

Stephen Gill's Novel the Coexistence Substantiates Religious Humanism

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Abstract

The world is suffering in several miseries. Today, man is more insecure than the man of 200 years before. Modern weapons are more deadly than the weapons of the past. There have been working many philosophies since that time but the plight of modern man is not reduced. Another philosophy has tried to solve this issue. This philosophy is applied by the authors in this research paper on the literary works of Stephen Gill; it is Religious Humanism. This is a modern philosophy which has given the solutions of the contemporary problems of fanaticism, terrorism, dogmatism and intolerance among the people. People are people everywhere. We have worked on this philosophy and applied it on the literature written by Stephen Gill. Religious humanism gives human beings a critical thinking about the phenomena around him. It says that there is always a good natural reason behind every happening. It rejects any supernatural power involved in the affairs of man. Religious humanism challenges every form of the religious and political extremism. It focuses on the democracy. Stephen Gill elaborates this philosophy in his poems, novels, interviews and essays. Gill deals with the man as the citizen of the world. He wants a democratically elected world government. This research proves that religious humanism is the solution of the contemporary problems and Gill is a religious humanist who believes that only the religion of love, compassion and tolerance can make this world beautiful. Gill says that if religion becomes intolerant, it becomes dangerous. The data is collected from different sources like internet, libraries, magazines and newspapers. This research paper enlightens the reader about the core issues of the world and the topics related to religious humanism.

Religious humanism, the centre of Stephen Gill's novel *The Coexistence*, is largely a modern concept that presents solutions to contemporary problems, concerning fanaticism, terrorism, dogmatism, minorities, and intolerance. Focusing on democracy, religious humanism challenges every form of creed and political

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extremism because extremism is the font of chaos. Fanatic robots misuse religion to pollute the minds and hearts of citizens for their own greed. Mark Twain highlights these pollutions or uncivilized qualities in *The Damned Human-Race*. He wants to humanize people after showing them the true historical evidences. He compares a man to an anaconda. A man kills seventy two buffaloes just for his joy and eats only a part of a buffalo with his companions and leaves other to rot. On the other hand, the anaconda kills only one little calf out of seven to satisfy his hunger. Mark Twain demonstrates that man is more cruel and greedy than an animal is.

In a broader sense, humanism deals with the problems humans face in the world. In one form or the other, this view about humanism has far and deep roots in history, but its importance in the world of today is felt more than it was felt before. It is because religious and political Lucifers are manipulating facts just for their petty gains, causing untold deaths. Their lust is yet not satisfied. They are cruel to humans as well as to other creatures. They cannot be humanized. These Lucifers or robots give several baseless arguments to defend their brutalities. They misinterpret religions to spread their false beliefs. They do not tolerate others; do not love others and do not spread messages of peace around.

Most humanists think that religion is a personal matter and human needs to learn to coexist with the people who have different views about religion and society. The cardinal purpose of religious humanism is to care humans and work for the well-being of all. Humanists may or may not believe in a paradise after death. Rather, they believe in making the world a paradise. A religious humanist brings religion from heaven to earth, considering it his social responsibility to make the world a better place to live. His approach is rational and scientific without sacrificing spiritual dimensions.

Stephen Gill elaborates this way of thinking in his poems, novels, interviews and essays. His novel *The Coexistence* is a manifesto of religious humanism. He is obviously religious when he talks of love and peace in his poems after poems and novel. In the last pages of *The Coexistence* he advocates that "Love is deathless." He believes "Love is the language of God and God is peace." (*Coexistence*, 279). It is obvious that Stephen Gill's religion is love and peace. He further says:

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 exudes the fragrance of fulfilment 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*

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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. (The Coexistence, 279)

Gill deals with every individual as a branch of the same tree. He suggests forming a democratically elected world government. Gill believes that only the religion of love, compassion and tolerance can make this world beautiful. Gill is of the opinion that man is responsible for brutalities and wars. After the two world wars, now the world is going to suffer in the third world war. The dove of peace has been assassinated or stolen by maniac messiahs. Stephen Gill wants to explore peace in the form of a dove-- a symbolic bird.

Many poets of this era of armed conflicts are writing about this sickness. The most authoritative creative writer of the era of sickness is Stephen Gill. Gill does not accuse supernatural powers for the current chaos. Rather, he blames humans for killing humans and disgracing life. Instead of peace, the world is coming closer to the threshold of complete annihilation. Stephen Gill writes:

War is the most terrifying kind of human interaction. Wars have never been economically favorable. Both victors and losers suffer. Wars are mostly for economic gains but they cause chaos. When there is economic chaos, leaders, called misleaders, take the nation to war, fabricating the giant of fear. They tell citizens that that they are fighting for the flag or for God. (The Coexistence. 153-168)

A writer's works can be appreciated properly if the reader has knowledge of the writer's biography and has studied the area and era in which the writer had lived. So, Stephen Gill's biography is important in this respect. Most of *The Coexistence* relates to his early experiences. Professor Agarwal is right when he states in his book:

The pain that Stephen Gill has experienced during the days of the partition is responsible for his creative urge and this creative urge has shaped his poetic voice. His emotional experiences are somewhat akin to the emotional experiences of sage Vakmiki. Such experiences changed this distinguished sage of India into a celebrated bard of epic poetry. (Agarwal, backcover)

Gill has produced more than twenty books including novels and poetry. His well known novel is *The Coexistence*. In his writing, he focuses on the prevailing turbulence, chaos, war and terrorism. He writes about peace, not because he has it

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but because of its absence.

