

Stephen Gill: The Promoter of Human Love

VijayLakshmi Chaudhary

For me soft drops of harmony shall produce a lullaby from the notes of now ¹(FOT,45)

Stephen Gill was born in Pakistan (Sialkot) and had migrated to Canada to have a prosperous future. But his staying in Canada made him ultimately disillusioned with the modern human life. Caught up between two cultures-- Indian and Canadian, he has to face the problem of emotional adjustment:

In the valley of terror my bones crack, shooting pains of insecurity, while the pride of my ego shamelessly mocks my nakedness² (Blind And Deaf,62) In this country Canadian, he faces so discriminations either in the name of caste, or language that he feels like a deer who is lost in the jungle. His disappointment and depression find the voice in his poetry: Often I have to caress even those thorns which knowingly pierce my feet³ (A New Canadian In Toronto,15)

Every time, he tries to go beyond all these divisive barriers and boundaries, which has divide the humanity into pieces. He lays bare all these divisive boundaries in his works so as to make the human beings aware of their evil consequences and timely to move them to another world, the world which is lying beyond all these divisions. In this alien country, Stephen Gill is in search for the identity which will bind him to humanity. Though his soul has been torn up by detached treatment of Canadian country, his sensibility is essentially international. He sounds the tone of brotherhood in his works:

Thy land and life and springs. thy summer and fall and skies and joyful birds – delight-giving sights – breathe a new life in me.⁴ (DOP,27)

There is a conflict between his native Indian ethos and forces of marginal existence, nagging in conveniences, and foreign dominance in the country of his adoption. The poet evolves through raw socio-cultural pressure, barriers of race, religion, colour and internationally making creative writing a survival process, a process of coping with the uncertainties of the new environment, new social structure, new values, new politics and new relations.

He suffers changes and all divisive barriers, shaking even the most basic human conditions. The complexity, diversity and rapid pace of changes make him appear alien in his own eyes. He is away from his own familiarity, perhaps from the humanity. He feels all these barriers and discriminations like thorns lying under his feet piercing them. Faced with an unrecognized life, monotony and uncertainty, he takes an immigrant in time and voyages into the future, sometimes with an idealist tinge. Real failures and disappointments to achieve money, status, power and success in a country where he hopes to get them, forces him to face all those barriers which caused a division among human beings. He is against such narrow-minded nationalism that confines a man to his own country with the feeling of egoism, not to the bond of brotherhood. The poet is always indignant of “xenophobic” nationalists whom he calls, “sinking vultures” and “smiling shylocks” that “rest in rusted tombs”. In Canadian country, he finds himself as an individual and a human being who is “caught at the honeycombed crossroads” of “divided humanity”:

In the pots of patriotism poisons are often prepared to kill the lily of peace.⁵ (SFH,45)

This unsettling experience of racial discrimination makes him feel alien. His creative writings reflect adjustment pangs of an immigrant who has lived through and survived against the hostility generated mainly out of unc cosmopolitan profile of his so-called cosmopolitan surroundings. The range of emotions and sentiments experienced by Gill is common to most of the unfairly treated immigrants. Haughty attitude of the natives, hurtful insults and motivated racial assaults cripple them both physically and psychologically and as a reaction to the feelings of hurt, they take option to voice their protest through the medium of writing. Gill’s writing is no exception, he vehemently protests—often with a touch of desolation – against the demons of bigotries: “life will not be the same / because the nights of racial prejudice/chews peace/in the jaws of endless depth.”⁶ (SFH, 48) He finds his beliefs, customs, ideals and values on the verge of collapse in this strange country. Gill’s nostalgia for his homeland is not solely romantic; it is rather based on the harsh realities of life as everyday life in this new land has its own measure of mystery and dread. His poems reflect an ironic consciousness for the generality of human loss and pain, a sense of disenchantment with the false money-making prosperity and a feeling of despondency at the world-crisis the society is heading towards.

