

## ***THE FLAME***

modern epic on terrorism

By

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*A MULTIPLE AWARD-WINNING POET  
AND WRITER*

*Dedicated  
to*

**ETERNAL FLAME**

***Author's Preface***

*The Flame* is divided into eight parts and sixty-two cantos. Part one of *The Flame* is devotional. Parts two, three, four and five are about the destruction caused by the maniac messiahs. Part six is about those who are responsible for destruction, and the remaining

parts are about the yearning for the loss. Some cantos are to extol the virtues of the Flame, some are to portray despair, and some are in its memory. I have written these cantos in the belief that maniac messiahs are misled individuals who generate the blizzards of fear and panic. Those who are silent are also to be blamed as those are who adore these blizzards of fear and panic. Both commit horrendous crimes against humanity as those who carry out sinister designs of these blizzards. The last canto of this book delivers hope. Hope signifies that a positive outcome is possible. Without hope life is a Sahara of dismay.

*The Flame* is the result of the eight years of my anxious care of these robins of my art. During these years, I changed my dealings with these birds in different capacities to nourish them more artistically. In the last two years, I became more diligent with more focus. At my writing table, I kept them close to me. Whenever I had time, as well as the first thing in the morning and the last before going to bed, I fed the robins with the berries of my passion. In their enlivening warbles, I drowned the chill of my presence and the ghosts of the past. Several times, I took their cage to my bed room to continue hearing their notes of freedom along the shores of my sleep. They remained closed to my heart as they are now and shall ever remain.

These birds are not meant to be caged. Therefore when I felt somewhat satisfied with my feeding, I kicked the robins out of the nest one by one. Very rarely any of them came back in dejection. This way, I was able to publish some of these cantos in more than forty publications in Canada, the USA, India, on the internet and elsewhere. That is how I treated the robins of my another collection, *Shrine*. Before they were collected in that book, several of them had appeared in more than seventy publications.

I feel strongly that before poems appear in book form, they should appear in periodicals, because these appearances encourage a poet. At the same time, they provide additional opportunities for sharing with divergent audiences. Some editors make suggestions for improvement. Some of these cantos without the present revisions appeared in my collection *The Flowers of Thirst*, out of print now. I have translated some of these cantos myself in Urdu, Hindi and Panjabi versions.

One problem that a poet usually encounters in a long poem is the possibility of repetition of words and phrases. Another is the maintenance of logical flow and continuity. I am a proverbial enemy of clichés though some are animating and some may creep in

without my being aware of them. I believe that a poet should use fresh images. I have tried to use every word carefully as a brick to build the edifice of *The Flame*.

Life is not a ready-made dish. During the days of my care, I made a number of unpalatable dishes. One makes several attempts in different combinations to find the right type of spices and amount to prepare an ideal meal. It is like finding one right turn after making several wrong ones. I am convinced that talent by itself is nothing unless it is blended with perspiration that includes mastering the tools of the art.

*The Flame* is poetry and poetry is my home. I began building my home during the painful shyness of my early days when I began to dwell in imagination and the world of books. It has been a long odyssey of search for my golden fleece. The path of my odyssey was rocky in all directions. I was from a family that was socially isolated in India after migrating from Pakistan. We were surrounded with a new environment in New Delhi. My father was the only earning member of the family. My mother, who was a teacher in Sialkot, now in Pakistan, started her own school for the kids who did not attend regular schools or needed extra attention. In a one room house, she gave tuition to those children to supplement income. It was not an easy adjustment from the good days in Sialkot to the bad days in New Delhi.

In those days, entertainment for children from the families which were not financially very secure was limited to meeting friends or reading. There were no tv's, and radio was a luxury. The movie theaters were expensive and rare. I had a few friends but we did not visit each other's homes; we used to meet outside. Our sports were self-improvised, like hitting one another with a soft ball on a street and trying to dodge. Others included different forms of play with marbles and kabadi, purely Indian sports. There were more sports along the same lines. I do not see them in the West nor in India during my visits. For some reason, my mother did not encourage me to mix with other kids, particularly with those who were not interested in their studies. That also became another factor for making me a painfully shy kid. I began to take interest in reading. But I hated schools and their books. My father was an avid reader of newspapers. On Sundays, when he was at home, he bought most of the newspapers that I began to love.

Apart from newspapers, our home had a small collection of books in Urdu. I was doing most of their reading. After finishing them, I began to borrow from our local library. I finished most of the novels, collections of poems and books on psychology that were

available in the library. I began to browse at book stores and ask my friends for the reading materials. I also began to move in the company of poets, frequenting the tea shops where they congregated. They were mostly mature. I heard each and every word they discussed. During those discussions, I heard that if persons memorize one thousand couplets of choice, they can start composing their own verses. That is what I tried, but I could not memorize them and what I was able to, did not help me.

I also heard that a writer should write every day on any experience or idea before going to bed. I was told that this practice helps to develop a style. I began to write about my friends, our games, chats, you name it. It proved a useful exercise.

I also heard that a writer should keep a notebook to put down any striking word or phrase that comes across during a talk, reading or from anywhere. This is a practice that is with me even now. If I like a sentence or phrase from a poem or just my own, I put it down in my notebook. When I have time or I am in the mood, I go over them. I find it a very useful practice, and will not hesitate recommending it to others.

My father edited a religious publication in Sialkot, in addition to running a sports firm. In New Delhi, he often wrote letters to the editor and to businesses. It seems that he enjoyed writing and reading replies. He also wrote poems to greet people on certain occasions.

When I grew up, my father wanted me to get married and settle in life and do my writing at leisure. He was more or less like Mr. Motard in my novel *Why* with the difference that Mr. Motard makes money from his business, while my father could not, or did not. I knew that I would not be happy making money to look after children though I wanted a family. I knew that just to make enough money to be a marginal citizen would not please me and would keep creating financial and family crises. To be a successful bread earner for a Christian in North India was a tough job. I found out that the officers at the employment centers were not friendly to Christians. I avoided the path of marriage and being settled. I began to explore ways to be an established writer. It was a long battle, but I was not discouraged.

I began to realize that one ladder to succeed for a person like me was formal education that would help to make money and be a successful writer. My mother was with me as far as education was concerned. But university education was expensive and to study from home for university degrees was not that easy. I yearned for real education in an

intellectual and stimulating atmosphere of a university, where students interact with one another and with professors. My one problem was my early education that did not help me gain self-confidence and skills. It was my early education that remained a serious obstacle in my life. I had attended the cheapest schools that were run by governments. In these schools, the media of instruction was the local language. English was touched nominally at the elementary level without any emphasis on conversation, till one left the school for a college or university. Those who could afford it, sent their children to mission schools where the medium of instruction was English from the beginning. Those schools built confidence in their students.

