



## 'THE LOST CHILD' BY MULK RAJ ANAND

### : UNIT STRUCTURE :

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### 11.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit we shall

- learn about the author MulkrajAnand
- learn explication of the short story

By the end of the unit, you should be able to

- learn about various elements of the short story under study
- evaluate the short story

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### 11.1 INTRODUCTION

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'The Lost Child' is a story written by Indian English author Mulk Raj Anand. This story is all about the value of love and affection that a child shares with his parents. The story is set in the season of spring and the location is fun-fair where the child gets tempted by all the attractive items displayed in the fun-fair. The story deals with the price of worldly things and the value of bonding in relationship. A sudden twist in the story conveys the central idea of the story. It moves from worldly pleasures to affectionate pains. It deals with the demands of a child-psyche, which moves from the external world to internal being. Many 'wants' turned into 'longings'- that is the main shift in the story. Narrative technique has tremendously been taken care of keeping in mind the psychology of a child. The pleasures of one moment do not satisfy the child's inner thirst at another moment. Something lost makes him learn the value of it in the midst of prices of worldly matters. This is how the story ends with a very strong moral lesson.

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### 11.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) is one of the prominent names among Indian English authors. His novels, short stories and critical essays have marked milestones

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in the genre of Indian English writing. Anand was born on December 12, 1905 at Peshawar, India (now in Pakistan). He is renowned for realistic portrayal of the poor in India in his stories and novels. He pursued his graduation from Punjab University, Lahore in 1924 and he studied further at University of Cambridge and University College of London. During early years, he wrote *Persian Painting* (1930), *Curries and Other Indian Dishes* (1932), *The Hindu View of Art* (1933), *The Indian Theatre* (1950), and *Seven Little-Known Birds of the Inner Eye* (1978) and he earned very good reputation in literary scenario of the time. Mulk Raj Anand expanded his fame with his novels *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936), which exposed the exertion of poor people in India. By 1945 he came back to Bombay to campaign for national reforms. His other major works include *The Village* (1939), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), and *The Big Heart* (1945; rev. ed. 1980). He founded an Art Quarterly 'Marg' in 1946 and also edited magazines and journals. His autobiographical novel entitled 'Seven Ages of Man' was also published during 1951-1984 in four volumes. He has been awarded with *Sahitya Akademi Award* (1971), *Padma Bhushan* (1968), *International Peace Prize* (1953). Anand was one of the pioneer authors from India who gained international readership. His works are remarkable for his observations on Indian social structure and role of the British in India. At the age of 98, he passed away on September 28, 2004 in Pune.

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### 11.3 ABOUT THE STORY

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In the season of spring, people are out dressed in colourful attires and they are moving towards a fair. This indicates a kind of joyful atmosphere. It has been described as 'gaily clad humanity' in the very beginning of the story. A child along with his parents is going to visit fair and he is 'brimming over with life and laughter'. He keeps running ahead of his parents being lured to the stalls lined up in the fair full of toys and sweets. The scene brings excitement to the child but he knows it very well that his parents would have elderly arguments and excuses against all his demands in the fair. In fact, it happens exactly the same way; his father gets angry and his mother tries to divert his mind to other things. But the child can't resist himself from being attracted to toys and sweets displayed in the fair. Further, he moves on towards snake charmer and a roundabout swing and he asks for the permission but doesn't get any reply. He looks back and finds his parents nowhere in the fair. All of a sudden, he realizes that he is lost in the fair. In a fraction of a moment, his joys are too lost, he starts craving for his parents, and ultimately it turns into his longing-cry in the fair. A gentleman helps him and consoles him by asking for a joyride, balloons, sweets, garlands which few moments ago were actually the subjects of child's temptation. But this cannot satisfy his yearning for his parents and he keeps sobbing repeatedly uttering one and the same cry "I want my mother, I want my father".