Gill finds that his integrity as a humanitarian is challenged with insulting blow from this insensitive country, Canada. He loudly denounces forces that promote extreme and vicious nationalism. He liberates his mind through his poems and reveals his socio-political concerns by exposing human animus:

The land of devils is empty hanuman because its occupants extend desert of savagery.⁷ (DS, 32)

He delineates a basic struggle of the soul, the mind and the body to comprehend life in its totality: what he communicates through the poetic medium is a confrontation of his whole being with reality. Disappointment is the keynote of his melancholy whether with edgy complications of social insecurity or with insoluble problems of political instability. The poet tries to achieve his goal to instill a sense of mortal fear in his reader and extends his sense of brotherhood and internationalism, "I need a wind/loving and kind."⁸ (FOT.96) He desires for a world, where all human beings will be beyond all trivial activities and divisive barriers. He notices an unquenchable thirst for the manna whose source seems to have dried up suddenly because noxious germs of anarchy are let loose on the socio-political stratosphere. He feels a sense of restlessness everywhere. So even on the eve of New Year, he is filled up with the feeling of gloominess: "The willful ghosts of sorrow/ have not dissolved . . . which float over the cold tombs"⁹ (On New Year, 2)

In his other poem entitled "Beelzebub of Demands", Gill mocks at the "seductive moans of social deities." Continuance of moral laxities, indulgence in sensuality and political corruption and exploitation strike a staggering blow to the entire social system and the poet experiences an intense need to break the strings: But how can I do it when the Beelzebub of demands chop off my wings.¹⁰ (BOD,23)

Here in this poem the Beelzebub stands for all social evils which making the poet's all efforts, to liberate the humanity from all the social evils, abortive. He goes on to say that the unprecedented growth of science has isolated men from one another emotionally and spiritually. As a result, the people have become insensitive to human sentiments and feelings. Thus this socio-political upheavals causing loss of human values, makes Gill acutely conscious of the spiritual barrenness of the time. Gross human apathy towards the sufferings of fellow-beings makes the poet question both the forces of racism and humanism: Which humanity do you talk about?

I saw her grisly dance yesterday at the railway station where a handful of hooligans scorned and hit a youth of a different shade.¹¹ (To Humanists, 12) The humanity has witnessed the naked dance of the death in the form of world wars and the worst spectacle of it was displayed in the use of atomic weapons during the Second World War. The poet is aware of savagery across the globe: "humans look for an oasis, / in human blood." The poet, an unyielding supporter of democratic beliefs, decries war which disintegrates society and tears apart a country with all-round devastation:

Carnages waged the delights of countries wives subdued numerous men lost their sight and many more maimed lofty dreams crushed laps of mothers are empty now With the thorns of hatred; .man is to breathe his last in the smoke.¹² (DOP,13-14)

War is self-defeating, it is fraud, declares Gill and wonders "what is today's man". He cannot understand the puzzle, the contradiction – love for animals but hatred for humanity – perpetrated by man of today. The poet pleads for love, harmony, integration, peace. But the poet is aware that "peace cannot swim on the blood waves for a happier future. So man should build bridges now by killing the serpent within "that vomits lava of hostility."¹³ (DOP,37) In his poems, Gill continually points to the deepening tribulations of people everywhere – contentions and disputes, mutual deceits, sudden calamities, misery and distress, convulsions of war, spread of chronic diseases, hunger and poverty that have upset the world's equilibrium. And on other hand the scientific advancement has made human beings "a prisoner of chaotic nights." In this scientific world, nothing is certain, as the science is encroaching over the whole humanity. Being fed up with all these human panic cries, the poet retires into his own "calming womb/ beyond the embraces of robots / and bursts of inhuman cries".¹⁴ (DOP, 48)

