

Dr O. P. Arora's WHISPERS in the Wilderness: A Perspective

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Dr O P Arora, a renowned versatile novelist, short story writer and poet-critic, dominates the current literary scenario with his knack for debunking all shams, superficialities, conventional evils, moral bankruptcy and spiritual sterility pervading our life and society through rare artistic skills and lyrical beauty.

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Dr O P Arora, a renowned versatile novelist, short story writer and poet-critic, dominates the current literary scenario with his knack for debunking all shams, superficialities, conventional evils, moral bankruptcy and spiritual sterility pervading our life and society through rare artistic skills and lyrical beauty. The poet, however, also strongly feels that the time for anger and action has arrived, to slap us out of our inaction and torpor, concerning the toxins settling around us, vitiating our mind, body, soul and milieu. It is with great management skills that he compresses various vital areas and issues of life into his slender but elegant anthology laden with profound and innovative thoughts and ideas. The title, 'Whispers in the Wilderness' seems to allude to today's frighteningly vacuous existence that is grim, is barren and lifeless wherefrom emanates, a weak and lonely whispering voice of some anguished soul clamoring to remedy all ills and abort all devastating situations and self-created crises besetting our life.

After going through the entire anthology, I instinctively discovered that it is streaked with three vital aspects of life: personal philosophy, current grim scenario and nature ----all emanating from his catholicity of thought, tastes and perception. The outcome of the unique synthesis of all these darts straight to the heart of the readers with piercing directness. It cannot be denied that the poet's philosophy of life and human existence is unique, meaningful, deep, has modern relevance, larger universal significance and eternal validity. In 'The Invisible Connect' (14), the poet discovers a grand cosmic order in all nature. To see the imperceptible link among 'all things, living and non-living/higher and lower/material and ethereal/inner and outer/visible and invisible...' and to finally perceive a grand harmony and energy manifesting in all these, evinces the poet's extraordinarily keen perception and breadth of vision almost like that of Shakespeare's and great philosophers.

It is also surely Arora's holistic vision that gives due significance to abstract, airy, ephemeral dream and illusion and the vital role they play in human life. This very idea is established in the 'Sandy Castles' (16) with simple logic and a tinge of optimism: 'Some illusions sprout into dreams/only through dreams man perceives/....bequeaths/human race wins even if one succeeds...' So, continues the poet, 'Don't chide the dreamers/always flying

on the wings, your saviors/blame yourself if you want/they do what you can't'. Further, the poet, through in-depth analysis, insightfully affirms, 'Without dreamers/man would still be living in the caves/eating raw flesh, buying slaves.....without their dreams/your civilizations would be in teens.....' Dreamers so, has the capability to turn '...the tide of history' 'Dreamers' (30-31)-----Luther, Viveknanda, Einstein, Edison, Wright Brothers are inspiring specimens of this. While reality is 'cold, mechanical calculations/ no heights or flights, no passions/beauty, choco-cake; love, simply fake...../Dreams...give meaning to the meaningless meanderings/in the nightmarish wasteland.' Those who pooh-pooh dreams will surely recognize and realize the essential role they (dreams) play to mould and develop our life into something great and big, sometimes even from nothing. A seemingly divine experience, Moksha (17) attained by many renowned spiritualists and saints, has been viewed by the poet also from a practicable, feasible, psychological and saner perspective as 'Illusion. Hallucination. Imagination.' Rather in a world wherein 'Satans and demons rule...., it is 'Melody of Peace' (18), that can lift man to blissful spiritual realms. It is also his '...craving for living to the full' that 'enlivens' and strengthens his 'soul' without any 'fear of the unknown...' In 'Clap, Clap'(104), Arora grasps the nub of human psychology and unfolds the sub-consciousness of man by proving how everyone fosters hope for some rosy future. Though this often seems illusive, it strengthens his desire to live and realize his dream in some future. Further, though one sometimes lapses into delusion, it cannot be denied that delusions also sustain life, as hope does.