After passing High school examinations, the medium of instruction at the college and university levels used to become English. There was no gradual transition. Text books after passing high schools were in English and professors gave lectures in English. This created more inferiority complex in students from government schools because their English was not adequate to compete with other students. The result was disappointing, because those from well-to-do families who had studied in mission schools, shined at the college and university levels.

My mother found a way. She used to ask us again and again to practice English among ourselves at home, though there was none to correct our mistakes. Our neighborhood was of no help, because it was even worse. I used to burn within with the fire to have a good knowledge of English because I wanted to be a writer in English, knowing that to be the way to reach the world audience. I am not prejudiced towards any language. Every language, including every object in the world, is beautiful. However, I wanted to know English well and properly to reach the readership of other nations, and the elite in my country. That was my goal. It was confirmed later that language comes by speaking and one should be in a situation where he or she is forced to speak. I realized it when I was in Ethiopia as a teacher. I was in a situation in which people did not know English. But nearly everyone knew Italian. I started speaking Italian in a couple of months and became a fluent conversationalist within a year. It is because I was forced to speak.

Apart from the inadequate education, my religion stood in my way. Discriminations and religious riots produced fears. They demolished whatever walls of security we had. These factors led me to the caves of isolation, thinking, browsing, and imagining that prepared a good recipe to be a poet.

As a child, I used to feel that India was the safest place in the world, because it is tolerant and religious. Most of the holy persons were born in this subcontinent. During those days, Mahatma Gandhi, an apostle of peace and tolerance, was assassinated. I saw Hindus, even old people, crying like children when they heard the news over the radio. I heard people saying that India has become an orphan—it has lost its father. I used to hear also that India, the birth place of Buddha, Guru Nanak and other spiritual physicians, is the safest place in the globe. It used to puzzle me, because of the killing in the name of religion. When I came out of India and had time to think from a distance, I discovered that physicians are needed where sickness prevails. The subcontinent of India has produced a number of spiritual physicians, because that area needed to be healed.

Lack of security in the land of those physicians led me to isolation in the early days that revealed to me the path of my poetic destination. I began to find ways to establish myself as a writer and poet. My struggle was based more on perspiration than inspiration. One can say that it was my inspiration that led me to perspiration. The shadows of inspiration and perspiration walked side by side with me everywhere. I grabbed every opportunity to sharpen my tools to be a better poet. Poetry may also be revelation and flash, but it is largely perspiration. When poetry becomes a passion, it becomes more demanding. Poetry was and is still my passion. Peace is the womb where the baby of my passion grew. Absence of peace had shaken my psyche deeply, while growing up in New Delhi, India. The solitary hours of the night spent in the web of fear and days without friends and hope forced me to read, think and imagine. Those days and nights drove me to the island of imagination that laid the seeds for my development as a poet and writer. In Ethiopia, where I went to teach, I had money, a maid, a car, good climate and peace that I desired the most. But the surrounding was not stimulating for writing. Means to reach even the local population were medieval. English was more limited in its use than it was in India. There was hardly any library. I had to abandon my good life in Ethiopia to be in an English-speaking nation where I could learn and establish myself as a meaningful writer.

When I came to Canada for my higher studies, the first thing I did was to find writers and poets and their groups. They were not many in those days. However, my search opened a new vista for me. I came to know some publications for writers. Some came to my attention at newspaper stands and some were referred to me. I began to buy them regularly though they were expensive. These magazines were useful, because they discussed problems of writings and poets, such as how to find a book publisher, edit

and so on. There was nothing like them in India. Poets in India were not organized and there had been hardly any workshops for them. On the other hand, in Canada, nearly every conference of writers had practical workshops. I began to discuss the craft of writing and about publications with others, whether they were writers or not, to get as much information as was possible. I was an attentive listener. I began inviting poets and writers to restaurants to get help to improve my writing skills. Often I had to travel afar. It was not easy to find a friend in North America where even whites are lonely. People here are very independent. Someone suggested to me to try the opposite sex for friendships. To find an established poet who had time to discuss the tools of poetry was not that easy. Established writers, including those who made a moderate success, had no time. Those who had time wanted to be with better writers. In any case, I kept my search and was able to make contacts in a limited way. My efforts yielded fruits but not what I expected. Searches itself was perspiration.

I studied at a university in Canada for three years and then became a book publisher. The idea behind this decision was to remain close to writing and also writers. Book publishing helped me in several ways. There were respect and money, but my goal kept evading me. Most of the time, I was engaged in promoting others. My own writing suffered for want of time. To get out of even this web, I had to make further adjustments. I knew that I would have to lose something to gain my golden fleece. I bade farewell to book publishing after about fifteen years.

Like any art or trade, poetry is seventy-five percent perspiration. By perspiration I mean also editing again and again, reading and reading, writing and keep writing and keep sending manuscripts to publications to be an acceptable poet. It is not an easy decision to continue kicking out the robins of art, because of the fear of rejection. For those who want to improve their art, rejection slips are the stepping stones to success. Some rejections are sent, because editors do not need additional material on the same subject or they do not have enough space to accommodate them. Some good editors make suggestions to revise certain portions of the work.

A poet should never be tired of revisions. A time comes when a poem would tell when to stop. Sometimes poets have to stop revisions, because they get tired of what leads them nowhere, even knowing that the poem needs extra work. In such situations, I put my poem aside to take it up some other day unexpectedly. This procedure works in most cases with most poets. Often poets will know themselves if a poem needs further work. It

is like knowing when the stomach is full. Another way is to consult an editor. Everyone needs an editor, even editors do.

There is a myth that poetry strikes a poet like a flash, or it is a divine bolt. For a serious poet, it may be bolt and divine, but mostly it is cooking. I believe there is beauty everywhere. That is what *the Bible* says in its story on the origin of the universe. After every creation, God said beautiful. There is beauty in every object and so is poetry. Beauty is poetry and poetry is beauty. But everyone does not have the abilities to bring out gracefully the god within. It is a poet who gives that god a shape with the beauty of the language. Language is a media between an object and poet that gives life, as God did when he created the universe with his words. What is important in a poem is the arrangement of words. This is an intellectual exercise that needs dipping into the amazing world of words. These efforts need the proper knowledge of the tools.

Poets are painters who use words, instead of colours, or they are dancers, who use lyrics instead of using the movements of their hands, legs and facial expressions. In addition to the arrangement of words, the most important feature of a poem is economy of expression.

Poetry is an unusual experience that shakes a poet thoroughly. A poem is by a human for humans about a deep inner experience that is symbolized through a language. To describe or illustrate, poets need tools and the struggle to master the use of the tools is perspiration. Through images and the arrangement of words and other tools, poets convey their experiences to their readers. Poetry is not only to convey that experience to readers, it is also to convey it in a beautiful way and that beautiful way should also be something like a new and delicious dish. That is where perspiration gets involved.