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### 11.4 TEXT: 'THE LOST CHILD' (MULK RAJ ANAND)

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It was the festival of spring. From the wintry shades of narrow lanes and alleys emerged a gaily-clad humanity. Some walked, some rode on horses, others sat,

being carried in bamboo and bullock carts. One little boy ran between his father’s legs, brimming over with life and laughter. “Come, child, come,” called his parents, as he lagged behind, fascinated 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 hold, said, “Look, child, what is before you!”

It was a flowering mustard-field, pale like melting gold as it swept across miles and miles of even land. A group of dragonflies were bustling about on their gaudy purple wings, intercepting the flight of a lone black bee or butterfly in search of sweetness from the flowers.

The child followed them in the air with his gaze, till one of them would still 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. Then 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. 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 doves and ran towards his parents, shouting, “The dove! The dove!” The raining petals dropped from his forgotten hands.

“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 fields. As they neared the village, the child could see many other footpaths full of throngs, 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-jaman, rasagulla, burfi, jalebi,” at the corner of the entrance and a crowd pressed round his counter at the foot of 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. He went towards the basket where the flowers lay 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 that they were

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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 their silken colours and he was filled with 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 snake-charmer 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 an invisible waterfall. The child went towards the snake-charmer.

But, knowing his parents had forbidden him to hear such coarse music as the snake-charmer played, he proceeded farther. There was a roundabout in full swing. Men, women and children, carried away in a whirling motion, shrieked and cried with dizzy laughter. The child watched them intently and then 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 real 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 not where to go. "Mother, Father," he wailed. His yellow turban came untied and his clothes became muddy.

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 quickly 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 flashing, 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 his voice, "Father, Mother!"

A man in the surging crowd heard his cry and, stooping with 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 ride 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 snake- charmer still played on the flute to the swaying 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 colours of the balloons 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 trying 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 the 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!”

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## 11.5 INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

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### **Theme:**

The story deals with the theme of love and affection that children share with their parents. Being immature at a very young age, children get fascinated by lots of things around them and unknowingly they tend to possess them but many a times parents cannot get them all those things because either they cannot afford it or it is not good for the child or else it may not be required. But children do not understand this and they may get angry with parents. The theme of love and affection of a child has been portrayed in this story by creating a situation in the plot of the story when the child is lost in fair and then he does not find any pleasure in any worldly things that used to allure him. The absence of his parents in the overcrowded fair makes him weep for the loss of his parents. The only thing matters for the child in this situation is his parents.

### **Significance of the Title:**

‘The Lost Child’ is a very apt title for the story. In the temptations of worldly matters, we forget the value of bonding in relationship. World is full of playful items having price tags on them and they attract our mind but the real treasure of life is hidden in human bonding and that can be realized when this treasure is lost. Here in the story, a child is lost in fair and he is craving for his parents only. Toys and sweets no more attract him once he is separated from his parents in the crowd of the fair. The child is lost in the crowd, in the midst of all worldly enticements and finally he comes out of all allure and realizes the value of his relation with his parents. He feels lonely in the crowd because he is not with his parents; no joyful item attracts his attention because he is not with his parents. His love and affection for his parents turn into a longing sob.

‘THE LOST CHILD’  
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### **Moral of the story:**

We think that we can buy everything with money but happiness cannot be bought by money. We get tempted towards materialistic life and gradually we mislay our relations far behind in our life. In this story, the child feels that his father is very strict and does not fulfil his wishes but actually that is an inseparable part of life that not our every wish can be fulfilled and we need to accept it. Sooner we realize this, happier we would be. Here, at the end of the story the child inconsolably cries for his parents as he is lost in fair and that is how he realizes the value of his parents. Now no matter how attractive the garlands, toys and sweets are, but the only thing, which matters for the child, is the unconditional affection for his parents.

