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Stephen Gill's *The Flame* – A Panorama of Global Peace

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Peace is the Path men take for bringing growth and Prosperity to society. If men do not have Peace and harmony, achieving political strength, economic stability and cultural growth will be impossible. Moreover, before men transmit the notion of peace to others, it is vital for them to possess peace within. It is not a certain individual's responsibility to maintain peace but everyone's duty. In fact, if one takes a look at all religious scriptures and ceremonies, one will realize that all of them teach peace. They mostly advocate eliminating war and maintaining harmony. In other words, all of them hold out a sacred commitment to peace.

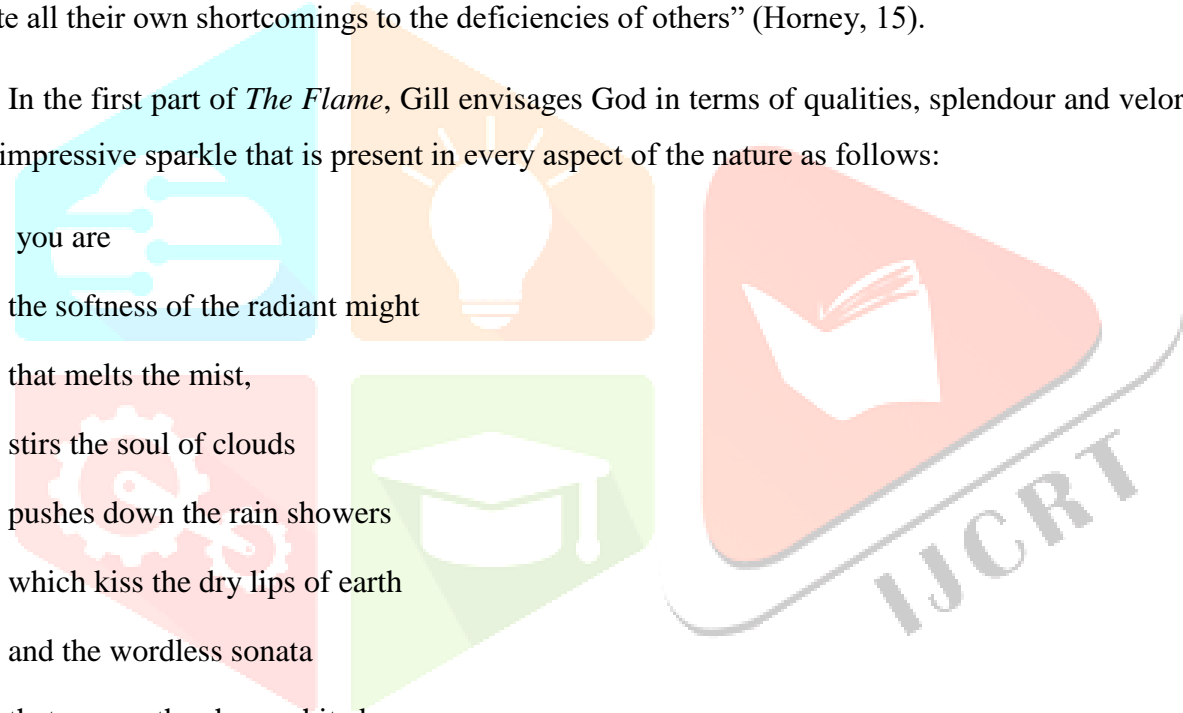
History has been the proof of the thousands of wars which have taken place in all periods at different levels among nations. Thus, people have learned that peace has played an important role in ending these wars or even preventing some of them. It is after the thousands of destructive wars that Humans have realized the importance of peace. Earth needs peace in order to survive. This applies to every angle including wars, natural disasters and more. When peace and harmony are maintained, things will continue to run smoothly without any delay and recourse men will have a happier life. There are many ways in which men can maintain peace at different levels. To begin with humankind, it is essential to maintain equality, security and justice to maintain the political order of any nation.

