CHAPTER III

INNOCENCE UNDER SIEGE:

SEVEN SUMMERS
Though *Seven Summers* cannot be termed an autobiography it is in reality an autobiographical novel. It is in fact part of the long autobiographical revelation titled *Seven Ages of Man*. The voluminous confessions are in the form of a lengthy novel which divides itself into seven natural parts. The first four parts *Seven Summers*, *Confession of a Lover*, *Morning Face* and *The Bubble* have been published. The last three parts *And So He Played His Part*, *A World Too Wide* and *Last Scene* are yet to be published. *Seven Summers* was first published in 1951. This novel recaptures from memory the formative first (seven) years of Anand's life. The period covered in this novel is from the time Anand was three to the outbreak of World War I. Commenting on *Seven Summers* Balarama Gupta writes: "The novel is significant both as an authentic document of the childhood days of Anand, now a recognised international intellectual force, and as also an imaginative reconstruction of the social, economic and political life of India at the beginning of this century" (104-105).
The novel is divided into two parts -- 'The Road' and 'The River'. Anand seems to have an inexplicable and at the same time irresistible fascination for the road and the river. He sidetracks often from the main issue to describe at length the intense feelings that he experiences on seeing roads and rivers. In Part I of the novel (titled 'The Road') Anand writes, "I love roads, I love lanes and streets: I love to walk, walk, walk, for it is an opportunity for thought developing into a clear process, often leading to self-illumination and discovery, thanks to the sound of one's own footfalls" (7).

In Part II of the novel titled 'The River' Anand declares his love for rivers:

"..... like the rivers that break down old landmarks destroy habitations and crops and human beings in their torrential course, carving out other channels to irrigate, and make fruitful other tracts, hitherto barren and spreading over all the wasted lands new alluvial soil to enrich them". (53)
Seven Ages of Man is a seminal work in the sense that the other works of the author seem to grow out of it. The narrator - hero is Krishan Chander Azad and it does not call for great perspicacity to recognise Anand himself in him. Suryanarayana Murti aptly says' "The 'I' in the novel, Krishan Chander Azad, is Anand himself kept at a distance: it is thus a 'subjectively objective novel" (94).

In the novel Krishan is able to recollect the experience of his childhood -- as early as of the period after the third or fourth year. He is able to remember with clarity the incidents and his emotional reactions to them. Krishan's father, Ram Chand, was Head Clerk of the 38th Dogra Regiment and Krishan remembers vividly the life at Main Mir Cantonment. Anand's father, Lall Chand Anand it may be recalled was a Subedar of the late 2/17th Dogra Regiment. As for Krishan, for Anand also his father was a legendary hero. Anand dedicated his novel Across the Black Waters published in 1940 to the memory of his father. To the child Krishan his father was the avatar of Raja Vikram, of whom his mother had told many stories. He was also Arjuna, the friend of Lord Krishna. In his view, his father had not only godly qualities but also earthly virtues. At Mian Mir Cantonment, the indigent sweepers and washermen came to him for loans of
money. Krishan's ancestors, like Anand's, were Kshatryas but had taken up the craft of silversmiths and coppersmiths.

Like Anand, Krishan is obsessed with and fascinated by the sight of the road. In fact, one of Krishan's early recollections is that of standing in front of the road that divided the barracks and the bungalow for a long time wondering where the road came from and where it went. Of his power of recalling the early life in the barracks, Anand declares through Krishan:

I recall that my impressions of people, though vaguely gatherd, at the age of three or four, from the heads and legs or torsos and the jumble of grown-up talk, began to form connected wholes when I was about five years old, because from that age I can recollect the contours of the history and geography of a fairly comprehensible world. (13)

At that early age itself Krishan realises the severe division made between the rulers and the ruled, namely, the British and the Indians. Perhaps an early spark of revolt against imperialism and authority is displayed when the child of four darts across the road to trespass into the prohibited
sahib's bungalow and pluck a rose bud. No wonder, Krishan's father has nicknamed him 'Bully'. Apart from the blind devotion to his father and the terror he feels for the sahibs Krishan remembers his eldest brother Harish, the elder brother, Ganesh, and his little brother Prithvi, whose withered wrinkled flesh looks like that of an old man and evokes disgust in him. While he is devoted to his eldest brother Harish, his attitude towards his elder brother Ganesh is one of jealousy, pure and simple. Ganesh, who has a flat, Mongoloid, snub-nosed face, is a docile, calm and unperturbed person and Krishan loses no opportunity to tell upon him to his father. Anand himself had two elder brothers and one younger brother and their counterparts in the novel have retained their very names. The actions and inner thoughts of Krishan remind one of what Anand said about his own childhood behaviour in his essay "Why I Write?".