### **Characters:**

**The Lost Child:** The 'lost child' is the central character in the story. He stands for innocence and purity. His childish gestures grab the readers' attention. He is full of life and laughter and easily gets attracted towards natural beauty of fields and butterflies. He gets tempted to toys and sweets in fun-fair but he is sure that his parents would deny buying any of them so he does not even utter a word of demand. He gets very much attracted to snake charmer and roundabout swing and due to his childlike reaction to the scene in the fair he is lost in the crowd isolated from his parents. Ultimately, nothing consoles his heart, not even garlands, sweets, swing, balloons or toys which he was earlier very much fascinated for.

**Parents:** The parents of the child take care of their son with utmost love and affection. Their denial for buying things from fair stands for their concern to instil a kind of discipline in their child. The father seems to be strict but his frequent calls to the child proves that he is concerned about the child. The mother's efforts to divert her child's attention towards other things indicate her affectionate love for her child.

**A gentleman:** There comes a gentleman in the story who helps the child and takes care of him when the child is lost. He understands the feelings of the lost child and to console him he offers the things like garland, balloon, sweet etc. This clearly depicts his compassionate nature. This gentleman in the story stands for humanity.

### **Conclusion:**

'The Lost Child' is all about a curious child whose fancy gets captivated by worldly wonders. His innocence gets fascinated by the beauty of nature. He is delighted to see the joyful fluttering of butterflies and relishing colours of the flowers. He enjoys every possibility of the present time and after facing the bitter reality of being lost in overcrowded fair, he craves for his parents. He does not get content with the offerings of toys, balloons, joyride and garlands by the strange person who is willing to help the lost child and his cry in search of his parents marks his unconditional love and affection for his parents. This is how the story ends in a moral tone that worldly beauty that captures the mind does not fulfil the inner thirst for the human bonding.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: 1**

**FIND OUT THE CORRECT ANSWER FROM THE GIVEN OPTIONS.**

‘THE LOST CHILD’

BY MULK

RAJANAND

1. What festival were the people going to celebrate?  
(A) The festival of Holi. (B) The festival of Spring.  
(C) The festival of Dussehra. (D) The festival of Dipawali.
2. How were the people dressed for the festival?  
(A) Shabbily. (B) Daily.  
(C) Carelessly. (D) Scantly.
3. How were the people going to the festival?  
(A) Going on foot.  
(B) Riding on horses.  
(C) Carried in bamboo and bullock carts.  
(D) All the above
4. Who was the little boy going with?  
(A) With his father. (B) With his mother.  
(C) With his father and mother. (D) None of the above.
5. How was the little boy feeling while going to the fair?  
(A) Nervous. (B) Frightened.  
(C) Sad and unhappy. (D) Full of life and laughter.
6. What did the parents say when the child lagged behind?  
(A) ‘Come, child, come.’ (B) ‘Come, or you’ll be lost.’  
(C) ‘Come, have these toys.’ (D) ‘Come, we’re getting late.’
7. What did the child do when his parents said, ‘Come, child, come’?  
(A) He refused to move. (B) He hurried towards them.  
(C) He looked at them angrily. (D) He began to cry.
8. What did the father do when the child said, “I want that toy.”?  
(A) He at once bought the toy for the child.  
(B) He said, “Look, child, what is before you.  
(C) He looked at the child red-eyed.  
(D) He began to beat the child.
9. What did the mother do when the child said, “I want that toy.”?  
(A) She asked the father to buy that toy for the child.  
(B) She looked at the child red-eyed.  
(C) She said they had no money for the toy.  
(D) She said, “Look, child, what is there before you !”
10. How did the flowering mustard-field look?  
(A) White like silver. (B) Red like a rose.  
(C) Pale like melting gold. (D) Lovely like a rainbow.

