

Peace and Spirituality in Stephen's Gill's *The Flame*

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Abstract: The present paper aims at searching spirituality in Gill's *The Flame*. Peace and spirituality are the two connotations, which, to some extent, are complementary to each other.

Keywords: Peace, Spirituality, Stephen Gill.

I believe that the life after death will be blissful if an individual does not destroy the legitimate peace of others. Those who maintain their lives on the path of good, their life after death will also be good. Those who promote peace on earth shall enjoy peace after death by destroying the peace of others. Hindu scriptures call God peace. Jesus says that peace-makers shall be called the children of God. God is the king of peace in the scriptures of both the Hindus and Christians. (The Flame 19)

These spiritually motivated lines form a part of Stephen Gill's Preface to *The Flame*. Gill, a multiple award-winning Indian writer, who resides in Canada, has set himself to undertake a journey full of painstaking efforts for the welfare of mankind. He has authored more than 20 books. *The Flame* is one more feather to his previous writings. It is his master-piece creation as it reveals Gill's ambition for the quest of peace, destroyed by the maniac messiahs. Lord Buddha, Swami Vivekananda, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther king, Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa and the like have been significant personages who contributed a lot to spread peace and harmony all over the world. Their mission for the world peace was propelled and boosted by Stephen Gill through his writings. He himself admits that poetry is to present his vision and concerns, and to conceive peace in a peaceful way. The compelling influence for his crusade is the peace that is beauty, the peace that is creative, the peace that makes life meaningful, he attempts to illustrate that peace in its myriad forms on the rocks of his words. (*Songs Before Shrine*) Stephen's eternal flame is an inspiration, an inexhaustible power, an undying, unending burning lamp, with which, he has, very boldly and courageously taken a vow to dispel the darkness of human souls. This shows that the more he gets spiritual, the more he becomes stronger to complete his mission – Peace. He invokes the flame thus:

You are/ the distinctive fount/ that feeds the ever growing pangs/ of
the sages/ in every age./ you bind the earth and the sky/ and rule to
relieve/ the rusting monotony. (*The Flame* 33)

Gill's effort to shape his poem as an epic, is praise-worthy. As far as, its subject matter and style are concerned, by every way, it is epical. And in its support, so many critics have stood. Sudhir K. Arora, a scholar and critic of Stephen Gill, has made a virtuous contribution in this sphere and he has critically and very dexterously examined *The Flame* and it has

been highly appreciated by the other various scholars. At one place he also opines, “Truly, *The Flame* possesses all the characteristic features that make it a Poetics of peace as it talks of peace not in any particular nation but in the world. There is no exaggeration in calling *The Flame* a Bible of Peace which must be read by all in order to save the humanity from destruction” (*The Flame unmasked*). He has also shown similarities between Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* and Gill's *The Flame*. Gill is also known as 'The Bard of peace' for promoting the values of tolerance, understanding and co-existence in the world, where, there will be justice, love, harmony and brotherhood, so does Khalil Gibran in *The Prophet*, which is widely acclaimed as one of the most spiritual books ever written. If Gill had not suffered from the pain and misery, caused by these enemies of peace, he would have certainly written on the secrets that might open the key to a successful life that ultimately makes man spiritual. Anuradha Sharma states, “In *Ramcharitmanas*, the poet writes his foreword in verse, and begins with invocation to gods and goddesses to help him in his attempt to write a great epic. The Flame, an epic poem, also germinates with an invocation” (*The Flame, Unmasked*). The poets, who previously wrote their epics, targeted the themes, which were for the extension of peace, moral values, social values and ethical virtues on the earth among the human-beings. Valmiki's heart melted down at a pathetic scene near a pound and the result was the first rhymed poetry in Sanskrit:

*Maa nishad pratishtham twamgamah Shashwatisamaha
Yatkrauchch mithunadekamvadih Kammohitam. (The Eternity
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And later these two divine and miraculous lines took the form of the greatest epic of the world *The Ramayan*. Ram is the hero of this epic and this hero is adored even today among the Hindus as “Lord Rama”, who fought for the existence of peace and moral values against the devils on this earth. Just as the moral fight on the part of lord Rama, brought victory of Truth over Falsehood, redeemed the humanity from the clutches of sin, fear and anarchy and established the *Ramrajya* on the earth. Similarly, Gill, the bard of peace, by the blessing of Lord Rama with a pledge determines to free the world from these maniac messiahs and wishes to dispel the darkness (ignorance) from the world, he is sure of a *Ramrajya*:

Where the streams of youth/ do not cease flowing/ and despair does
not nail tents/over the constellation the dreams/ under land of yours/
calls me to gather pearls/ from the ocean of your wisdom. (*The Flame*)

Gill is not merely an invoker of peace; rather he is a strong ideologist. He articulates in his 'Preface to *The Flame*' that the Flame is about peace and peace is the main area of his exploration for him. There are several minor and major areas that also relate to peace, including human rights treatment of the minority by the majority antiwar activities (19). Further, he adds: “It is not sufficient just to talk about peace. There should also be some concrete ideology and activities” (19). Just as this Flame of Gill symbolizes sharing compassion, sacrifice, courage and witness, so his

dove. He uses flame as a symbol as he has used the bird dove.