Anand, like Krishan, was the third of the four sons of his parents. Anand was a precocious and very sensitive child and was often lonely. Krishan's antagonistic attitude towards his brother Ganesh was because of the latter's reluctance to include him while playing with his friends. The reader feels tempted at this stage to condemn Krishan's action -- or is it Anand's -- as a pampered child's. In fact
subsequent acts and feelings expressed by Krishan on certain occasions towards Ganesh and his friends do not definitely endear him to the readers. Writing from a long distance of time Anand would certainly have known that it would not have created a good impression about himself on Irene for whose benefit the confessions were written. Certainly the reader admires the candour and courage of Anand in baring the child's soul. This honesty is what one expects in an autobiographical novel. Thanks to a peculiar sensitive nature and loneliness most of the time, Krishan, like Anand during his childhood, develops a power for keen observation. He has plenty of time to observe people and their peculiarities and admire the beauty of nature. Dogged by indifferent health, he could not physically partake of the fun and frolic indulged in by children of his own age. Along with the power of observation he develops the inquisitive nature. He wants to know the meaning of many things that he cannot comprehend. Another faculty that Krishan develops at this age is the strong sense of smell. He can recognise and remember the smell emitted by persons who are close to him at that age.
In his autobiographical essay 'My Childhood' Anand writes:

Fortunately, I have inherited an acute memory. For instance, I can close my eyes now and see the shimmerings of the sun across the Swat hills; above the square mudhouses of Peshawar Cantonment, where I was born, as I knew this place at the age of three. Again, I have only to look in the mirror of my heart, to recollect the perfume of the flowers of Motia and Molsari, which radiated from the presence of my lovely aunt, Devaki. (37)

Anand does not let slip any opportunity in his narrations to describe in elaborate detail the physical appearances of the characters Krishan comes across. While reading through the novel the reader feels that Anand spends too much time giving a meticulous physical description of his women characters. In doing so, not only does he digress from the narration but also fails at times to sustain the interest that he develops. While describing Aqqu, the youngest sister of Krishan's mother, Anand compares her with his own mother. He writes that not only did they look different, but also they smelt different. While his mother was milk and sugar his aunt Aqqi was like the essence of curds. Krishan also
tries to disentangle himself from the coils of Aqqi's embrace when he feels the acrid smell of her armpits as she bends down to kiss him. He is pressed to the bosom by Aqqi and he is filled with the sense of a rich and luscious young body, with the perfume of sweet cream cakes. Writing after a score of years, Krishan still feels the secret sensual pleasure that he enjoyed in being picked up by Aqqi. He marvels at her beauty and remembers how warm and comfortable she was. Throughout the novel this awareness of sensuality is evident. The family of Aqqi leaves such a deep impression on him that he seems to have soared to the sky whenever he meets any of these wonderful people.

It is during this period of his childhood that strange feelings stir inside him. Women much older than he -- old enough to be his mother -- excite him sexually. The innocent fondling and kissing of women sends a thrill through his body. Another woman he comes to recognise and love during this age is Gur Devi, wife of Babu Chattar Singh, the Quarter-Masters' Clerk of the 38th Dogra Regiment. Unashamedly Krishan describes the pleasurable experience he has when fondled by Gur Devi. It is a sensuous pleasure for the little child. Since Krishan is Anand's double, these are the author's own childhood experiences and it is the seeds
sown by these very experiences which developed into the full-
grown trees of his novels in riper years. However, one must hasten to add that Anand was never deliberately vulgar or obscene while describing the excitement his hero felt when in the company of women. What he wrote -- the stirrings within his heart -- appears as a natural feeling any human beings would have. The only notable point is that these physical experiences, including the sense of smell, should be so strong that even after the passage of so many years he could recollect them vividly. Anand is moved to ecstasy when he reminisces about those. His physical description of women cannot be termed nauseating or revolting to the mind. No reader can honestly deny that he had had similar experiences or feelings during childhood.