The fading and perishing of everything including big castles has been stressed in Shelley's Ozymandias of Egypt' thus: My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings /Look on my works ye Mighty, and despair!/ Nothing beside remains. Round the decay/ Of that Colossal Wreck, boundless and bare, /The lone and level sands stretch far away', For all his enchanting philosophy and intense comprehension of life, Dr Arora also does not lose sight of the transient nature of life and conveys the same in a rather interestingly concrete manner through 'Castles'(37). Like castles 'on the beach', the poet 'too had built castles', but they could not withstand the ravages of time as they are now 'Demolished, decimated, destroyed/.....not a trace of them...../.....all dreams, dreamy stuff, all visions, only moony'. With all the grit and guts to be enterprising, to seize the initiative, to face challenges, to take risk even with one's own life, the poet is on his full mettle when he daringly affirms : '...Only fools wait for the right opportunity/the daring create the opportunity./Think of Columbus, Vasco-de-Gama or Tithonus/adventure and risk, them success crowns'. How inspiring and educative the lines are! Their power and strength of the poet to wake up the slumbering, sleeping, dormant, complacent, regressive souls lyrically is remarkable and unparalleled indeed! This very thought is further stretched and intensified in 'The Forked Path' (107) wherein the poet underlines that it is the spirit to venture into the unknown that enables one to make new discoveries or discover new regions, for 'every new path' according to the poet, is 'a new challenge/a new discovery/a new destiny..../Had Columbus not ventured on.....he would never have discovered the New World'. Miltonic idea of 'the courage never to yield or submit' is explicated thus: 'Even if you are doomed/even if it is all dark and gloom/even if it is the dead-end/just don't give up, don't bend/be the Edison/you will ultimately win.....'The concluding punch lines are really noteworthy, motivating and meaningful: '...there is nothing significant about falling/significant is---rising again after falling'. In 'Be a man' (81)—a thought-provoking and stimulating poem the poet gives a clarion call to the slumbering humanity to 'Arise, awake, and clean up the tan....'; no Messiah like Gandhi or Krishna should at all be needed to shed darkness, 'moral cowardice, tortoise culture, sheer selfishness' to 'awaken your slumbering soul'.

'Chimes of Time'(77) corollary to 'A New Beginning'(79) are two psycho-philosophical poems wherein the poet discovers some eternal truths perceived by man since time immemorial. In the former, the poet watches all the activities and happenings of the world objectively and dispassionately from a vantage point and convincingly proves how time is silhouetted against the goings-on of human life. The latter elucidates how despite the transient nature of life, it 'never ends in Nature/every end is a new beginning....' and 'The universe/ spanning millions of galaxies/billion of years/would go on forever....' This very idea that is explicated by 'The Eternal Spectacle' (13) also reflects the see-saw motion of the poet's fluctuating emotion: 'watching the eternal spectacle/rise and fall/assertion and fusion/aggression and acceptance/crisis and calmness....'

Literature reflects life in all its diversities and complexities; it also holds up the mirror of people to the life we readers live and poetry is, perhaps, the best type of literary endeavor that best reflects life. It shows the reader how the poet perceives and comprehends life. This reflection can teach, inspire, motivate, educate, make us laugh, or even frighten us. This in fact, is the beauty and the joy of reading poetry. The back cover-page of the anthology clearly states: 'These poems are a mirror in which you get your own reflection, sometimes clear, at others hazy and foggy, nevertheless your true reflection if you deep-breathe them....poems...strive to make your reflection wrap in beauty, truth and divinity....touch the cords of your heart...feel the inner bliss...bound to stir your soul and the vibrations will be a source of eternal joy ...help in creating an 'invisible connect' between you and nature.' Dr Arora, through his powerful imagination, lyrical beauty backed by his own intense and immense experience inspires the reader to enter his world and share it with him. As such, like other great poets of all centuries, the poet also vividly reflects the current grim scenario of today through various poems of the anthology, making it the epic of modern age and the live example of Eliot's dictum: "A great poet in writing of himself, writes his age".