Literature plays a significant role in manifesting global peace and men's happiness. Many writers have contributed to stress world peace and anti-terrorism through their writings. One such prominent Personality is Stephen Gill, who is of course the bard of world peace and anti-terrorism. In the words of K.V. Dominic, born in Pakistan, brought up in India, and now settled in Canada, Stephen Gill is a Canadian writer, Indian English writer

and a world writer” (Preface vi). Stephen Gill strongly believes in a democratically elected world government and in this sense he would not like to be confined to the narrow boundary of any nation. Global peace and social concerns are the main areas of his interest. This paper entitled “ Stephen Gill’s *The Flame* - A panorama of Global Peace” is an attempt to analyse how stephen Gill reveals the calamities of war and the loss of harmony and thereby stresses world peace through *The Flame*.

The Flame, Stephen Gill’s magnum opus, consists of eight parts – sixty-two long cantos, The entire poem is in free verse composed of lines of varied length – monosyllable to more than ten syllables. The use of imagery decorates the noble theme of the poem. This poem is a proclamation of Gill’s vision, philosophy, poetic birth and development as well as his opportunity to patronize peace and create awareness among readers on the enemies of peace. Gill strongly believes that terrorism is the main hindrance to peace and all terrorists mold themselves with a rigid system of inner dictates. These terrorists indulge in a “dark idolatry of self (Shelley) and consistently attribute all their own shortcomings to the deficiencies of others” (Horney, 15).

In the first part of *The Flame*, Gill envisages God in terms of qualities, splendour and valor. He portrays God’s impressive sparkle that is present in every aspect of the nature as follows:



you are
the softness of the radiant might
that melts the mist,
stirs the soul of clouds
pushes down the rain showers
which kiss the dry lips of earth
and the wordless sonata
that moves the sharp white beams
of the moon.

In Creation

you are a balance. (Gill 32)

Global peace and social concerns are the main poetic message of this lionized literary legend. Addressing the flame, Gill opines in such a pleasurable way in the poem as follows:

You are
 the driving force that lifts
 spirits from the ditches.
 You are the creation
 whose meaning is perceived
 through the glasses
 of peace. (Gill, 36)

A flame is the visible form of fire. It has been and still is the main symbol in the Vedic scriptures. To burn fire is the sacred rituals of the Hindus. Even in Christianity, the flame is a symbol of the Methodist church. To the poet Stephen Gill, the flame is eternal. And, the Poet hankers after peace in these following lines.

I wish
 to end the odyssey of my woes
 under that tree of your amazement
 where
 happiness does not take leave
 and the shaken leaves
 smell the fragrance
 of the warm sweet clover
 from the exalted heights of intensity
 for the fondest hope to see
 the fruit of peace. (Gill 46)

Part two is a detailed narration of the wreckage caused by the terrorists. The poet describes the site of destruction with his characteristic use of imagery depicting the unbearable sight in such a way that he has been a witness. He describes many breathtaking scenes such as headless, naked, limbless dead bodies, amputees, wounded and bleeding human beings, mothers crying for their lost children etc to the readers.

There was an arm and a head
 and a woman's leg
 from the knee down
 the rest was buried under the rubble.
 A body appeared
 to have been through
 a meat grinder.
 There was an open chest cavity
 beside a headless torso. (Gill, 53)

Part three consists of three cantos. This part describes the rescue operations on the terror-hit areas. The volunteers risk their lives in search of life trapped in the debris. The rescue workers are trying their best to help the people who have been trapped in the debris. It is described by Gill as follows:

Some positioned their ears
 close to the debris.

The leader often shouted
 as loud as he could:

“We are here to help.
 call out.”

All would wait, praying
 to hear a whisper or sob. (Gill, 65)

Part four also describes another bomb blast by the terrorists in a day-care centre. It occurs in the busy morning when the kids in the centre are ready to paste cotton balls onto paper cutouts after the breakfast. The kids become soundless and the day-care centre disappears in the raging fire of the wrath. The terrible sight causes even the medical team, which rushed to the spot to provide first aid, cry and sick. Part five gives a detailed description of the aftermath of the blast in the day-care centre. Days are filled with funerals and some people are still searching for their dear ones in the crowd that has assembled for the funeral. The situation is really very pathetic.