*Na tadbhasayate suryo na shashaanko na paavakah;Yadgatwaa
na nivartante taddhaama paramam mama. (The Bhagavad Gita
401)*

In the above mentioned lines from a *shloka* in the *Bhagvadgita*, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that His Param-Dham is beyond the light of the sun and the moon. It is the divine light that lights his Vaikunth-dham. Really, Gill's flame is visible but it is also a divine one, an imperishable one and perhaps it is connected with that divine light in the abode of God. There is, perhaps, a power-house there and its switch is in the hand of the Almighty. One, who goes there, never wishes to return from there, as his soul is enlightened with the sparkle of that divine light. In addition to Stephen Gill, as far as today's literature and litterateurs are concerned, there are many writers, who, in today's scenario, are making their valuable attempts for the welfare of mankind. There is also a personality, besides others, spiritually elevated, Harekrushna Mahanta, Who is running a journal, highly spiritual, indeed, a rare happening. It is really an enlightened, spiritual journal. This man has done something extraordinary for the world-peace. He has made us acquainted with so many spiritual celebrities across the world. Here, I quote Harekrushna Mahanta's significant views on terrorism: 'The whole of the world hates terrorists because they have filled the air of this beautiful earth with fear, sorrow and anxiety. Attacks in Mumbai like in New York, London Karachi and in many cities, have murdered peace, sleep and tranquility from the world. But fortunately, the doers too are humans of flesh and blood having soul lying dormant within them too. (*The Eternity* 91-92). In ideology regarding spirituality, this man is quite matched with Gill. Sandhya Saxena also expresses her meritorious views on Gill's *The Flame* and on spirituality in *A Comparative Study of The Flame And Paradise Lost*. 'A society may encounter the danger of a total collapse of the grand edifice of civilization if there are no spiritual physicians to redeem it from the state of moral or spiritual affliction. Despite the invasion and attacks India could survive and save her identity as it has been the land of great spiritual teachers like Buddha, Guru Nanak, Swami Vivekanand, Mahavir Swami and others. These spiritual preachers cured India of her existing ailments and helped her in retaining moral and spiritual force. Christ descended on earth for the redemption of mankind. Moses came to communicate to man the Gospel of God; the holy aim of the descent of Mohd. Saheb was to lead man on the path of God'. (*The Flame, Unmasked*). She is of the view that Gill visualizes the arrival of Moses' from the disarrangement of the void" (*The Flame* 137) Stephen Gill who is a real embodiment of peace has employed peace as a panacea with which, he challenges the enemies of peace. It is oft-quoted that William Wordsworth spiritualizes nature in his poetry; Keats is content to express it through senses and Shelley intellectualizes Nature. One more name is added to this oft-quoted line—the name of Stephen Gill who has spiritualized peace to elevate it to a divine height. And the aftermaths of that process are replete with a great humanitarian message, a message of peace and love, recommended for the good of the humanity. Like

Wordsworth, he is a mystic and a pantheist, he mystifies and baffles us by glorifying his eternal flame. He asks The Flame:

Your eyes/ a seaside retreat/ where mystic flame reign/ and/ nature courts the night's favor/ for a feast of peace/ As streams you an aerial grounds/ nourishing the arteries of harmony/ with the flow of wisdom/ from your unseen presence. (*The Flame* 37)

Stephen Gill is a real humanist and a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi's charismatic personality. Gandhi was also an ardent worshipper of peace and non-violence. He knew that violence is fatal to any nation's progress and peace among human beings. It is only for animals. In the words of Gill: Gandhi acknowledged that Jesus was the most active non-violent practitioner in the history of the world" (*The Eternity*). The poet is a devotee regarding the eternal Flame. He has a full devotion for the flame:

Receive me eagerly/ I am a battle unending/ I need support./ Caress me carefully/ I am a rose tethered/ I need tenderness/ Tend me delightedly/ I am a wound unattended/ I need wine./ Hold me ardently/ I am a root unprotected/ I need the breeze./ Play me wisely/ I am a note un-tired/ I need hands/ Accept me readily/ I am a lamb unclaimed/ I need a good shepherd (*The Flame* 129)

Gill has also a full belief in the fundamental unity of mankind. For this, he uses many symbols which show spiritual unity of humanity. Mark the lines for the use of symbol:

The fishes of the still harbour/ sense the star of love of the love/ that guides my spirit/ through the spirits of the dark alleys/ Manna from the departed moon/ bursts in to the ambrosia of my strength. (*The Flame* 137)

To conclude, the survey of Gill's writings, specially, his magnum opus, *The Flame*, shows him an ambassador of peace, deeply concerned for the spiritual values which are necessary for a healthy society. It would be misleading and degrading if one calls him 'a propagandist'.

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