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## 11.6 LET US SUM UP

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'The Lost Child' is a story written by Mulk Raj Anand which portrays psyche of a child who is yet not coloured with worries of past and future and the child is full of 'life and laughter' but there comes a sudden twist and his pleasures of the fair turn into pains of a huge loss. He realizes that he is lost in the human crowd in the fair. A kind-hearted stranger appears in the story as a saviour to the child and he tries every possible way to console his lamenting heart but the child continues his sob for his lost parents with utmost affection and worries. The world full of materialistic luxuries cannot satisfy his intimate longing for his parents. His 'wants' change the direction from alluring luxuries to affectionate love.

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## 11.7 KEY WORDS

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**Short story:** a short prose fiction usually depicting a single incident (unlike most novels). A newer form than the novel, the modern short story dates from the early nineteenth century.

**Plot:** A plot is a series of events and character actions that relate to the central conflict.

**Theme:** A term used in different ways: for the main idea (but not necessarily the subject) of a work of literature; an idea which a work explores; or an argument that a work advances. Therefore, a theme can be identified in a complete sentence, a noun phrase, or a single word.

**Setting:** The location of a story. It may be important in developing character, motivation and meaning.

**Character:** A character is a person, or sometimes even an animal, who takes part in the action of a short story or other literary work.

**Climax:** The high point of tension in a plot, when the outcome is decided.

**Alley:** narrow way

**Gaily:** happily

**Clad:** dressed

**Brimming:** to be so full of

**Lingering:** lasting for a long time

**Receding:** left behind as he walked ahead

**Suppress:** put an end to

**Cold:** without any feelings, emotions

**Pale:** dull, colourless

**Gaudy:** extremely bright and showy

**Grove:** a small wood or group of trees

**Capers:** a playful skipping movement

**Throngs:** huge crowds

**Converging:** gathering

**Heeded:** paid attention to



**Overwhelming:** a very strong emotion  
**Forbidden:** not allowed  
**Coarse:** unpleasant  
**Hither and thither:** here and there  
**Intently:** carefully  
**Congested:** full of  
**Hefty:** large and heavy  
**Thrust:** push  
**Knocked:** hit  
**Brutal:** harsh, rough  
**Trampled:** crushed  
**Surging:** powerful  
**Swaying:** swinging  
**Soothe:** relax, comfort  
**Pleaded:** requested  
**Double - pitched strain:** usage of a lot of force  
**Bore:** carried  
**Reiterated:** repeated  
**Disconsolate:** very unhappy and unable to be comforted  
**Charge:** a person or thing entrusted to the care of someone  
**Receding:** to move backward  
**Bustling:** moving here and there  
**Dizzy:** unable to balance  
**Linger:** hanging around  
**Tyrant:** cruel ruler  
**Bustling:** full of activity  
**Fluttering:** moving  
**Caper:** short jump  
**Throng:** crowd  
**Whirlpool:** centre  
**Repelled:** driven away  
**Convulsed:** fearful  
**Shriek:** cry  
**Shrine:** holy place  
**Jostle:** to push  
**Hefty:** heavy  
**Trample:** crush  
**Surge:** to move quickly

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## 11.8 REFERENCES

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<http://www.brunswick.S12.me.us/hdwyer/short-story-literary-terms-definitions/>  
<https://ardhendude.blogspot.com/2015/11/analysis-of-mulk-raj-anands-story-lost.html>

<https://edumantra.net/ncert-extra-questions/the-lost-child-ncert-book-solution/>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mulk-Raj-Anand>

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:2

#### ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. What are the things the child sees on his way to the fair? Why does he lag behind?
2. In the fair the child wants many things. What are they? Why does he move on without waiting for an answer?
3. Why does the lost child lose interest in the things that he had wanted earlier?
4. What did the man do to make the child happy?
5. Write a note on the theme of the story 'The Lost Child'.
6. Describe the condition of the child after he had lost his parents at the fair.