I had no problem as far as subject is concerned. The object or the subject that had deeply disturbed me was my early days in New Delhi, where the bear of discrimination and fear roamed freely. I often think that it must be the supreme power that has kept me secure and helped me to settle in Canada to be able to do something for peace. I also wonder that with my limited power of the pen and abilities how that divine power expects me to do something for peace. The deeper I go, the more I come to know that I can serve that purpose with whatever means I have.

*The Flame* is my extraordinary ambitious project. I fathom here a subject, artistically, that concerns politicians, reformers, peace activists, philosophers, prophets and others. 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. It does not make any sense to expect peace after death by destroying the peace of others. Hindu scriptures call God peace. Jesus says that peacemakers shall be called the children of God. God is the king of peace in the scriptures of both the Hindus and Christians.

*The Flame* is about peace and peace is the main area of my exploration. There are several minor areas that also relate to peace, including human rights, treatment of the minority by the majority and antiwar activities. I have tried to attempt these areas in the light of my ideology of peace. Just to talk of peace is meaningless. There should be also some concrete ideology and activities. That is what I have attempted in my prose. Peace has been my main interest in my prose, poetry and also in my talks. As I have mentioned in my articles and prefaces, the source of my inspiration is my early childhood. Lack of security in the country of my birth was responsible for my search. I did not give up this hunt even in the countries where I was comfortably secure.

Peace has been the hunt of humans from the time immemorial. There have been different theories to weave its rainbow. Some physicians who have appeared to give directions have given their lives to light its candle. Some of them taught unconditional love and some of them taught tooth for a tooth. Some prophets have taught to be neutral or indifferent to the pains and pleasures of the world. Terrorists also talk of peace. They believe that they achieve or will achieve peace by terrorizing citizens. A breed of these terrorists, fed on religious fanaticism, is most dangerously intolerant of the views of others. This breed is spreading fast and widely all over the world. Those who believe in preparation for war for peace have invented the deadliest weapons, such as nuclear bombs. Instead of peace, the world is coming closer to the threshold of complete annihilation. No one wants that sort of peace, except some morbid thinkers.

I believe that terrorism, an extreme form of ambition for power to rule others, is the work of organized groups that carry out the bloodshed of innocent citizens to gain political, national or religious power. They disregard human life. They do not belong to any organized armed forces and therefore do not follow any rules of the war. They strike

whenever and wherever it is possible. Often they call themselves liberators, separatists and jihadis. They shun democratic means to achieve their objectives. The values that are shared by law-abiding citizens are their targets and they come from every community and background.

In November 2004, a panel of the United Nations describes terrorism as a deed that is □intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or noncombatant with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act.□ The main weapon of these groups is violence and the threat of violence to cause as much destruction as possible with deep and wide physical and psychological impact. Their intentional targets are civilians. They want to paralyze people with fear to put pressure on their government to accept their agenda. Sauntering on the bones of children and innocent citizens to get the crown of peace, they gain maximum publicity. They believe they can achieve peace effectively through violence. Their groups hold secret training camps, where they exercise for physical fitness, learn to use firearms, explosives and receive constant doses for their brainwash. They are funded with the money from organized crimes, the sale of drugs, and the misuse of the funds of some charitable organizations formed to deceive people and governments. These days terrorists make CDs and movies of their heinous crimes to sell to make money. Terrorism has become an industry.

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. Poets all over the world have reflected this need with individual techniques and symbols, peculiar to their own cultures and ages. Due to the universal interest in peace, different ethnic groups will be able to enjoy the cantos of this book as much as I have enjoyed writing them.

I firmly believe that to promote peace, it is important to appreciate also other cultures, emphasizing similarities, rather than dissimilarities. The emphasis on dissimilarities is usually to shock, not to build bridges. Since the cantos of *The Flame* are about that eternal flame, a universal phenomenon, these cantos will help readers realize, consciously or unconsciously, that hope is still alive under the sun. This realization will open gates for the appreciation of the writings of other cultures and to the fact that their writers are also human beings, mixtures of strengths and weaknesses, with the same basic needs.

Canada, where I live, is a complete world in a microcosm. It is blessed with distinctive ethnocultural, as well as political, racial, social and religious groups. It is the second largest country in the world and its citizens come from every corner of the globe, who retain their distinctive heritage. Canada publishes every year more than three hundred newspapers and periodicals in ethnic languages. One thread that links the ethnic groups is their increasing awareness of the richness of one another and significant contributions in several areas.

Flame also symbolizes sharing, compassion, sacrifice, courage and witness. I use flame as a symbol as I have used the bird dove. Flame is the visible form of fire. It has been discovered that gravity plays some indirect part in the formation of the fire. If flame has a connotation, the gravity also has a connotation. Flame has been and it still is the main symbol in the Vedic scriptures. In the Hindu religion, the Almighty symbolizes five elements. One of those elements is fire. People in the Vedic Age worshiped fire and even now some Hindus keep the fire burning during worship. They also perform a sacred ritual of fire at important events, including births, weddings, funerals and major holidays. The Hindus use it also on their festival of Diwali. The Jews light candles on Hanukkah and Christians use it on Christmas. Fire is used as eternal flame to watch at monuments and tombs. Candles flicker in churches, temples and mosques. Flame is also a symbol of the Methodist Church, a Christian denomination with a long history.

The Methodist Church uses the flame with the cross that represents the third person of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit that refers to the Pentecost when believers witnessed tongues as fire. In Greek mythology flame refers also to the Olympic Flame that commemorates the theft of fire from Zeus, a Greek god, by Prometheus. During the ancient Olympics, fire was kept burning throughout celebrations. According to Greek mythology, fire or flame was in the possession of gods only. Prometheus stole fire from the god Zeus to give to humans when they lived in dark caves. This gift brought productivity also in the field of art and literature. Prometheus was punished by Zeus for this act of compassion and generosity.

To destroy humans, Zeus gave another gift to humans. He collected disdainful objects and put them in a box that was given to a beautiful girl, who was created for that purpose. Zeus named her Pandora that means all gifted. She was told not to open that box, but she did. Consequently, the contents of the box that contained pain, bloodshed, fear,

economic strangulation, anguish and suffering, began to roam in the world. All that was left was Hope. Eventually, it was also let out of that box. Expression of hope is in the last canto of *The Flame*.

The maniac messiahs open Pandora's Box with the fingers of science and technology, using the muscles of fanaticism to spread the dust of the untold brutalities for the sake of their macabre pleasure. These openers of this Pandora's Box roam in the world in every shape to cause as much destruction as possible. They go to universities, do usual business, greet their neighbors, smile, shake hands, eat and do everything as normal human beings. The next moment, they are seen killing citizens with the rage of their guns and explosives, killing even themselves. They are trained to hide their love for bloodshed. Actually it is the education that they receive during their childhood and years of adolescent that is never washed away. These robots steal the flame in whatever shape they find anywhere.