For the first time in his life Krishan learns about an invisible and frightening shadow called 'Death'. For a child basking in the sensuous love and affection of grown — up women this is a new and unpleasant experience. He learns that life is not all sweet and honey and man is not born to enjoy pleasure alone. The ailing younger brother Prithvi dies. Anand comes from a silversmith family and the manners, customs and superstitions of that community are extensively portrayed. Anand is intrigued by the observations of
religious rites and rituals. The news of the death of Prithvi brings many visitors to Krishan's house. He remembers only the couple Devaki and Uncle Pratap who come from Amritsar. To him they are a magnificent pair. Devaki makes a deep impression on Krishan. That Krishan is the fictional projection of the author himself is evident from the close parallel between Krishan's experiences and the author's narrated elsewhere. This equation between the character and his creator is further confirmed by the similarity between the fictional aunt and the real-life aunt (of the author), which goes beyond a coincidental identity of names. Many years later Anand wrote that among the deep impressions left in his mind during his childhood was the ill-treatment meted out to Devaki by the orthodox Hindu society. He feels that he has not adequately described Devaki and proceeds to paint her beauty further. For a novelist who has taken up painting as a hobby, description is not a hard task. Anand describes Devaki thus:

Gentle as the sound of the breeze which stirred the tops of the casuarina trees was her voice when she said this, hard as two mangoes were her breasts as she pressed me to her bosom to soothe me, thrilling as the cool raindrops were the kisses she showered
on my face, and never can I forget the singing
voice made hoarse by the way she bent her profile
over my forehead. (Seven Summers 26)

Anand admirably portrays the certain strange sadness
that descends on the lonely child. He writes that childhood
is not altogether a happy state as the sentimentalist makes
it out to be. He says that childhood is characterised by
long patches of loneliness when children are condemned to the
prisons of their own sensibilities. The lonely child becomes
more sensitive and spends his time in fantasies. He agrees
that this bout of loneliness has its advantages in the long
run. It also encourages in him the habit of silence. During
this period of loneliness the arrival of the juggler with a
bear proves a great diversion for the lonely child. The
antics of the bear throw him into a great ecstasy of
amazement and happiness. After months since Prithvi's death,
Krishan laughs with gay abandon. Remembering the incident he
writes:

Childhood, oh childhood! How easy it is for one to
yield to the slightest happiness and the merest
breath of sorrow in one's childhood! And is there
any joy as pure or any sorrow as fleeting as that
of childhood? What was the magic of those days which is not here today? Was it the innocence of one's soul or the sheer vitality of one's body?. (Seven Summers 31)

Anand's father, Lall Chand Anand, was an army officer and his family was most of the time confined to the cantonment. So, like Krishan, Anand had little opportunity of acquiring many children of his own age as his friends and playmates. Though almost entirely cut off from civilians, Anand found that in cantonment life also caste and religion played their part. If the sahibs alienated themselves from Indians and lived in bungalows away from them, the low caste people and Muslims lived in mud huts of the followers' lanes. In the barracks the Muslims were also on par with the untouchables.

These underprivileged and unfortunate who were considered untouchables and kept at a distance suffered their humiliation silently. Their pathetic condition leaves an indelible impression on the young mind of Krishan. In Dickensian style he portrays the miserable condition in which the people lived in the followers' lines. The caste system in India was at its worst in the pre-Independence India. It
must be remembered that *Seven Summers* was written during foreign rule in India and caste had divided the people then. If the British oppressed the Indians, the Indians in turn divided themselves into castes and the upper castes oppressed the lower castes. The British cannot be blamed for the injustice meted out to the low castes because it was an inherent social evil that existed in India at that time.

Though Krishan idolised his father at first, as years passed their relationship becomes less than cordial. While his father is almost obsequious in his attitude towards the Kernal Sahib, his mother has no such reverence for the foreigners. She has a will of her own and there are moments when she can criticise her husband for his submission. In the pre-Independence days it was the survival of the fittest and Krishan's father lives in constant dread that his connection with Arya Samaj would be known to his superior officers. It may be recalled that Anand's father Lall Chand Anand was also a member of the Arya Samaj, a Punjabi Hindu reform movement. His loyalty towards the British was a source of constant shame for Anand as he grew up. Writing about his father's connection with the Arya Samaj, Anand states:
Actually, my father did not formally cut his connection with Aga Khan Ismailism till 1913-14. Meanwhile, however, he attended the services at the Arya Samaj, which had, in practice, come to be a social club for respectable professional and business men. (Apology 32)

Though coming from a family of silversmiths, Krishan's father is not keen on any of his sons taking up the family craft. Being the only educated Indian in the barracks he has set high hopes on his sons. Similarly, Lal Chand Anand, Anand's father, did not take up his ancestral craft of copper and silver smithying and pursued his studies to become a matriculate. He joined the army and by hard work ended up as Head Clerk in the 38th Dogra Regiment. Krishan's father, Ram Chand, cannot be termed a tyrant. He belonged to that breed of Indians who knew how to survive by hook or by crook during the foreign rule. He was by no means an honest and upright officer. It is unfair to blame him, for the circumstances were such in those days that Indians could not be otherwise.