The pungent criticism of the bleak state of affairs, sometimes direct and sometimes indirect, is tellingly relevant, caustic and effective: ' Oh God, look at man, the best of your creation/his deeds, he shames even the worst of demons/ a heartless butcher, destroys everything beautiful/ rains fire, paints red on this planet wonderful....competition in sadism, how fast they kill how many more/ blood sucking beasts, they surpass even the vampires/ the shrieks of the innocent, the sweetest melody they aspire...." 'Melody of Peace' (18).In 'Kuruksheetra' (22),when the poet sees that the overpowering forces of evil cannot be conquered by even the divine and virtuous powers, he sub--consciously resorts to scriptures for help and inspiration: 'I would arouse Arjuna to Krishana's call/inspire him to come out of the cocoon/fight out evil to the last drop, greatest boon....' A sequel to this is 'Krishna'(25) wherein the poet implores Lord 'Krishna' to fight evil: 'Rid the earth of devils and demons, law of Dharma/no sin, only a duty to cleanse the universe of Adharma,' the universe replete with people who excel 'in the art of manipulation', who shame the 'whole creation.' Even Ram, despite his best of intentions and efforts, failed to cleanse the system, 'but frustration and failure became so vile/disgusted, he realized things had gone beyond repairs....silently he prayed and took to the heavenly stairs....' 'Had Ram Really Returned to Ayodhya'(29). Fed up with all prevailing earthly 'obnoxiousness,' the poet also envisages undertaking such a journey to heaven himself, but also sub-consciously feels that it would be an uncomfortable one: '...path to divinity/has to suffer the ugliness/for my journey to eternity.' 'Deaf and Dumb'(32). As a sensible, insightful, analytical and meaningful agnostic, the poet here blasted the beautiful myth of the, one could even say, escapist Ram, who is a Hindu

divinity and is ironically worthy of being revered and even worshipped. Though understated, the querying title: 'Has Ram really returned to Ayodhya?' is pregnant with meaning. Leave alone ordinary mortals, even a 'Mahatma' 'in moral uniform', 'runs the empire of evil/boasts of kinship with the devil....'and pathetically, the reward of the great, but ill-fated 'Jesus, Joan or Gandhi' is nothing, but a 'a bronze statue', 'You Too'(36).

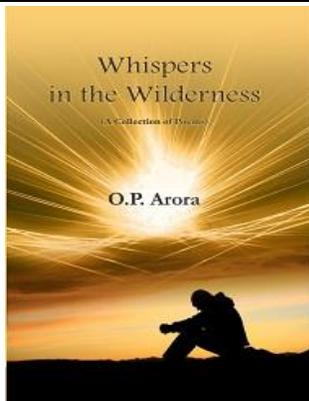
'Anger, agony, anguish/pour out of' the poet's 'every pore' when he finds 'infants, worth a lore/tattered, twisting with hunger.....crying and shrieking, a mournful score/cursing human race, gods too.....', 'Cuckoo-Clock' (41). The poet projects the worst thriving in the current scenario through expressions like '.....man fighting his last stage of cancer', 'The nation bathing in the swirl of black money', his own 'faithfuls' daggers more poisonous and spiteful/than Caesar's murderers', 'invincible India, at peace, raped and robbed in heaps', 'man kills man only 'for greed', 'mother dumping her newborn daughter into the dustbin/hear the wails of the child on the roadside, his mother gone to earn his feed....'Even the world of nature is not devoid of sorrow. The poet, with sardonic humor and irony advises the miserable sparrow to 'learn to suffer in silence, for the world, cheerful quotes...'Witnessing the all round sorriest state of affairs, the poet becomes completely broken, his 'heart pierced, his soul in agony, cried foul/deception and stabbings, jeers and tears, negation and rejection...'and so feels compelled to ask God, 'My God! Isn't that the history of man?/He realizes only when deflated, in vain./But is it too late?/No, never, it's never too late....'It is human nature to question God or some supernatural being unconsciously, sub-consciously or even consciously when mortal powers fail to rectify the desperate plight or topsy-turvy condition of this earth.