The openers of these boxes are also gifted with every beauty as Pandora was. The most precious of them is the gift of life that they have been trading with the ugliness of violence. They reject their gift for the domain from where no one comes back. Their path to that domain is paved with the bones of the children and painted with the blood of the innocents. The flowers that grow on both side of that path are fed with the tears of the helpless children and widows. To reach their other world, they walk over the ground that is concreted with the blood of mothers. Walking on this path, they dream of entering the domain of bliss. Intelligent people may not find logic here, but the life of brutalities is more real for terrorists than the life they see around in their daily life.

Obviously these openers reject the gift of life, turning their backs even to the normal joys around them. When this rejection is combined with the philosophy of their bliss, they stand up to do anything. Most of them are prepared for the work of terrorism in their childhood. Aristotle said that first school of a child is the lap of the mother. Laps of mothers of these maniac messiahs must have disciplined them for this type of life.

These openers include educated and illiterate, rich and poor, men and women, politicians, engineers, medicos and religious leaders of all ages. Among them, religious fanatics are most brutal. They aim at killing as many innocent citizens as possible because they are soft targets. They do this work for a greater good or for themselves to enter the kingdom of their land of peace easily. They do not appear to be mentally sick. They do not think

about the wrong they do. They do not feel the pains of others and do not suffer from clinically defined personality disorder. They are not alone. There are groups behind them who control their minds. They have an agenda.

These assassins of humanity steal joys from life. These days with sniffing dogs and other scientific checkups, there is no real defense against them. When I was growing up in New Delhi, there were no dangers from suicide bombers, but from crowds or stabbers. Our home was also a target that I came to know later when the riots subsided. There were hardly any telephones and police were not as active as in the West. Moreover, they were far off. When I think of those days, I still shudder and think that there must be a purpose for which I have been saved from uncouth killers. I have experienced their stings. I know what fear is in the jungle of helplessness. I know what hope is when there is no hope. We were surrounded by the original inhabitant of India, called Adi Basi that means the real inhabitants.

I still remember how they used to sing hymns all day and night to the Hindu deities without any pause. They used to sing on loudspeakers loud enough to be heard blocks away. They were devout and religious. Most of them were from the laboring class. They had been also involved with killing. In the ladder of the caste system, they are not from the higher casts. Many years later when there were other serious riots, against the Sikhs this time, again such people were involved. That uprising was due to the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her own body guard who happened to be a Sikh. Luckily in those days of riots I was in Canada. It happened in the eighties.

How a spiritual person would start killing even his own neighbors and friends seem to be an enigma to me. Perhaps killers have been fed with the poison for earning points to enter the kingdom of God, or it is the mass hysteria of violence when even normal beings act as animals. They do what others do, forgetting all the norms and principles of life.

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 result of that is *The Flame*. It is not to attack a particular creed or religion or nationality. Scenes in *The Flame* are common to any destruction in Canada, the United States, India or anywhere. People are people everywhere and suffering is suffering. I believe that remorseless forces of brutalities have their own agenda. They do not follow any organized religion.

*The Flame* is my humble offering to serve peace in my own poetic way. It is a collection of the flowers whose cultivator has roots in the centuries-old culture of the subcontinent of India. I expect people of other traditions and heritage to view this bouquet from that angle, though the pseudo-critics are known for marring beauty by dissecting works of art into fragmented forms in an attempt to search for ugly spots. I have toiled in these cantos to catch the flame in a net of diverse techniques. This diversity is also to avoid the monotony of treading the same path. This is in an earnest venture, using every possible tool of a poet within my human limits, to catch the essence of that flame. However, the beaten track of expression does not provide the ruling atmosphere in this book.

The eternal flame knows no occupation, faith nor complexion and cannot be imprisoned within human bonds. It has engulfed millions, whose names can be traced in every age and land. This flame is known to engulf mortals even today, melting unknown metals into one. I dedicate my book to this eternal flame.

*Stephen Gill*

*Canada*

*December 30, 2007*

## Samples from sixty-two cantos

(1)

**You** are the imperishable harmony  
that reaps unparalleled prosperity.  
From the chalice of your peace  
I long painfully to sip  
the invigorating wine  
of fruitful returns.

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.

You are  
the luxuriance of the aroma  
that runs  
in the veins of the enchanted blossoms.

You flower  
a fragrant feast around,  
caress  
the flushed cheeks of the horizon  
and liberate the birds that fly  
to receive the ruler retiring  
in a strange ceremony.

You are  
the beat that echoes  
in the breast of the arc.  
You muse  
in the melody of the falls.

You are nirvana  
that helps in breaking the fetters  
of the relentless brutalities  
and manna for those who hunger  
for the morsels of equity  
on the barren mountain  
where  
the biting winds of intolerance  
blow.

You are

the distinctive fount  
that feeds the ever-growing pangs  
of the sages  
in every age.  
Your abode,  
ocean's every drop.  
You bind the earth and the sky  
and rule to relieve  
the rusting monotony.

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**(4)**

**You** are  
the single inner sanctum  
that sails  
on the breast of emotion's  
unruffled ocean.  
Amid the frigid draughts  
you emerge as a wave of warmth  
muffling me in the arms  
of your affection.

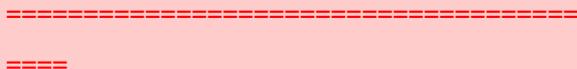
You are the vanity of swans  
that is the pulsating vessel  
of the dignity of hills  
and the ark

where the pride of the rose  
seeks refuge in silence.  
Your vision of heaven  
is the loveliness of hope  
that is the crown of aspirations  
and the vitality of the river.

Your eyes  
a seaside retreat  
where mystic flames reign  
and  
nature courts the night's favor  
for a feast of peace.

As streams  
you float on aerial grounds  
nourishing the arteries of harmony  
with the flow of wisdom  
from your unseen presence.

You are  
unlike the age  
that is distant and aloof.  
Out of time's reach  
is your placid beauty.  
You guard  
the eyes of the bloom  
against glares.



**5**

***Tell*** me

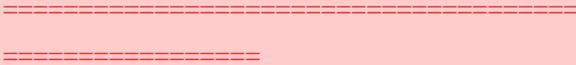
how to string the harp  
that is suffused with the sounds  
of your sprightly prairies

and  
receive the energy  
from the symphony of the earth  
that is enveloped in the virginity  
of your blaze.

How to be the source of the food  
that increases the hunger  
for the hidden treasure  
of your blessings  
that transcend the flesh,  
blood and bones.

Tell me  
how to feel the touch  
of the light fatherly fingers  
that shall lift me as a leaf  
out of myself  
to free my freedoms from the tribes  
of chaos  
and discern the field  
that is beyond  
the common human confines

from where  
the vibrating potency  
of your sovereign art  
heals the corroded minds  
who see their god  
in the monster of perversities.



(9)

*I wish*

to recline under that canopy  
where  
the rough diamonds of your eyes  
radiate calmness  
and the loitering clouds of your hair  
dispel the ghost of despair  
from the chamber of my mind.