Gill seems to be a poet-philosopher whose voice is mightier than war weapons. He is the promoter of universal brotherhood and condemns the fanatic mind which is born of ignorance. He wishes for the humanity's welfare: "Give us wisdom/not to uproot our orchard . . . give us now a gown of humility/to wear/water of tranquility/to drink/O Father."¹⁵(DOP, 52-53). As a well wisher of the whole humanity, he considers the war derision to the creator, who loves everyone and reveals the secret of undisturbed peace. He sees that the hostility has led the humanity to destruction. So he appeals to the people not to rest on the political power, military power and unprecedented growth of science, but to follow the path of justice and to accept the thoughts of the cosmopolitan. Gill turns to poetry to search for the unity:

I wish my poetry to be friendly to pacify the tiger of violence and to assemble flowers of all hues into a single bouquet.¹⁶ (SFH,12) As a well-wisher of humanity, he makes the readers aware of the brooding disaster seems to befall mankind, if the present generation does not take the apt steps to maintain world peace and harmony:

Humans have to change demons to go, and rusted fetters to break before the glory of harmony stretches soothing wings over the decaying orchards and... to free the rays of beauty.¹⁷ (SFH,27)

The poet looks for the ambrosia that can instill corpuscles of love and tolerance into humanity which indulges in violent struggle for nothing. His poetic cult is the cult of humanity which reverberates with universal brotherhood, manifesting itself in the form of devotion through the love for peace and harmony.

Gill seems to be influenced by Hindu metaphysics as it is based on Christian faith. His poetry sounds the tone of oriental philosophy which makes the humans to turn inward to perceive the pervading presence of God in the whole universe. The turning inward can lift the man beyond all trivial and worldly desires and can unite him finally to God and to the whole humanity: Dropped the dew of innocence on the wings of my guilt which I carry still while searching for Me.¹⁸ (A Handshake) This philosophy propagates the love for whole humanity through broadening one's outlook and realizing the presence of God in one's being. The poet believes that a man need not wander outside in the search for love, but it lies in abundance hidden into one's heart which is the abode of God. He opines that only the realization of Omni-presence of God can enable one to establish the harmonious relationship with the whole humanity. Thus the poet desires for a high level of human life, a level where man is capable of participating in two worlds, the higher which exists as the transcendence of personality, the extension of consciousness beyond the limits imposed by ego and the lower world where the human organism functions in accordance with the laws of its being.

The poet desires for a life which shall lift him beyond all odds and limitations, and finally provide real satisfaction and peace to his soul. He is the poet who has firm faith into human values. He is the propagator for universal love and peace. He wants to make the humans more alive by liberating them from the divisive barriers which have made them spiritually dead. He urges abolition of racial, religious, political and economic prejudices and seeks equal rights and opportunities for humans. As an ideal poet, he longs for a perfect world that would be free from social, political, economic and religious discriminations. Parthasarathy rightly speaks of Gill, "He wants to instill the feelings of universal love into human life to make it more friendly to promote the harmonious relationship among the humans".¹⁹(Rough Passage, 17) As Gill himself asserts: "I shall hibernate somewhere/Amidst the Elysian bounties/Embracing peace surpassing all."²⁰ (DOP, 44-45). These lines show the poet's true devotion to the welfare of the whole human race.

WORKS CITED

- [1]. Gill, Stephen. "The Flowers of Thirst." Ontario: Vesta Publication, 1990.
- [2]. R. Parthasarathy. "Rough Passage." Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1977.
- [3]. Gill, Stephen. "Blind and Deaf," Gipsy. 1991.
- [4]. Gill, Stephen. "A New Canadian in Toronto," Star India, July 9, 1993. Gill, Stephen. "The Dove of Peace." 2nd Ed., New York: M.A.F. Press, 1993.
- [5]. Gill, Stephen. "Songs for Harmony" New Jersey: Rose Shell Press, 1993.
- [6]. Gill, Stephen. "Divergent Shades" Ranchi: Writers' Forum, 1995.
- [7]. Gill, Stephen. "On the New Year," Seaway News, December 26, 1994.
- [8]. Gill, Stephen. "Beelzebub of Demands," from Both Sides of the Ocean, January-February 1995.
- [9]. Gill, Stephen. "To Humanists," at-mohajer, Issue No. 2-3, February-March, 1994.