In part seven, the poet asks the blood spillers if they have heard the silence of the infants in the cradles of terror. The poet is certain that the terrorists might have felt uneasiness or stiffness of heart before executing this atrocious act. Hence, the poet not only portrays the terrific situation but also shows the humanness in the minds of the terrorists. In part seven, the poet turns to seek help from nature as the terrorists have polluted the air with

dust, smoke, fog and clouds. He has made his request to the sun to provide light to weed out the darkness, evil, war and misery.

We need the grace of your presence
 to weed out the bigotry
 the cruelty
 the fanatic howls
 the fear
 the sickness
 and for mosaic to refine its gem
 for equality to shine. (Gill, 110)

Towards the end, in part Eight, Gill earnestly seeks an ideal world of God to seek refuge for this life as follows:

Where life is not anchored
 to the strands of Zealots
 and crocodiles of disharmony
 do not roam around
 (Gill, 145)

Here, one can find a resonance of Tagore's famous poem from Gitanjali.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
 ...

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by
 narrow domestic walls; ...

...

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening
 thought and action -

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake. (Tagore, 53)

The poet, Stephen Gill seems to be very optimistic and his optimism is evident in the following lines:

I shall catch
glimpses of your elegance
in the glow of the candles
within the temple that I build
for you. (Gill, 132)

Stephen Gill writes poetry as it gives him refuge and helps him in extending a stage for promoting peace which the world lacks. He, as a human being, senses the pain and anguishes of the people and sympathizes with them. For many, poetry may be a spontaneous pour out but for Gill, it is largely perspiration. Humanity the world over is in search of peace and harmony. By presenting the destruction and portraying terrorism caused by the maniac messiahs, Gill urges the common people to make every effort towards attaining peace. “*The Flame* is about peace and peace is the main area of my exploration” (Gill,19).

Terrorism is the scourge of the contemporary world. It has occurred throughout history, but today the world is experiencing a number of terrorist attacks. Innocent people are suffering in their homes and public places by barbaric acts of terrorism. Poems like *The Flame* stress the need for peace and instills the spirit in the readers to make efforts to achieve it. The poem, *The Flame* condemns the demonic tendencies and hold out the message of hope, love, peace, harmony and spiritual unity of the mankind. Actually, the poem ends on a note of hope, which is of course the fundamental requirement of life in today’s terror-struck world.

Stephen Gill is variously engaged in propagating his idea of peace throughout the world by the sword of his pen. Peace is, according to Gill, absence of war or fear of war and bloodshed. The poet is very much alive to the world happenings that he is very conscious of all incidents of terror worldwide. He has been constantly writing and working for global peace. On the basis of his childhood experiences of shock and fear and the present condition of the world at different levels, the poet has become peace prone. In the preface to *The Flame*, Gill makes it clear when he says, “I believe that peace is the legitimate child of peaceful means. I believe that peace is a powerful basic human need that is the other side of the coin of love. All normal humans, no matter where and how they live, aspire to peace” (Gill, 21).

A sense of helpfulness comes to the poet when he feels the inner power of the flame within him. He looks upon flame as a source of light and he becomes optimistic that one day the world will be liberated from the clutches of terrorism and there will be peace and serenity all around the world. Stephen Gill is of course a bard of peace as he says that the poem is no wonder that poets usually seek peace and they feel that it is their responsibility and pleasure to bring peace to the world. Some of them come out with their agenda in various ways like Stephen Gill, but to Stephen Gill, it is not just propaganda but a heart felt desire for peace. It reflects the words of Sri Aurobindo. “A day may come, must surely come, we will say, when humanity will be ready

spiritually, morally, socially for the reign of universal peace, meanwhile the aspect of battle and the nature and function of man as a fighter have to be accepted and accounted for by any practical philosophy and religion” (Aurobindo, 45).

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