Would you like a garland to put round your neck ?" The child turned his nose away from the basket and reiterated his sob : 'I want my mother, I want my father'".

Thinking to humour his disconsolate charge by a gift of sweets, the man took him to the counter of sweet shop. "What sweets would you like, child ?" he asked. The child turned his face from the sweet shop and only sobbed : "I want my mother, I want my father !"

||Glossary||

alleys	— narrow streets (पगडण्डी, सँकरी गली)
emerged	— came out (निकलना, दृष्टिगोचर होना)
gaily	— happily (प्रसन्नता से)
sworn	— promised by an oath (शपथपूर्वक प्रतिज्ञाबद्ध)
brimming	— flooding (भरा हुआ)
lagged	— remained (ठहरना, बना रहना)
lingering	— staying (ठहरते हुए)
receding	— coming back (पीछे होते हुए)
suppress	— control (दबाना, नियंत्रित करना)

stare	— look, gaze (स्थिर दृष्टि से देखना)
refused	— denial (मना करना)
familiar	— known (जाना हुआ, परिचित)
tyrant	— cruel person (क्रूर व्यक्ति)
tender	— soft (कोमल, मृदु)
disgust	— strong feeling of dislike (घृणा करना)
ebbing	— decline (उतार)
cluster	— group (समूह)
dense	— thick (घना)
evidence	— witness (साक्ष्य)
plunged	— entered (प्रवेश करना)
prancing	— dancing (नृत्य करना)
gaudy	— bright (चमकीला)
mingled	— mixed (मिश्रित, मिला-जुला)
fascinating	— attracting (आकर्षक)
congested	— packed (एकत्रित)
trampled	— crushed (नष्ट किया, कुचल दिया)
gaily clad	— wearing clothes of bright colours (चमकीले वस्त्र पहने हुए)
warren	— series of burrows in which rabbits live (रास्तों की भूल-भुलैया)
sparkling	— shining (चमकते हुए)
brimming over	— full (पूर्ण, उफनता हुआ)
quelled	— overcame (जीत लिया, विजय प्राप्त की, नियन्त्रित किया)
pouting sob	— sob with lips pushed out (मुँह बनाकर सिसकी भरना)
circuitously	— going a long way round (चक्करदार रास्ते पर जाना)
eddy	— circular movement (घुमावपूर्ण गति)
mirage	— illusion of something which is not there (भ्रम)
weird	— eerie, strange (विचित्र, अद्भुत)
evaded	— avoided (टाल दिया)
abreast	— ahead (आगे, मार्ग पर)
teeming out	— coming out in a large number (बड़ी संख्या में आना)
adoration	— worship (पूजा, अर्चना)
chaperon	— escort of a girl (युवती की) (संरक्षिका)
wafted aloft	— carried high up lightly (धीमे से ऊपर उठाया)
pent up souls	— suppressed feelings (दबी हुई भावनाएँ)
implacable	— that cannot be appeased (जो उपस्थित न हो सके)
languid	— slow moving (धीमी चाल, धीमे चलते हुए)
overwhelming	— very strong (बलिष्ठ)
miniature	— on a small scale (थोड़ी मात्रा में)
dizzy	— causing a whirling sensation (चक्कर)
rapt	— deep in thought (विचारों में गम्भीर)

eternal denial	— constant refusal (लगातार इन्कार)
convulsed	— shook violently (जोर से हिलाया)
panic stricken	— in great fear and terror (भय तथा आतंक में)
perspiration	— sweating (पसीना बहाकर, परिश्रमपूर्ण)
trampled	— crushed (नष्ट किया, कुचल दिया)
steered clear of	— came clear out of (स्पष्टतः बाहर निकला)
importunate	— making repeated requests (पुनः प्रार्थना करना)
reiterated	— repeated again and again (बार-बार दुहराया)
to humour	— to gratify, to please (प्रसन्न करने के लिए)
arrested	— (here) attracted (मोहित हो गया)
hurried	— ran hurriedly (तेजी से भागा)
suppress	— control (दबाना, नियन्त्रित करना)
pleaded	— requested (विनती की)
eager	— curious (उत्सुक)
wended	— passed (बीत गये)
ebbing	— flow back from the land to the sea (उतार)
tributary	— assistant (सहायक)
saturated	— containing the maximum amount of solute capable of being dissolved under given conditions (संतृप्त)

||Exercise||

➤ Short Answer Type Questions :

Answer the following questions in not more than 30 words each :

- Where was the child going ?
- What was the first demand of the child while going to the fair ?
- What did the child feel when his first demand was not fulfilled ?
- Describe the beauty of the mustard field.
- Why did the child not ask for the balloons ?
- Why was the little boy called by the parents ?
- What were the things the child was attracted to in the fair before getting lost ?
- Where did the man find the child ? What did he do ?
- How did the child react to every kind of offer of the gentle man ?
- What did the child feel when he was lost ?
- Or** What changes do you notice in the behaviour of the child, once he is separated from his parents in the story 'The Lost Child'?
- Or** Describe the condition of the child when he had lost his parents?
- Describe the plight of the child, after he loses the company of his parents as given in the story 'The Lost Child'.
- Why did the child reject everykind of offer of the gentleman in the story 'The Lost Child'.
- How did child react when he realised that he was lost?
- Show how the child lost all interest in the fair after he was separated from his parents.
- Why do you like the story 'The Lost Child'?