Of his own father, Anand writes:
Sometimes, during my childhood, I heard my father complain against the intrigue, the graft and the brutality of Indian army life. And he looked forward to his retirement, when he would spend his life visiting the holy places. But in other moods his love of money, and the habit of work, made him averse to the other-worldliness of the famous ideal of Hinduism which urges dedication to God on the approach of old age. And he reconciled God with Mammon in the inimitable way of his English masters, of whom he was a loyal subject, enjoying the rich foods prepared by my mother on all religious festivals, doing the bidding of the priests in the arrangements of betrothals, marriages, births and deaths, paying lip service to the tenets of Hinduism, while he sought to amass a fortune through efficient service, as well as through various sidelines in money-lending, buying and selling houses, accepting mortgages of property and bribes. (Apology 32-33)

Krishan remembers vividly his father taking the family to the great exhibition in Montgomery Hall at Lahore. However, he remembers better the taste of the ice-cream,
Kulfi, that he has at the exhibition. Another trip that Krishan remembers is the one with his father to the "Sparrow House". Anand used to recall how his father often took him to the museum at Taxila near Rawalpindi. Anand's love for travel must have been born of these trips which he used to have with his father.

In a playful mood Ganesh prompts Krishan to drop a new-born kitten into a well. The consequence of the act is serious and for days Krishan is haunted by a sense of guilt. He never forgives his brother for what he considers an act of treachery. Because of this act of fraud practised on Krishan, his mother has to offer to a temple a kitten made of gold. Anand, in his autobiographical essay "My Childhood" writes, "And I can remember the lines of horror on my mother's dark face, when, at the instance of my elder brother Ganesh, I threw a little kitten into the well" (37).

The life of Krishan from five years onwards is narrated in the second part of the novel Seven Summers titled "The River". The family has moved to Nowshera cantonment and it is here that the youngest son Shiva is born. Ram Chand's ambition of seeing one of his sons as doctor is shattered
when the eldest son Harish discontinues his study at medical school owing to the influence of his wife Draupadi. The proverbial animosity between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is demonstrated in Krishan's house also. The constant bickerings in the household create tension and he also gets involved in it. Although Sundari is a dutiful wife and loving mother, she proves to be a heartless mother-in-law. Krishan realises that his mother has lived in a fool's paradise if she expects Draupadi to live up to her dream of an obedient daughter-in-law to the matriarch in the joint family. The unhealthy practice of getting children married off at an early age has its repercussions. While dealing with the problems created by the arrival of Draupadi, Anand takes time to give a detailed history of her husband's ancestors. Here he is guilty of sidetracking the main issue. Probably he wished the readers to understand the family background of Sundari to the extent it had its impact on her.

It is interesting to note here Anand's opinion of the place Hindu women occupy in a family. As he saw it, the father, though apparently lord and master of the house, had a subservient role with the domineering matriarch of the family having her way and subjugating her husband's will more often than not. This definitely seems a contradiction to the
plight of women portrayed in Anand's novels. The untold miseries that Gauri had to undergo in *The Old Woman and the Cow* come to the reader's mind. Though Ram Chand ridicules the superstitions and offerings to temple by his wife, he does not prevent her in any way. Though it angers him to hear Sundari condemning the British Sarkar, Ram Chand feels that she is justified in her accusation. Though loyal to the British he has at heart the welfare of his family. The combination of abject submission to the superior officers on the one hand and the quality of enterprise on the other enables him to tide over crises whenever they appear. It is thus that he is able to get the post of Assistant Jailor in the Jail Department for his eldest son Harish who has quit the Medical School. Being an educated person he knows the value of education and is severe upon the sons when they neglect their studies. Readers are informed that Lal Chand Anand attended the Church Mission school in Amritsar and that the critical bent of his mind was further developed by the readings he did later while in charge of an army library. As his own education was a limited one he wanted his sons to be educated well. With this end in view he took them to museums, provided them access to books and made them constantly aware of the value of school education. In the novel Ram Chand complains to Sundari how he has to struggle
to enable his sons to come up in life and how much he sacrifices to make them have good education. Anand's mother, like Sundari, has a traditional peasant background and is a pious Sikh woman. Beef-eating was unthinkable in the silversmith community and Krishan is forbidden to eat at the house of Muslims.