I wish  
to snuggle under that shade  
where  
your eyes express the unexpressibles  
and the magic chant of your gaze

breaks the chains of my confusion.

I wish

to awake under that dome

where

untainted fountains

from the realm of your compassion

pacify unquenchable thirst

and where

dreams open the portals of my

freedoms.

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.

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(10)

**When** the avatars of savagery  
mow down defenceless innocents  
and  
tear down the towers of routine

deep pain goes deeper  
inside.

Spiders of sinister news  
crawl in and out of the cracks  
of the tranquil trust  
that mothers the rational of discipline  
and the stress-causing stairs  
of the menacing fear go up and down  
with the sound  
of a tombstone in the grass.

From the oak of harmony  
leaves fall  
in the maze of mistrust.

The locusts of threat  
shadow the crops of shelters  
and the driving rains of discomfort  
lash the denuded twigs of hope.

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(12)

**Like** every day

birds chirped  
devotees came  
parents brought their youngsters  
to the nursery  
and the sun rejuvenated  
on the stage of humdrum.

The day opened its dance  
with a frightening boom  
that rocked the structure of tranquillity  
and closed  
with the deepening gloom  
that froze the mouth, feet  
and heart.

The birds that reposed

on secure boughs

flew in fear.

For days

sparrows, roses and dawns

forgot their songs.

Brutes flickered tongues

over the lips of normalcy.

Time stopped when an explosion

blew up the simple elegance

of my flame.

The furious rumbling bang

released a sudden cataclysm

that the devotees thought

an earthquake.

It sparked a vast red-orange fireball

the rushing gust

sounded as if a giant jumbo jet

or a missile

had struck.

Thick black smoke

that arises from cannons

hovered above the choicest gem  
leaving the smell of the gunpowder  
to poison the palate of peace.

The darkened vicinity  
encircled the skies  
under the haze of a horror  
agonizing the souls  
who coldly stared.



(18)

**Using** floodlights  
they toiled in chilly nights  
fighting  
the smothering clouds of dust  
under impaired visibility.

Wearing thick overalls  
and masks to ward off  
the stench of decaying flesh  
gathering pieces of flesh  
amid pools of blood  
they walked in a shattered shell  
where hands, thumbs and legs

littered  
and blood stains were washed  
by rains.

They ascended slopes of rubble  
crossed bodies half seen  
inching their way  
crawling over dead bodies  
to find  
if any survived.

They worked  
on their hands and knees  
using lights  
fixed to their helmets.

Through cracks they reached  
no-go zones  
and came back with tears  
because  
they could not get to the dying  
even risking their own lives.

Clocks and weather

stood against them  
yet deeper and deeper  
with their deepest devotion  
sore backs and ankles  
under the harsh glare spotlights  
facing unfamiliar sights  
smelling death  
speaking through their eyes  
they walked.

Behind  
the fragments of the concrete slabs  
and compressed filing cabinets  
they recovered victims  
with ruptured eyeballs  
and fractured ribs.

They kept going  
though the airborne particles  
caused headaches  
or dryness in their throats  
and nose.

*68-flame*

With the mounting mass of courage  
they moved forward  
with crowbars and axes.  
If someone recovered an adult  
or a child  
he was rushed  
to the stress center  
because the exhaustive search  
mentally and physically was exhausting.

The perfidious conditions  
stressed even dogs  
who felt dispirited  
for not finding anyone alive.



(20)

**With** jackhammers and chainsaws  
they removed obstacles  
to dig out the nursery  
buried under a pile of rubble.  
No little hands reached them  
only tiny voices

and faint sobs they heard.

They saw babies  
shrouded in blood  
and plastered with insulation  
or faces half covered with glass  
calling brokenly  
for their dads and moms.

They saw  
bodies slashed  
or lying under doors  
walls and cement beams.  
They turned over cribs  
and furniture cautiously.  
One by one  
they removed bricks  
to reach two toddlers alive.

While carrying an infant  
when a cop paused to breathe  
he looked down.  
He was standing

on a dead child.

They saw  
babies wrapped  
around the poles  
or their faces blown off.

They saw mangled carcasses  
entombed under the beds of steel  
and a teacher  
holding a child.

Papers  
and playthings were scattered  
blending with arms and legs.

They picked up dolls  
with discomfort.

A rescuer was frozen  
when he saw a truck  
like the one his son had.

They found  
tiny corpses with blankets  
but the cold hands of the winds

through the cracks  
where once stood windows  
and walls kept throwing them off.

Drenched and chilly  
holding toys  
from the wrecked nursery  
they searched  
paused  
and searched again.

A sergeant  
with a flashlight  
chased the trails of red insulation  
through the tunnels  
of the twisted metal  
concrete beams  
and jumbled furniture.  
In uniform  
masking his nose  
he explored every closet.

Their eyes were tearful

and their hands trembled  
when they grasped  
the slain kids.

Those speechless faces  
who watched the workers  
were engraved forever  
on their psyches.

The fire fighters wept  
as they lifted weightless bodies  
struggling  
to retain composure.

The medical team  
worked around the clock  
wading through the mud of danger  
to perform first aid  
where the disfigured bodies  
huddled  
under horrendous disorder.

Searchers  
sifted through debris by hand

and carried it out in buckets.  
Machines of every type  
were brought  
but no one could use them all.

Rumors about hidden bombs  
added torment  
to their comfortless task.

Most thought of their families  
when a sense of helplessness  
overpowered their efforts.  
Several exhausted rescuers  
left the gaping cave.



**(23)**

**A camp** was extemporized  
in a parking lot  
to anatomize  
the shattered shell  
floor by floor  
indicating the bodies  
that could not be pulled out.

Soaked in blood  
nurses in uniform  
rushed around the improvised surgeries.  
Red stained gloves  
loafed among the leaves  
scattered by winds  
over the lawn.

The area was cordoned off  
most exit ramps were closed  
the telephone lines jammed  
the car agencies  
had nothing to rent.  
Investigators and relatives  
filled the hotels.

A surge of press reporters,  
television transmission trucks  
and photographers  
within hours  
turned a sleepy town  
into the capital of the media.

They competed for stories  
wombed in emotion.  
Radio stations informed  
where to donate blood  
off duty medical teams  
responded with calm.

A trucker from another city  
arrived with soft drinks,  
tooth paste,  
aspirin  
and first-aid kits.  
Residents brought cots  
and blankets to him.  
He was at his station  
to provide considerable relief  
from the torment of the tragedy.

Another drove for hours  
to offer free meals  
to rescue workers.

Residents collected bed sheets  
and plastic tarpaulins  
in response to a shortage  
of body bags  
and prayed.

Counselling centres sprang up  
with psychologists  
pastoral assistance  
and psychiatrists

Hospitals postponed planned surgeries  
and nonessential radiological procedures.  
They had enough anesthalogists  
neuro and vascular surgeons  
and  
pulmonary specialists.