Sometimes the world assumes the shape of human emotion. Sometimes it is the world itself that shapes the emotion. It is difficult, rather impossible to say which precedes which: the external world is explicitly and vividly perceived, yet the specific object is chosen to reflect the mood. Hence, poetry, at times tends towards pan-psychism - the feeling that soul pervades all matter. And complete development of this feeling is pantheism. So, pantheism is a belief system or concept that reflects the awareness of and belief in the life force in all objects in nature, like trees, rocks, water, mountains, etc. It is somewhat related to the concept of animism, which suggests that there is consciousness in nature and natural objects. Many romantic poets, like Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth were deemed pantheists. In modern times, the ecological movement has given way to new interests in pantheism and considered its concept of nature as something sacred. In his nature poems, Dr Arora also evinces marked traces of pantheism. He not only personifies nature and blends it with his own consciousness, but also views it objectively from different angles, giving new meanings and shapes to it. In the 'Eternal Spectacle' (13), the poet first objectively views and personifies waves as 'mighty, menacing...coming upon you like demons...as if they would swallow the whole world....soften down/subside, lower, still lower/retreat, like a defeated army ...'The waves then naturally get fused with his own consciousness that bespeak his fluctuating thoughts and feelings: '...rise and fall/assertion and fusion/aggression and acceptance/crisis and calmness....' Finally, the poet winds up the whole psychological interplay with perfect artistic subtlety, metaphysicism and a tinge of philosophy by showing how these very waves culminate with the terminus of the journey of his life: 'The realization dawns, as I awake/me too like a wave/flaunt around my identity...passion and intensity/and then merge into the eternal ocean/lost forever, unknown, unseen'. In 'Sea Waves'(75), the powerful imagination of the poet enables him to see the different movements and forms of the sea waves with apt poetic analogies as '....rising and howling...towering the

skies....storming the citadels....hoping to destroy the despotic tower', 'subdued and retreating....like the mobs, defeated and desperate, 'like Indian masses, opiate, slumbering....fated to be slaves, they bow', 'like the Indian sages, resigned, deep insight/gazing....compassion at man's plight'.

On few occasions, the poet perceives nature as an independent entity that has no interference in human affairs. But all the same, he meaningfully enlivens nature and gives to it the form of a detached and dispassionate spectator: 'Nature only looks on his (man's) illusions, mockingly/adhering to its laws, the axis rotates, nonchalantly.... 'Life'(21), but often conscious of it's 'miracles' and 'man's blunders'. It is with this consciousness that he could think of how 'Nature's design you and your consciousness/otherwise, how could you explain your brother's selfishness./Everything in nature serves her shrine/your talents, gifts of Nature, meant to serve her design.' However, in moments when gloom overtakes the poet, he paints a grim picture of nature. When the poet fails to find true love among humans, he makes a desperate and vain search for it in the world of nature by narrowing down the search to 'the loveliest flower of the garden I chose' and asks 'Why don't you spread smiles and love/and turn this House into a Home?/The rose squirmed, callously cast/you seem ghost from the past/how dare you, here, those foreign words dart?' 'I Looked for Love'(53). 'She And Her Garden'(94), a short narrative poem, is strongly marked with lyrical fervor and expresses the influence nature exerts on man. On seeing the 'elusive, reclusive, mysterious' and disillusioned lady 'tending her garden, 'the poet curiously asks, 'why this self negation, cutting at the roots of Creation'. He was taken aback to get her pert response filled with wisdom, irony and acute awareness of life and all human relationships: 'I've seen so much of man, homilies on friendliness/In this world of flowers, no deception, no torment, no selfishness/they speak to me, wave to me, fondle me, touch me/they understand my pain, my agony, try to cheer me...' How educative and thought-provoking is the poem!

To conclude, Dr Arora has spontaneously displayed the best of his knowledge, observation and experience. His keen perception, profound imagination, emotional intelligence, intense sympathy, infinite compassion and deep passion for serving humanity and preventing ecological disaster have enlivened, embellished and sanctified the anthology so much so that it has become a source of perennial delight, instruction and phenomenal piece of art, to be treasured, glorified and preserved by posterity for all ages to come.



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Dr Dalip Khetarpal worked as a Lecturer in English at Manchanda Delhi Public College, Delhi. He worked in various capacities, as Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and H .O. D (English) in various academic institutes in Haryana. He was a Dy. Registrar and Joint Director at the Directorate of Technical Education, Haryana, Chandigarh.

Dr Dalip has also started a new genre in the field of poetry, which he would like to call "psycho-psycho flints".



Dr O.P. Arora is a well-known poet, novelist and short story writer and holds a distinctive place among contemporary Indian writers in English. Arora has a Doctorate in English Literature from Punjab University, Chandigarh and has taught in Delhi University for over three decades.

His poems have been published in many leading literary journals, magazines and dailies and have been generously included in the prominent anthologies. He has four poetry anthologies The Creeping Shadows, Embers in the Ashes, The Edge of the Cliff, and Pebbles on the Shore to his credit.

His last novel The Silken Traps has been critically acclaimed as a true portrayal of contemporary Indian social scene and a great work looking at human relations in a novel way.