The only excitement during this period for Krishan is his father's promise to take him to Delhi along with the 38th Dogra Contingent to attend the Coronation Durbar of George Panjam, Badshah of Englistan and Shahinshah of Hindustan and his consort, Mary. This was the period when the British were at the pinnacle of power and little knew that the dawn of freedom for India was only a score or two of years away. Elaborate arrangements were made at Delhi ostensibly to display the power of an empire where the sun never set. The first visit to Delhi, however, is not a pleasant one for Krishan. Anand himself later recalls that of the visit to Delhi he could indeed remember only terror of one kind or the other.

Anand's father, a Hindu, remained a Hindu after a trial experience with the Agha Khan and the Ismaili Muslims.
It is said that his concept of religion was not a narrow one. While Ram Chand in the novel is a practical man completely devoid of superstitious beliefs, Sundari is fanatically superstitious and makes religious offerings immediately whenever any member of her family falls ill or something is lost. It is in this atmosphere of diametrically opposite characters that Krishan grows up. His analytical mind cannot digest the arguments of his mother in support of certain superstitious customs. He suspects that holymen or godmen are exploiting the ignorance of the people. At the same time there is an inborn fear of the unknown in him that prevents him from condemning such practices outright. He faithfully accompanies his mother to visit the holymen but remains not fully convinced of their holiness.

It is pathetic to read about Ram Chand torn between his inborn love for the country and his loyalty to the foreign rulers he has to serve. Viewing from this distance of time it is rather easy but unjust to condemn people like Ram Chand for faithfully serving British. Life was never safe for the Indians who were in the British Indian army. They were always suspect and lived in the dread that any malicious rumour would destroy their career.
There was an unhealthy rivalry among the non-commissioned Indian officers. Each one was on the look out for an opportunity to tell upon the other to the British officers. The ingenious policy of divide and rule was paying rich dividends to the British but was dealing a crushing blow to the unity and integrity of Indian society. Ram Chand is always suspicious that his fellow Indian officer Babu Chatter Singh covets the Head Clerk's post and may any day betray him. The anxiety and terror of this suspicion costs the tranquility at home. Ram Chand is on friendly terms with the Pathans of that area because his advice is sought by them on many matters. The supposed invincibility and supremacy of the British is challenged when these Pathans steal seventy rifles from the magazine. A gang of Pathans kidnap the station master of Rawalpindi and demand one lakh rupees as ransom. The British have to pay to get the station master released. These actions of the Pathans terrorises Ram Chand because the British might suspect his involvement as he is friendly with the Pathans. Anand's father, like him, was a consultant and advisor to the militant Pathans. They were his very good friends and Ishwar Kaur, Anand's mother, who was a passionate patriot, ardently supported and admired the Pathans for their
courage. The bomb thrown at the Viceroy's residence and the subsequent strained atmosphere between the sahibs and the Indian people weigh on the mind of Ram Chand in the story. Hastily he disassociates himself from the Arya Samaj as they are suspected of having thrown the bomb.

Krishan remembers the time when he is thrashed soundly (for the first time in his life) for stealing a luscious mango from his house. He did not expect such violence from his father, nor did he consider his stealing a sin of such a serious nature as to warrant violent thrashing. Deeply hurt in mind, he recalls:

The strong sense of resentment against this burned itself into my memory. And it may be that the violent thrashing which I received then made me hate him for ever on one side of my nature and largely transformed me into the uncompromising rebel that I became, gave the spoilt, self-willed child in me the impetus of an over-developed sense of grievance and misery. Anyhow, apart from the instincts of early childhood, there sprang perhaps
from this ridiculous incident the lava of violence in me which sizzled like an active volcano during my boyhood, till my whole life became a series of constant eruptions. (Seven Summers 125)