Several people spent their nights  
in sleeping bags  
on cots or folding chairs  
stunned or thinking  
how they would cope without a brother  
child, wife  
or mother.

Citizens were glued  
to their televisions.

Lava flew  
from the Mount Etna of their anger  
because the media focussed  
on speculating about culprits  
rather than the emotional bruises

of the sufferers.

Fearing retribution  
several families did not speak  
and several more  
confused, outraged or shocked  
sat frozen  
waiting for another list.  
Days were filled with funerals  
and expecting  
the missing to be recovered.

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(29)

**Dear** children

do not suffer from the painful longing  
for the domestic bliss of your early days.

Irons unfastened  
your parents have gone  
to soothe your sagging spirit.

Look at the darkness  
beyond the hills that gives birth daily  
to another dawn.

Poetry  
has not flown to the distant fields.

Snow still falls  
outside the window  
and the sun melts away  
coldness from homes.

The place  
where the dismembered limbs lie  
mocks the blindness of the brutes  
who had tried to frame a coffin

for liberty

under the shades of their vilest impulses.

The morning  
that buried your elders  
in a massive grave of the frozen mind  
has become a ground for hope.

With the driving dry drifts  
birds from the dale of intolerance  
flew to teach their tongue  
to the birds of insight.  
Locked in obsessions  
they briefly stench the air  
with their uncontrolled spiral of hate.

Flame is still a pyramid of justice.  
Hope carves niches of safety  
around towers of peace  
to lay eggs even today.  
Denizens of ignorance  
blow off the petals of innocent flowers  
not knowing the doors of future  
remain open.  
When the bulldozers  
uproot the shrine  
the land does not go dry.

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(30)

### ***Mothers***

do not weep.  
Suffering from the frightening fancies  
the social lepers  
wander among the denominations of malice  
and carefully consider the endless roads  
of the potentials to worship

the bubbles of the self.  
Shed your tears with cries  
from the skies of your fond memories  
to awake their conscience  
slumbering in the shambles of brutality.

Offer your hymns to a new birth  
your children  
baptized with your tears  
sail on the white wings.  
Notable nips outside the house  
and the nights  
when you snuggled your babies  
beneath the quilts  
or in front of your tvs  
shall keep flooding back  
the meanings of those moments.

In the citadel of your patience  
lies a spot for your soul  
to gather the grief to handle.  
Wanton violence  
startled signals to stamp out  
the plague  
that scourges the defenseless lives.  
Peace has been tested  
in the cyclone of the freshness  
of early morning.

The panorama of the grimness  
outlines the blueprints  
for the nest of tomorrow.  
The season of the dense fog of danger

standing as the wall of wadding  
has dissolved  
in the fold of the spring.

Skies  
spread their prismic wings  
over the forces of confusion  
for new vistas to emerge.

The days of inconsolable distress  
have rolled off.

The lotus of the present  
blooms in new waters of decision.

Shadows have passed  
the blood, dust and smoke  
have cleared  
yet the bones of a mother's love  
remain dislocated.

The discerning art of physicians  
heals  
but healing a mother  
wounded in her backyard  
is another story.

Dear mothers  
do not unfold  
the bed of the past  
a broken image  
in the foggy mirror.

There are cradles  
in which  
new babies of aspiration  
are to be rocked.

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(31)

**Car** bombs, mobility and might  
have become the toys of robots.  
They know how and when  
to free their unfed tigers  
from the cages of depravity  
to stifle democracy.

With knowledge,  
easy money and weight  
they become maniac messiahs  
to snuff out the flickers  
of the inner blaze.  
Breathing the stink of ferocity  
for pastime  
they still the nightingale of freedoms  
uprooting the tree where she sings.

They smash welcoming doors.  
Shafts of steel  
warble in the smoky bar  
of self-glory  
to dig ditches for agonies  
and spread a carpet of paralyzing fear  
to mangle mothers  
and wives.

With a repulsive pump  
they inflate balloons  
of their willful delusions  
to soar

above the unexpected heights.

They do not see  
opening to the sky  
as does a butterfly.

They lead governments  
for more road blocks  
metal detectors  
bomb sniffing dogs  
and fresh looks at newcomers.

Eerie paths of their pleasures  
shape public opinions to accept unhappily  
surveillance cameras  
and  
electronic screening.

Their relentless pursuits  
to grab the crown of chaos  
swim political pendulums  
to promote quick deportations  
and wiretappings.

Their brutal feuds  
with human rights  
force regimes to extend  
easy arrests.

In the plutonium trade  
smuggles are more likely  
by these dukes of fruitless longing.

In the windowless cells  
of anarchistic gospel  
they prepare terror  
with the weeds of ignorance  
on the fire of savagery  
in the pots sooted with conceit.

Citizens of peace  
robots cannot be bridled  
from the fortified bunkers.

Lament from the top of your shelters  
because your freedoms  
cannot be defended now  
even by the mightiest armies.

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(35)

***I open*** eyes

from my deep meditation

at the wilderness of my retreat

because I find you not there.

I stop counting the beads  
in the cycle of monotony  
for it drops the seeker in me  
into the well of emptiness.

I find the artifacts  
of stones and clay  
within the cloistered walls  
of sky-touching domes  
where the waves of human life  
flow once a week  
to bow  
in silence



(41)

**You** knock at the doors  
of the ruins of my hours  
modestly sit beside me.

Engrossed in chats

we finish cups of tea  
playing hide and seek  
in lonesomeness  
we empty more cups.

A pleasant wind  
carries us away  
freed from chains  
hair ruffled  
we are attuned to the stars.  
Along the self-composed clouds  
we trail.



(42)

**When** in spring  
net of the day asundered  
and dark ravines  
begin to reveal themselves  
I seek solace in a garden  
where flowers bathe  
in a shower of peace.  
I feel the feathers of a rose.  
Your presence I find inside

softly wrapped.

When those glow worms above  
push aside  
their curtain of isolation  
and when intoxicating wind  
is set free  
I visit the nearest waterfalls  
where painfully sweet melodies  
retreat into a soothing womb.  
I see your face emerging  
in those falls.

When  
a spring unpacks the snow  
burying alive the tender boughs  
and storms spoil calm  
I long for your warmth.

When there is diffusion  
of another dawn  
and the denizens of the air  
spread their tunes  
in a symphony that is strange  
yet sweet

I hear your voice ringing.

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(46)

**The** radiance from the flame  
that emanates from the dense canopy  
of your bounty  
I have painted with unspoken thoughts  
on the inner wall of my fancy.  
I study it  
under the lenses of astonishing care  
to dissect the order of the days  
when Nirvana hung around.  
No smiles  
no tears  
suddenly our links were severed.

From a golden cage  
of snow-capped desolation  
I long for the shower of a gentle gale  
from the beach  
where I shall canonize  
the petals of freedoms  
for my joy to be full.