### 11.9 FURTHER READING SUGGESTED

#### Books:

- World's Greatest Short Stories (Various Authors, Grapevine Publishers)
- Mulk Raj Anand Father of Indian English Fiction (B. Agrawal, Atlantic Publication)
- Greatest Short Stories (Mul Raj Anand, Jaico Publication)

#### E-resources:

- <https://englishsummary.com/lost-child-mulk-raj-anand/>
- [https://archive.org/stream/TheLostChild-English-MulkRajAnand/lostchild\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/TheLostChild-English-MulkRajAnand/lostchild_djvu.txt)
- <https://ardhendude.blogspot.com/2015/11/analysis-of-mulk-raj-anands-story-lost.html>

#### Video Links:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usX1YgJwd-4>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaIUoMBmSNw>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8d26sZvByE>

#### Answers

#### Check Your Progress 1

1. B 2. B 3. D 4. C 5. D 6. A 7. B 8. C 9. D 10. C

## Check Your Progress 2

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Ans. 1. On his way to the fair, the child sees the following things-

- He saw toys that were displayed in the shops lined up on the way.
- He saw the vast mustard field which seemed like melting gold.
- There were brightly coloured dragonflies, butterflies and black bees which flapped their wings and sat on the flowers to suck nectar from them.
- He also saw little insects and worms along the footpath that were crawling out of the holes in the footpath to get sunshine.
- The child saw a dove bird in the grove.
- Also, he saw hordes of people walking towards the fair.
- The child often lagged behind because he would watch the different happenings around him. He would get attracted to these things and would stop in his way. Then, his parents
- would walk ahead and he would be left behind.

Ans. 2. In the fair, the boy wanted the following things-

- He wanted to buy a burfi from the sweetmeat seller.
- He wanted a garland of flowers from the flower seller.
- Next, he saw a balloon seller and wanted a balloon.
- When he saw the snake - charmer he was attracted to the music of the flute and wanted to listen to it.
- He wanted to take a ride on the roundabout swing.

The child moved ahead from all the stalls without waiting for a reply because he knew that his parents would not heed to his demands. He knew their replies in each case would be as follows -

- For the burfi, they would say that he was a greedy child.
- The garland of flowers would not be bought because it was considered cheap.
- They would not buy him a balloon because he was grown up to play with it.
- The child’s parents had warned him from listening to such unpleasant music as was played by the snake – charmers

Ans. 3. The lost child loses interest in the things that he wanted earlier because now he is sad as he has lost his parents. Before getting anything of his choice like sweets, flowers, balloons, joy rides and music, he wants to reunite with his mother and father.

Ans. 4. The man saw the child crying. He lifted him up in his arms and tried to soothe him. He took the child to the snake-charmer. Then he offered to buy balloons for him. He offered to buy him flowers. Then he took him to the sweets shop. But the child did not want to buy anything. He wanted only to be united with his parents.

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Ans. 5. The story 'The Lost Child' is based on child psychology. A child is curious by nature. He is attracted by beautiful things. He wishes to possess everything which looks attractive. However, he takes interest in these things only when he is in the company of his parents. But when he is lost, these things lose their charm for him. In this story, a child goes to a fair with his parents. He is attracted towards different things. He wishes to buy balloons, sweets and garlands of gulmohur. He wishes to enjoy a ride in the roundabout. But suddenly he finds that his parents are missing. Now he starts weeping. A kind man tries to console him. He offers to buy him a number of things. But the child goes on weeping. He wants only his parents.

Ans. 6. The child went to the fair along with his parents. He was very happy. He was attracted by the colourful and beautiful things. He saw balloons, flower garlands, toys and sweets. He saw a juggler showing tricks. He also saw a roundabout. But he was sad because his parents rejected all his demands. They did not purchase anything for him. He could not enjoy the juggler's tricks. Then he wanted to have a ride on the roundabout. He turned to ask his parents. But he found them missing. He was separated from them. Now a sudden change came in the child. He started crying for his parents. A kind man tried to console him. But the child lost interest in everything. He wanted to join his parents again. He cried, "I want my mother. I want my father!"