He recalls two more incidents of such beating by his father. The one is when Krishan is unwilling to go and call the barber to shave his father, as it is late for school. An enraged father slaps him hard. The second time his father slaps him is when he trespasses into the mango grove of a Pathan and is caught. It is during this time that he also personally gets a taste of the inexplicable and inhuman behaviour of the British towards the natives. One day sees Captain Cunningham go out and, out of the curiosity of a child, follows him. The sahib obviously was not in a frame of mind to let an Indian child follow him. He shoos him away as one would a cat. The child cannot comprehend the indignity that is heaped on him and continues to follow him. The annoyed Cunningham shoots a stone at the child with his catapult which catches him in the arm and wounds him. This inhuman behaviour of the sahib leaves a deep impression on his mind. It is noteworthy to mention that the behaviour of Cunningham does not attract any adverse comments or action from the British superior officers.
Krishan pays a rich tribute to his mother for looking after him during his period of illness. He is moved by his mother's love and affection. Her world is small and lonely and her life is one of continual submission to a ready-made idol but she is susceptible in her own way, to the joys and sorrows of life. When occasion demands she can be as firm as a rock and jealously guard her offspring with the instinctive devotion of an animal. Since Anand's father was in the army, he was away most of the time; so it is natural that he was more attached to and influenced by his mother. So it is not Krishan but Krishan — Anand who pays tribute to motherhood thus: "It is not strange that the elemental relationship of mother and child persists among mankind, in spite of its dangers, when many other primaeval instincts have been refined into knowledge and shame" (Seven Summers 159).

With a gift for story telling Krishan's mother would narrate the adventures of Raja Rasalu. He would listen with rapt attention to the story of Lord Krishna told by her. Anand too remembers vividly the stories told by his mother and writes in his autobiographical essay 'My Childhood':
So the poems I loved then and now, have always been heroic like the story of Raja Rasalu conquering all before him, like the epic love tale of Hir and Ranjha, where the lovers die for their absolute passion, and those folktales, told by my mother, which spoke of the noble, the exalted, and the intense dramas of life". (40)

Anand narrates in elaborate detail the whole story of Lord Krishna which incidentally runs to many pages. The readers feel that this detailed description of the life of Lord Krishna -- so well known to the Hindu -- could well have been avoided as it tends to slow down the pace of the novel. A visit to the house of Krishan's maternal grandfather in the village of Daska leaves a deep impression on the mind of the child. The scenic beauty of the village and the simplicity of the villagers gladden his heart. Daska is memorable to him as it is here that he meets his mother's widowed sister Amrti Kaur and her daughter Durgi. He still remembers the rich warmth of Durgi's lap and the perfume of her breath. While narrating his impressions of girls of his own age or older, he is not able to restrain himself from giving detailed physical description and of Durgi he writes:
Only a little older than I, she emerges from the concordant atmosphere of joy and sorrow of my first visit to Daska like a strange little flower, with a rich perfume like that of a bud bursting its sheath in the spring. And as a flower steals into one's awareness, so she seemed to enter into my soul, not with certain aspects of her personality but with her whole presence. For she seemed to live in my ears with the lilt of her voice: she seemed to be alive to my flesh; she slept in my eyes; the aroma of her body filled my nostrils; and the movement of her young life as she capered to and fro allied her to all my urges. (204)

Even in a serene atmosphere like that of Daska, the villagers are materialistic and superstitious. Anand is at his best in giving a realistic picture of the petty jealousies and bickerings that abound in every Hindu joint family. The accusations and counter accusations levelled at each other by Krishan's mother and her sister are realistically portrayed by Anand. Perhaps he wished to show how money could be the root of all evil. Family members become enemies to one another over trivial issues and
bear such malice that they become sub-human. Krishan regrets that a joyous occasion for which they have come to Daska ends disastrously. He remembers some of the wise sayings of the people of his own village. Grandfather Nihalu advises his sons that fortune comes at random but ploughing and beating copper cannot fail one. He firmly believes in hard work, for men who work hard eat like kings. According to him, old grain, new butter and a good wife are the pillars of Heaven. Nihalu can give copious quotations from Guru Granth, the holybook of the Sikhs. Nihalu is a character taken straight out of the life of Anand. This is how he recalls him in his autobiographical essay: "I also simplified my life a good deal, began to wear homespuns and recalled the feelings for devotion, or 'bhakti', which I had acquired as a young boy by seeing the personal love of my Sikh maternal grandfather, Nihalu, who used to tend the sick and the poor in his home" (The Story 13).