Filled with the reddest rubies  
of my passion  
here I shall devise a basilica for you  
where my daffodils shall never die  
and the effervescent laces of my lyrics  
stretch their endless wings  
through a new universe of the brain cells  
of my imagery.

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(54)

**Moving** with crutches

under their armpits of insensitivity  
the artisans of insidious shocks  
defile orchards of your stainless holiness  
with the sputum of false gods.

They crush buds  
with bulldozers  
wearing the gown of sanctimony  
to cover the nakedness  
of their disease  
that eats away  
the flesh of peace.

With singular eagerness  
you accept  
even these deranged savages  
who erupt the lava of devastation  
from the depressive corridors  
of their oddest mania.

You wait  
within the shoreless mansion  
of your patience  
for these prodigals to return.

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(59)

**This** is

the palace of peace.  
Years of brain-rattling forces  
high on a cocktail of arrogance

ignorance  
and an ideology of sickness  
have sealed its doors.  
Do not look inside  
through its openings  
painted with the pigment of poison.  
Under its ceiling  
terrorists have raised  
the beasts of their twisted creeds.  
They are prisoners  
to the cult of the kingdom  
where ill-winds blow  
the noxious emission of no hope.

Within the void  
of the narrowness of this palace  
you will see  
blinding redness floating.  
Do not come  
out of the bounds  
of your freedoms  
you would be wounded.

Here  
the litany of the rituals  
unveils the hidden ugliness  
of the inglorious advocates  
of wicked designs.

This palace stands  
between pointed rocks  
on the bones  
blended with the blood

of blameless citizens  
and children.

In its kitchen  
malice is prepared  
within its walls  
aspirations of mothers  
have been buried  
the back of its roof  
has been arched  
with the weight of firearms.

The princess of the self-respect  
sheds tears with strangled cries  
in the nights of the frozen grave.  
Candles had been put out  
long long ago.

Do not step outside of your solitude  
overpowering stench of the palace  
would canker the sanity  
of your sensibilities.

It is the ruin  
where the swords of its pilgrims  
twinkle  
in the wrinkles of the religion  
of self-glory.

This is the palace of peace  
do not come near.

=====

(60)

**Where** creeds are not crushed  
and human gods do not feed

the vultures of war  
that island of yours  
defends the dignity of freedoms  
that is distinctive and charming.

Where life is not anchored  
to the strands of zealots  
and crocodiles of disharmony  
do not roam around  
that delta of yours  
dwells in the woods of blessedness  
under the borderless sky  
that is lofty and pleasing.

Where the cactus of shame  
does not mushroom  
and the evil birds of bloodshed  
do not defile  
the nests of my vision  
that lushy bloom of roses  
touches the hem of the gown  
that is the epitome of your beauty.

Where the dove flies without fear  
and the lilies of justice  
blossom for all  
that domain of yours  
assures a comforting niche  
for the songs I write  
for you.

Where the streams of youth  
do not cease flowing

and despair does not nail tents  
over the greenery of the dreams  
under the constellation of calm  
that land of yours  
calls me to gather pearls  
from the ocean of your wisdom.

Where love is not suffocated  
and the twigs are not damaged  
by the trotting swarm of savages  
that oasis of yours  
wants me to break my chains  
to breathe the amazing fragrance  
of your presence.

Where waves snuggle sands  
and soul is free  
that shore of yours  
commands me to chase out  
the dragons of your absence  
from those hills  
where they reign  
in the darkness of the graveyard.

As a mad prophet in painful ecstasy  
I shall bathe  
in the mystical falls of those regions  
that are steeped in the melody  
that sobs in the radiance  
of your gentle warmth.



**To** direct my steps  
towards the shores of the pure bliss  
of your peace  
I shall dip in the esoteric stream  
that meanders along the woodlands  
of my absolute fidelity.

Covered with the cassock  
of the unbreakable bond  
I shall go over the ablaze alp  
where the sad unwanted clutter  
of the rational ground  
consumes into ashes  
and the smog of doubts disappears.

I shall aggressively pursue my odyssey  
through the barren regions of the moor  
where the scamps of ego erect  
the deceitful caves  
and the reptiles of the debasing bargain  
roam.

The radiation of their enticements  
shall fail to lead me  
into the blindness of their hopeless muddle.

The echoes of their moans  
shall bear no desirable flavour  
for me  
because of the smell of my lilac  
that is more animating  
than their tempting promises.

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**The Flame, Vesta Publications 2008, 152 pages, paper back,**

**ISBN : 978-0-919301-21-3, \$ 10.30**

## **OPINIONS :**

**\*The Flame, the longest poem on modern terrorism by Stephen Gill, is a sprinkler of peace in the dark cloudy nights ...**

In recent years when the explosions of dynamite and roars of the mortars are deafening humans and the dance of terrorists is posing a real threat to human liberty, the Flame by Dr. Stephen Gill is a sprinkler of peace. While the rising blaze of terrorism is swallowing humanity, The Flame suggests to control this blaze by using the water of peaceful means. It is a unique experience to read the longest poem ever written on terrorism that illustrates the ultimate solution towards peace.

*The Flame* is the latest book written by Dr. Stephen Gill, who has authored many volumes to express his vision. During current disastrous geo-political situation in different parts of the world when a majority of writers prefer to be silent, Stephen Gill is a voice in wilderness but in truth he is a real champion of peace.

The peace poetry in the present era is still a rare commodity. A majority of poets are silent about the burning olive leaves by the cruel hands of terrorists. The destination chosen by Stephen Gill to spread the fragrance of peace with his poetry strengthens the efforts of leaders who struggle for harmony.

I wrote poems during my school days and passionately read poetry of famous Urdu poets. I was fond of poetry, which had short lines, because that indicated a full control of the poet on his or her work. It was amazing to read Jazeera, a collection of Urdu poems of Stephen Gill, where nearly all poems have short lines. This reveals the soul of each poem in a few words—a difficult job indeed.

*The Flame* is about a long history of peace expressed in every verse in solid form and with fresh imagery, which make the Flame a masterpiece. The Flame is not the flame of terror but the flame of peace.

I do not know, why Stephen Gill is still a blossom in wilderness when he deserves to be a renowned envoy of peace of some esteemed organizations and on the peak of his fame. It seems that the world still accepts readily those who write about sensational aspects, violence and sex, instead of those who write peacefully for peace. ([\*Dr.. Nazir Bhatti, editor-in chief of Pakistan Christian Post. His book The Trial of Pakistani Christian Nation is going to be released in 2008\*](#))

**\*The Flame is the longest poem**

*The Flame* is the longest poem on terrorism in the last two or three decades. I have checked all the other available sources. Modern terrorism is indeed a recent phenomenon. I have visited The Gazette and enjoyed reading the poems from The Flame and the critique on Gill and for sure, Dr. Bhatti, the commentator and the chief editor of Pakistan Christian Post is right. I have decided to write a critique on The Flame after receiving the copy. Please give

me sufficient time and I hope to come out with an intelligent and resourceful critique. ([Dr. . Dominic Savio, Reader in English, Kamraj University, India](#))

**\*A different message in *the Flame* grabs my attention**

Usually I avoid giving my opinion on books. *The Flame* is quite different when it comes to message of world peace. It is this message that grabs my attention and forces me to write.

