



Self-exiled Stephen Gill is a multiple award winning Indo/Canadian poet, fiction-writer and essayist. He has authored more than thirty books, including novels, literary criticism, and collections of poems. He is the subject of doctoral dissertations, and research papers. Thirteen books of critical studies have been released by book publishers on his works and more are on the way. The focus of his writing is love and peace, based on his ideology of live and let live. He has also written and published book reviews and research papers on writers and peace. Stephen Gill's writings have appeared in around one thousand publications. Some of his Urdu/Hindi poems have been performed by prominent singers of India and Pakistan in three volumes.

Stephen Gill was born in Sialkot, now in Pakistan, and for higher education he studied in India (Panjab and Agra Universities), Canada (Ottawa University) and England (Oxford University). His father owned a company at Sialkot. The company manufactured and exported the supports goods, such as field hockey sticks, bats for cricket, tennis rackets and shuttlecocks. When India was divided in 1947, this company went bankrupt as several other outfits had. His parents moved to New Delhi, the capital of India, to be in a calmer area. The family never saw good days after the division of India.

Remorseless brutalities on both sides of the border hardened the hearts of both the Hindus and Muslims, resulting in an intense atmosphere also for Christians. About these remorseless brutalities and intense atmosphere, Stephen Gill writes in the preface of his collection of poems, titled *Songs Before Shrine*:

*During those riots, we did not know if there would be another dawn and when there was, it brought tales of more brutalities. I saw old people running for help and being pelted with bricks and then burnt alive while the patrolling police ignored the clusters of misguided zealots who were in the street in spite of curfews. I perceived death dancing in the eyes of minorities, heard the cries of infants and read about the butchery of the*

*innocent as if that was happening in front of my eyes.*

*Curfew used to be lifted for a couple of hours for citizens to buy the necessities of life. Items like sugar, rice, wheat flour and several other eatables had disappeared from the stores. If there were any, their prices had shot up because those who could afford started hoarding them. Minorities suffered this way and also because of other fears. Both the Hindus and Muslims were engaged in this ugliness for religious reasons. Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated because he tried to end this drama of degradation to humanity.*

*I began to flutter my wings to escape the prison of suffocation in search of an El Dorado of peace. (Songs Before Shrine x, xi).*

He writes in the preface of another collections of his poems, titled *Shrine*:

*Every time there was a stir caused by the wind, a car on the street, the bark of a dog, or the mew of a cat, we froze inside our house. Every time there was anything unusual, unseen tragedy was expected. The nights were nightmares and the days did not bring any hope. Often, the mornings dawned with more lamentable events. It was not easy to sleep when night after night the ghosts of fear looked straight into our eyes. It turned into an obsession that afflicted me every minute of every hour that whom to trust and to take in confidence. Passers-by and neighbours appeared to be the possible killers. Apparently, the dark forces of religion roamed around freely to terrorize minorities. (Shrine, p.11)*

Stephen Gill began to find ways to run away from the murderous religious rage to grow as a creative writer in a fearless atmosphere. He says it was a miracle to receive a teacher's position in Ethiopia. After teaching for three years, he immigrated to England before settling in Canada in the early sixties.

Stephen Gill has not said much about his early life, because that is to reincarnate the silent wrenching pains, he says. He however has painted some gruesome realities of these silent wrenching pains in the prefaces of his collections of poems, including *Songs Before Shrine*, and *Shrine* as well as in the introduction to his modern epic on terrorism *The Flame*. He has touched those gruesome realities also in his interviews and depicted here and there in his novel *The Coexistence*. It is the bitterness of the water of the early life that runs in the arteries of Stephen Gill's writings. That bitterness in different forms often emerge in his dreams even now. He does not want to see that bitterness happening again in his life.

The "silent wrenching pains" of his early life in India has kept Stephen Gill as a prisoner of fear even when he came abroad. This has largely shaped his psyche. He writes of this fear in his preface to his modern epic *The Flame* that is about the destruction caused by maniac messiahs, a phrase he uses for terrorists:

*Fear became an unwelcoming guest in my life from my early life. As a potent biological presence of unpleasant danger, it took away a considerable joy from my life. It often led me to the heightened perception of being persecuted that destroyed the delicate fabrics of my trust. In the shape of fear of rejection, it led me often to make irrational decisions. The scars of this powerful emotion were not easy to wash from the psyche even after I came out of that fear abroad. To find hope, I traced riches, education, faiths and many other things. I tried to see the face of hope in political ideologies, including Marxism, Nazism and dictatorship. ... To take the root of fear out, I took a long and painful journey of efforts. My life in Canada was my attempt to refuse to let fear be my master. But this is not that easy. Writing, particularly poetry, is one way to do that. Poetry is my refuge and my helper to help others to be aware of the enemies of peace. (The Flame, 27)*

In his interview appeared in *Poetry in the Arts* from Texas of January 2001, No 23, he says:

*I have seen the glass of peace being smashed into pieces when I was growing up in India. My family did not know if there would be another dawn and when there was, it brought horrific tales of more brutalities. I have seen old people running for help and being pelted with bricks and then burnt alive while the patrolling police ignored the clusters of misguided zealots; I have perceived death dancing in the eyes of minorities; I have heard the cries of infants; I have read about the butchery of the innocent. Both the Hindus and Muslims were engaged in this ugliness for religious reasons. Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated because he tried to end this drama of degradation to humanity. It is the pain of these wounds that I carry with me no matter where I go. I have struggled to catch a glimpse of that pain in the preface to *Shrine*, a collection of my poems of social concerns. That pain is still alive in the caves of my arteries and comes to life as a ghost any time, particularly when it is night.*

His education and experiences began to nourish a cosmopolitan outlook in him. He came to the conclusion that peace is the child of justice and freedoms. Global peace and social concerns became the leading drives in his poetry and fiction. This view was largely encouraged by the basic atmosphere provided by the governments of Canada. His interest in peace is tightly tied with his days in New Delhi. As he has mentioned, he has not said much about his early life, because that was to reincarnate the silent wrenching pains. He also says his life has been a bundle of miracles. About peace and love he writes in the preface to his love sonnets, titled *The Singer of Life*:

*I believe love is a singer of life. I also believe that love and peace walk side by side and where there is no love there is sickness in every shape and where there is sickness there is no peace-- neither personal nor national. It is in the interest of every human to follow the path of love for personal health and governments at all levels are expected to maintain peace to nourish a meaningful life and prosperity. I believe live and let live is the way for personal and national prosperity. In my novel *The Coexistence* I attempt to provide its blueprint. It can be achieved without love, but if these principles*

*are used with love as a lubricant, the result would be much more satisfying. There can be peace without the base of love but love provides emotions and feelings to solidify the foundation. Attachment is the base-- human is born with attachment. (The Singer of Life,p. 10-11) .*

He concludes his novel *The Coexistence* with the following glowing tribute to love:

*A person is born to love and to receive love. Love is the binding force for families, planets, every atom and every part of every individual. Love is the thread that unites humans and non-humans at every level. Life disintegrates where the rays of love do not each. "Nothing is more toxic in love than being possessive and jealous. Loving is dissolving and dissolving is a process of dying and dying is fearful. Fear may form inhibition, and inhibition is the shrouded reef that shatters the ship. Dissipation of inhibition in the unshaken waters of transparency is the way to be born in love again... Loving is a prayer and this prayer is to live beyond and the essence of the beyond is in coexistence. The deeds which abide in love bring forth much fruit. The tree that exude the fragrance of fulfillment is in love with the earth. The nightingale that carols on its branches loves freedom, as the air and sky do. Every branch that bears fruit is pruned to produce more fruit. Love is the expression of Truth, and Truth is in deeds. The love that does not abide in deeds is cast forth to whither to be gathered as wood for the fire where they are burned. The hearts in love are neither troubled nor fearful, even when anxiety is at a boiling point. Their joy in love is full. In life there are tribulations, but love overcomes them. The universe breathes in the openness of love in an egoless state... When the waves of the ocean fuse, they drive their energy from eternity. Love is the spark of eternity, and eternity is not born in time. Trusting love is trusting the arms of mother that are around the child without strings. Abuse of love is the rape that is the reckless disregard of the trust, ending in the demise of relationships to become a sepulcher of emptiness. Love is the absence of the dust of self- desire, and self- desire uproots serenity to seduce infirmities. Love is the language of God and God is peace.*

He believes that peace is the legitimate child of peaceful means. In Canada, he kept finding ways to widen and deepen the field of his writing that had been his passion all his life. The compelling influence of his crusade he says is peace—the peace that is beauty—the peace that is creative—the peace that makes life meaningful. Canada to him provides a blueprint for this peace.

In his interview with Professor Dr. J. Sarangi that appeared in *The Atlantic Literary Review* of July-Sept & Oct-Dec. 2004, Vol. 5 on pages 164-183, he says:

*I believe that home is where our feet are. I also believe that our feet are in a home that encompasses safety and happiness. A home is also the evening fireside that provides warmth and cosiness. Wherever these components habitat there habitats the heart. I see these components habitating in the rainbow beauty of Canada. Here I walk under a roof of assurances for my safety and freedoms. Wherever I go, I wear a hat that is textured with the ethnic touches of the mosaic nature of Canada. This hat is neither*

*entirely south Asian nor entirely North American. It gives me protection, though at times it hurts a nerve.*

Well-developed digital technology in Canada has opened more doors for writers to reach global audience at minimum cost. Canada still is not a nation where writers disappear for speaking out; novelists are sentenced to death; journalists are charged with sedition and poets languish in jails, where journalists are attacked, imprisoned and murdered. Here writers are largely free to evaluate the performance of the ruling party and engage citizens in meaningful discussions. Denial of freedom to writers is denial of nourishment to the growth of democracy and a furtive attempt to murder the conscious of a nation. These factors have provided incentive to his pen.