

Dr O P Arora – An Unflinching and Dynamic Critique of Modern Society

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(With special reference to *The River Flows Eternally*)

Author, critic, reviewer, editor.

Abstract

Poet, novelist, short-story writer, outstanding academician, eminent scholar and a profound thinker, Dr O P Arora stands out distinguished among all contemporary Indian English writers by virtue of his subtle perception, mellow vision, bold, clear, psychological, philosophic, realistic and objective insight and outlook on life as against the skewed and narrow thinking and stance on the prevailing socio-conventional tenets and norms.

Keywords

Indian English writers, English writing in India, contemporary literature.

Poet, novelist, short-story writer, outstanding academician, eminent scholar and a profound thinker, Dr O P Arora stands out distinguished among all contemporary Indian English writers by virtue of his subtle perception, mellow vision, bold, clear, psychological, philosophic, realistic and objective insight and outlook on life as against the skewed and narrow thinking and stance on the prevailing socio-conventional tenets and norms.

The present collection of short stories, entitled, 'The River Flows Eternally' is an invaluable compendium of all updated knowledge thriving on the cerebral challenge of debunking all empty, superficial, meaningless, worn out, age-old established shams, ideological leanings, conventions and traditions as a perfect bohemian does. The stories in the book are short, but the ideas they convey are enlightening, practical and universal and leave an indelible and lasting impression on the mind of readers.

The second story, 'When You Blow The Conch' is purely psychological. Vikas, the central character, acquires a strong identity at night but loses his identity during the day when Neha, his wife, acquires a strong identity. Without explicating anything overtly, the writer, in the most artistic and refined manner has been able to drive home the idea that it is all a natural phenomenon and that it is very much in accordance with human nature. Again, the psychology of human nature is elucidated in 'When the Sun Rises' when Ria most truthfully unfolds Avinash,

an innate but unconventional human desire: 'When we live together twenty –four hours, and every night you find me in the same nightie, or find me tired and not responding to you, or in the morning ask me to bring tea for you, and I am not in a mood, or....Even otherwise, can you recall the romance of our first-time sex, what happened when you touched me the first time, well, does the same thing happen every time now? No, never. It cannot. Sameness, staleness. Man, you need variety to be alive. You don't need a wife. You need a beloved if you want satisfaction. And your wife can never be your beloved'. How unconventional, yet how true, psychologically and biologically, both. In 'Straws In The Wind,' the off-beat author seems to have even gone to the extent of advocating extra-marital relationship quite strikingly on the basis of widely accepted and much touted Shakespearean lines: 'Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so'. Avinash 'thought of Shakespeare, the greatest bard of all times, who said, it is only our thinking that makes something right or wrong'. 'Not So Easy' is also a purely unconventional story. Though Ria and Sudeep are wife and husband, the former, to the affront of the latter, divulges that she had slept with an Australian business man just for fun. Sudeep doubtless wanted a modern girl like Ria before marriage, but at the same time he also wanted 'someone who will wipe your (his) tears...Ultimately, it is your spiritual strength, your inner worth, that sustains any relationship'. The author thus, also maintains the sanctity of love and does not lay

excessive stress on freakish activities at the expense of morality, true love and sincerity in human relationship.

In ‘Dreams are Dreams’ the writer affirms most realistically that dreams are dreams and they could collapse anytime. This is illustrated by the story that explicates how the hopes of nuptial life sometimes get shattered and that nothing in life could be taken for granted. ‘Rashmi’ is an uncanny love story wherein Arora, through his psychological observation, has successfully and convincingly proved how love, at times, is aroused even by certain negative traits which endear one to the other. To be enamoured of other’s deficiencies and weaknesses run counter to socio-cultural norms, but we know that such strange feelings are embedded in human nature and the writer tries to unearth them to give a core and elemental picture of our society. This story also echoes how ‘human warmth is more precious than moral platitudes’.

The opening lines of ‘The safe Channel’ explicitly details the narcissistic traits of Rao, ‘Mr Rao stood before the mirror and looked at himself, turned his face left and right, touched his cheeks, felt his necktie and adjusted it a little...in fact he took care of everything...He turned forty last month, yet looked quite young for his age. The final touches done, he looked at himself approvingly, smilingly, he also approved of the mirror of the dressing table...’ By and by, the writer starts exposing the grim unhealthy culture of the system. The story points out that after