Religious fanatics of today are busy finding new ways for atrocities, including murder, suicide bombing, and rape. In this environment, the *Flame*, Dr. Stephen Gill 's latest book, is most appropriate and timely. Peace is the message of *the Flam*, the longest poem in English. Dr. Gill paints a touching picture with the colors of life and death, fear and hostility, love and torture, humanity and bloodshed for the massive awareness without being prejudice. Dr. Gill has been building bridges for years through his articles, speeches and books. I am confident that *The Flam*, a book of 152 pages that conveys a long poetic message of peace, will be a unique contribution to Global Peace.

[\(An artist, Steve Almas from Canada is a prominent poet of Urdu\).](#)

**\*Stephen Gill condemns terrorism in his poetic way in *the Flame***

*The Flame*, a long poem of one hundred and fifty-two pages, is about the destruction caused by maniac messiahs. Terrorism, which is born in the diabolical minds of religious, political and financial fanatics, is probably the single most dangerous enemy to world peace. What a blessing to have poets like Dr. Stephen Gill, who boldly declares through their poetic art about human responsibilities to create and maintain peace in the world. *The Flame*-- Dr. Gill's latest book, is a perfect example of that. Filled with provoking questions, this long poem challenges to see humanity through the eyes of the Divine love. *The Flame* unfolds a tragic story that reveals the diabolic work and how, by igniting the flame of peace, humans can defeat the monster of terrorism. . The darkness can be defeated with the light of revelation and grace. Silence is not the answer. Voices together with Dr. Stephen Gill , should condemn the demon of terrorism to establish the state of lasting peace.

[\(Nikola Dimitrov, author of three book, is ordained minister of Living Faith Ministry International in Bulgaria\) \[nikolahelen@gmail.com\]\(mailto:nikolahelen@gmail.com\)](#)

**\*Struck in a unique way while reading *The Flame* ..**

While browsing through Dr Stephen Gill's 152-page poetry book, *The Flame*, I am stuck in a unique way. Dr Gill lashes at the 'maniac messiahs' who love going on rampage, destroying peace and harmony on their way to gain their own selfish ends. These religious fanatics are out to bedevil human relation without

delving deep into what religion means. They commit atrocities in the name of religion.

As I am reading the poetry book, I get the impression that the poet personifies the flame that dwells in every peace-loving man and woman and invokes it to manifest itself as a harmonizer, a harbinger of peace, as in the following opening lines of this long poem:

*You are the imperishable harmony  
that reaps unparalleled prosperity. (P. 32)*

This book deserves to be read by poetry-loving people, because it gives a message about global peace in an artistic way. (*Dr. Bhaskar Roy Barman, author of Gateway to Heaven ( a novel) and other books, is president of World Literature Society. )*

#### **\*A Note on Stephen Gill's *The Flame***

While editing my recent book on Stephen Gill, I found that a note of feverish anxiety runs through his creative works. This ambassador of peace is perturbed because of the destruction of calm, peace and tranquility in the world by the maniac messiahs. The same distaste for 'the avatars of savagery' is to be found in his latest poetic work, *The Flame*, which is divided into eight parts and sixty two cantos. The following expression from the thirteenth canto is sure to touch the innermost chords of the reader's heart:

*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.*

The just-quoted lines exhibit the presence of the senseless and chaotic violence, pervading the human society. Gill's heart is ever crying, for this 'blood-dimmed tide' of carnivorous violence is devouring the humans.

I hope the book may enlighten the flame of compassion and sacrifice in the human society, filled with 'remorseless forces of brutalities.' Another important point about this book is its autobiographical preface, which outlines the growth of Gill's career as a writer. Gill's experiences may serve as instructive prescriptions for the budding and upcoming writers. One such experience, which he shares with the readers, is that he always keeps 'a notebook to put down any striking word or

phrase that comes across during a talk, reading or from anywhere.'

Besides, the preface of the book is marked by extraordinary candour and frankness of Gill. How many intellectuals and writers can confess as truthfully as Gill has done in the following lines:

My one problem was my early education that did not help me gain self-confidence and skill. It was my early education that remained a serious obstacle in my life. I had attended the cheapest schools that were run by governments. In these schools, the media of instruction was the local language. English was touched nominally at the elementary level without any emphasis on conversation...

My question is—Do the other writers and poets have the same courage and moral strength to speak in such a candid manner about their earlier career and life? Gill has done it in *The Flame*. It shows the man behind the words—a good natured man with a transparent heart.

*The Flame*, from the pen of such a man, must be read by the citizens of the world to eliminate 'the jungle/ of deafening disorder' from the hearts. I strongly recommend this book to the people of all nationalities, communities, classes and castes. If language is the barrier, it must be translated into several native languages. The intellectuals and writers must come forward to translate this monumental work into several other world languages. **(Dr .Nilanshu Agarwal is Senior Lecturer in English at Feroze Gandhi College, Rae Bareli, (U.P.), India. His book *Discovering Stephen Gil* is to be released shortly.)**

**\*Deep and highly moving poem**

I have had the honour of going through highly thought-provoking, touching, deep and highly moving long poem *the Flame* by Dr Stephen Gill. It reminds me of Walcott's poem "Sea Grapes" and Neruda's poem "Tonight I can Write". Similar sentiments flow from *the Flame*. Dr Gill, a well known champion of world peace and harmony, yet again comes out with distinct vision and message. A unique poem, subtle and absorbing. This poem by itself can be a subject of doctoral dissertations at post graduate level.

**(KKSrivastava, Jaipur, INDIA, author of *Ineluctable Stillness, and An Armless Hand Writes* )**

**\*Stephen Gill's *Flame* is an epic poem in the composition of which the author has invested all his skills as a poet, a thinker and a philosopher...**

Stephen Gill holds up high with burning passion the Flame of Peace. This commitment is rooted in his life-long encounters with humankind's incorrigible tendency to succumb time and again to the evil charms of religious fanaticism, ultra-nationalism and racism. *The Flame* is an epic poem in the composition of

which the author has invested all his skills as a poet, a thinker and a philosopher of the weak and oppressed. The end result is a creative work of such overwhelming beauty – notwithstanding the fact that most of the space is devoted to depicting the ugly faces of self-righteousness, cultural arrogance, violence and terrorism. The beauty is naturally not in the shocking and depressing data that he presents, but the argument for peace that he advances as each facet of human wickedness is reviewed in light of his own message and philosophy of peace and love. I have been profoundly touched and moved by the author's goodness of heart and idealism.

*(Author and peace activist, Professor Ishtiaq Ahmed teaches at Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore , and Stockholm University.)*

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