Through the influence of mother Anand was drawn to Sikhism initially. As he grew older Anand's devotion to the Sikh religion became deeper. Marlene Fisher says:
The figure of Guru Nanak, the founder of this religion, became and still is for Mulk Raj Anand the symbol of the idea of "quest" in all its implications and ramifications. To the degree that Anand's entire life has been a quest and a pilgrimage, Guru Nanak is a model for that life. And in certain important respects, the characters he was later to create in his novels hark back to the great teacher. (8)

It is at Daska, while listening to uncle Sardar Singh's recital of Waris Shah's poem 'Hir and Ranjha', that Krishan seems to admire the simple and sweet Punjabi speech of the peasants. The fact that his mother hails from Daska and has the same sweet Punjabi speech makes the child love his mother more. At the age of seven Krishan becomes aware of the beauties of nature and the urgency to translate them into words. Though he has not given up some of his childish pranks, another side of his personality -- a fine sensibility -- slowly emerges. His heart instinctively responds to the wild beauties and terrors of the frontier region; the sights and sounds of that exotic landscape stamps themselves indelibly on his imagination and form the stuff of his
memories of later years. The first-hand feel of these recollections lead one to the indubitable conclusion that it is Anand who speaks through his creation. The mask of fiction is too thin to deceive one.

_Seven Summers_ deals with a seven-year period in the hero's childhood. It is from the year 1908 to 1914. The first World War has broken out and Ram Chand receives orders to stay with the depot at Malakand in Chitral, an outpost in the North Western Frontier. The seven years filled with happy, rich, hilarious and sad days are over for Krishan. The family of Ram Chand is to go to their home in Amritsar and the children are to study in the school there. Krishan is happy with the anticipation of seeing his aunt Devaki and uncle Pratap. In the concluding pages Krishan — Anand takes a nostalgic look through the glass of time at those early years of carefree happiness, though not unmixed — memorable, though not eventful by adult standards.

He recollects with remarkable clarity many of the main events and characters and persons of those years. His father is responsible for his intellectual development and through his mother he is drawn to the Sikh religion and myths. Emotionally he is attached to his mother very much and her
native Punjabi speech leaves a deep impression on his mind. The village Daska and his grandfather Nihalu make him aware of the shortcomings of cantonment life. His experience of school life makes him realize that there is something seriously wrong with the system. In cantonment he witnesses class distinction and the humiliation of the depressed castes. The roads and the river Lunda hold great fascination for him and in many places in the novel he expresses the thrill the sight of them gives him. Indifferent health plagues him throughout these years. With great fondness he remembers his favourite aunt Devaki. He experiences a strange emotion in the company of women. In great detail he portrays the personality of Devaki, Gurdevi and Durgi. Each one of them emits a different smell and he derives sensous pleasure when fondled by them. While narrating the story of Krishan Chander, Anand digresses many times to describe the scenic beauties of nature, the myths and stories told by his mother and the family background of his parents. The artist in him comes to the fore in these descriptions. Child marriages and their serious consequences are shown through the characters of Harish and Draupadi. Life in general is a mixture of happiness and misery and loneliness for Krishan at the cantonments of Miarmir and Nowshera, where he spends the early seven years. In all these discussions the reader is
left in no doubt as to the fact that Anand himself is speaking through the person of the narrator. These early years in the life of the author-protagonist -- unexciting as they were -- still were formative in the sense that they provided a wealth of material he could draw upon while writing the novels of his later years.

Commenting on *Seven Summers* Suryanarayana Murti writes:

In *Seven Summers*, Krishan, who can be called as the Indian Daedalus narrates his experiences and evolution through the early years of his childhood, and the later six ages spring out of these childhood experiences. In other words, *Seven Summers* is Anand's fictional matrix. All his themes and techniques, images and symbols, and ideals, lie embedded in embryonic forms in this prologue. This novel begins the quest for illumination through the child hero asking naive questions about the universe. (82-83)

Saros Cowasjee declares, "Still, *Seven Summers* remains a rare achievement -- the best autobiography of childhood yet written by an Indian novelist in English" (175).
The close parallel between the experiences of Krishan in the novel and of Anand in the real life reinforces the fact that the novel is a piece of autobiography. Every detail -- even the tiniest one like Krishan developing blisters in the feet walking the long distance to school -- has its counterpart in Anand's life and adds up to this equation between the author and the protagonist - narrator in the novel. The borderline between fact and fiction becomes fuzzy here and this ambivalence, deliberately created and sustained, adds to the charm of the novel.