establishing links with the higher ups, one can be rude and disrespectful towards one's senior or boss who is more worried about his own reputation, given facilities, personal comforts and retention of job than doing justice to his seniors or juniors: 'And in case the higher authorities did not feel convinced and took the side of the poor clerk, his own prestige, his position, his reputation, his instalments for the flat, his telephone, his children....' The author here satirizes nepotism, flattery, cajolery and selfishness which are the key traits of modern job culture and which are also eating into the vitals of our civilization. In 'Every Boat Has a hole', the message of the author is loud and clear: 'We are all corrupt or corruptible'. Few, like the honest Praggya do not have a successful career because they do not bow before the authority. Rajendra, an honest labourer went to return the lost purse containing Rs 10,000/- of some Seth, but got nothing, except Rs 100/- in return, while retention of that money would have built his fortune. Through this story Arora also rebukes the attitude of generalization most Indians are fond of. Rajendra heard about a similar case of an honest boy who after returning the lost money to a Seth was rewarded with a permanent job; his name and photo also found a place in a newspaper. Inspired by this episode, Rajendra toed the same line, but got only Rs 100/- as a reward for his honesty. He also makes clear that it is very difficult for an honest and principled man to survive in the present corrupt set-up wherein corrupt officers hold their sway.

The author views our conventional society critically as could be seen in 'When Will You Grow Up'. Society for Arora is very callous, 'indifferent to your likes and dislikes, to your desires or ambitions. It doesn't like people who think out -of- box. Fixed boxes for life. After you get a job, marriage and babies are two boxes you must fit in. If you don't you are a bohemian, a worthless person, in fact unfit for a proper life. They start finding fault with your physiology or psychology. They may also raise bigger questions relating to your character. Beware.' Coldness, selfishness, indifference and lack of feeling and warmth are also evils that afflict our society. 'In Goodbye To Angels' the death of Dr Anand, an honest doctor who devoted his whole life to serving humanity, was quickly forgotten by his own wife who rented out the clinic to Dr Gupta without fulfilling 'Dr Anand's wish of a charitable dispensary'. This indeed is shameful and baneful, both.

O P Arora is dynamic, a growth oriented person who wants to see everything growing continually. In 'The Spark', he castigates the very word 'limitations'. For him, as Atul in the story said, '...limitations is a word through which the older generation has always tamed the younger one and thus retarded the progress of civilization as well as mental and moral growth of man'. Despite infusing high ideals and principles into the character of Atul, the author is realistic enough to show that Atul failed in his career after taking a lot of stress upon himself. He looked 'lean, haggard, greying at the age of thirty-five...' just because it was difficult for him to work under the pressure

of unscrupulous and disreputable bosses. The author, thus, makes his point clear that honesty, high ideals and principles have no place in this deceitful socio-political set-up. Dr Arora also rebukes racial prejudice which is another common evil and which has taken deep roots in our society. For him all human beings are the same; there is no Hindu or Muslim or Christian or Buddhist or any caste, community or race, whatever, as perceived and established by various religions and cultures. In 'Shazia', while speaking to Savita, Shazia bluntly and boldly retorted, 'Muslims and 'Hindus! I was born to Muslim parents, and so I am a Muslim. You think I am different from you. Birth is just an accident. I could have been born to Hindu parents, and I would have been a Hindu. How does it matter? We are all human beings'. To be a human being with proper human characteristics and values are more important for the author than to have a stamp of caste affixed to our name. Through the unprecedented care and hospitality displayed spontaneously by Shazia to her Indian guests in times of need, the author has proved that all caste barriers can be broken only if one is broad-minded and if one can view things liberally with an open mind.

Literature reflects the zeitgeist of the age and Dr O P Arora has done this abundantly, successfully, effectively, psychologically and meaningfully by capturing most of the vital ideas, beliefs, interests and deficiencies that are typical of most modern pretentious people we witness in day- to-day life. Many writers have tried to present our

society in their own way, but the way Arora has presented it is matchless, because he delves deep into the subconscious and unconscious mind of his characters and dredge up all unpleasant, unconventional thoughts, feelings and ideas that are true, but not acceptable to our hypocritical society. Peeved at the general moral, social and spiritual degradation, the author's observation and remarks may sometimes appear scathing, but they are tempered with mild humor, wit and compassion. His lucid, racy and pacy style enables him to express psychedelic shades of complex passions, feelings and emotions tellingly, effectively and pointedly. Equipped fully with truth, guts, honesty, knowledge, candor and simplicity of expression, Dr Arora has shot into literary firmament and blazed forth with infinite effulgence, shedding its luminosity on all upcoming, budding and even established writers, not only of this age, but of all ages and climes. His creations, be it prose or poetry, will continue to invigorate and enlighten human psyche spiritually and intellectually for all time to come.

Work Cited

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