William R. Murry, a top advocate of religious humanism, points out its five tenets in his prominent book *Reason and Reverence*. These tenets surfaced in Europe during Renaissance, also called the period of enlightenment. This way of thinking has become a part of the freethinkers of the United States of today. The five tenets that William R. Murry points out abound in the writings of Stephen Gill, particularly in his novel *The Coexistence*.

The first tenet of a religious humanist is that he embraces both reason and reverence. Here, reason means rationality of a person and reverence means his respect for the given natural phenomena. Both these elements are found in the philosophy of Stephen Gill, particularly in his novel *The Coexistence* that provides a blueprint to live and let live. He gives solid examples from every source to confirm its legitimacy. He says that a man should be rational in every action of his life but the respect for others should also be kept in mind. The freedom of a man ends where the nose of the other fellow starts. Religious humanism emphasizes personal freedom and the application of critical thinking. It emphasizes natural intelligence in making choices and guiding one's action. It is devoted to learning and increasing knowledge by the use of reason. Gill supports this view when he says

The sun, the moon and other planets do not clash. They coexist within their own spheres. If they come out of their spheres, there will be clashes. Even the human body is composed of different organs, like the eyes, ears, hands and other parts. They all are needed for the healthy function of the body. If one organ is sickly, the whole body suffers. It is like the world that consists of nations, races and others who all rely on one another for their survival. Even within a nation there are males and females, young and old, strong and weak. They are composed of the same elements and have the right to exist. (The Coexistence 78- 79)

The second tenet of a religious humanist is to defend the rights of every individual. Stephen Gill goes a step further in the favour of establishing a parliament of nations to tackle the problems of the globe which has been reduced to a village. Gill supports United Nations Organization but he is not fully satisfied with its performance. He wants some amendments in its charter. He wishes that the power of veto be abolished or made less effective to make UN more democratic. He writes in his novel:

In a democratic setup every human has the right to contribute to the welfare of society. This is what democracy is. Discrimination in any shape violates the basic principles of democracy. Awareness of one's rights to survive with dignity is the way to unity and prosperity... (The Coexistence 118)

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The third tenet of a religious humanist is that life here and now is real and important. The cosmos runs in a planned and harmonious way. Human should work to make this planet more beautiful. Every theistic religion makes a utopia of a heavenly world.

The fourth tenet of religious humanist is the rejection of all forms of religious and non-theistic dogmas. Religious humanism rejects all type of absolute authority, totalitarianism, autocracy whether these are secular or theistic.

Professor Dr. Zotta Alexandru from Romania discusses this concept of “absolute authority” in his paper “*The Coexistence is the Conscious of Today*” when he says:

Mircea Eliade, a Romanian, also condemns ethnocentrism because it leads to disorder or chaos. In primitive societies order was created by divine mandates. They saw order coming from God or gods. But modern societies are moving towards multiculturalism which is causing disorder at national, international and other levels. Divine mandates are not acceptable today because of the wide spread of education and means of communication. The best way now to create order is through the mandate of discussions. (Coexistentia, 108).

Religious humanism rejects the ideal belief in supernaturalism. As per religious humanism it is not important to have a belief in a deity, it is more important that man should define his values and preferences to promote peace and harmony in this world. In his interview with Dr. Anuradha Sharma, Stephen Gill says “any human who does not believe in an organized religion, but believes in peace and love is religious to me.” (Sharma, interviews).

The fifth tenet of a religious humanist is the belief in the competence of man in governing this world. According to religious humanism, no supernatural gods are ruling over this universe. Nature is governing the universe and man is a part of it. It strives for the uplift of humanity without an intervention.

Stephen Gill and Murry faced the same dilemma when they witnessed the deaths of innocents. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection has shaken the beliefs of several intellectuals in a supernatural deity. While evaluating Gill's poetry, Professor R. K. Singh and Mitali De Sarkar write:

Stephen Gill has taken writing as his mission or goal because his humanitarianism is seriously challenged when he sees waste, loss and mutual destruction again and again. He stridently denounces forces that promote extreme and vicious nationalism or fundamentalism... Gill delineates a basic struggle of the soul, the mind, and the body to comprehend life in its totality; what he communicates

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through the poetic medium is a confrontation of his whole being with reality and his response to it in a pungent and straight-forward manner. (qtd. in Arora 205)

While assessing *The Coexistence*, Professor Dr. Daniel Bratton from Canada highlights the importance of Gill in the contemporary world because of Gill's concerns for peace:

Stephen Gill helps us understand that without these bridges of communications, with love and compassion, our lives are essentially meaningless-- and increasingly imperilled.... In these dark times of state-sponsored terrorism and global conflict-with the republic of reptiles waiting to be born- Stephen Gill's work demands our utmost attention and ask us to cultivate a greater mindfulness of the world around us. The Coexistence is a wake-up call, but are enough people listening? (Coexistentia, 38-39)

An important element of the religious humanism is to give personal freedom of critical thinking to every individual; a conscious man is supposed to be a critical thinker about his or her own surroundings. Gill introduces the term Agents of Lucifer for war-mongers and terrorist in *The Coexistence*. According to Gill, these polluters of peace are not from a specific group of a society but they are “educated and illiterate, rich and poor, men and women, politicians, engineers, medicos and religious leaders of all ages.” (*The Flame* 25) Gill openly expresses that they are “from every community and every background” (*Flame* 20-21). They resembles Marlowe's Dr. Faustus' who sold his soul to devil in exchange for twenty- four year's of physical pleasures with the eternal suffering in hell.

Curtis Reese referred to humanism as a “religion of democracy”. In his sermon in 1916 he made a distinction between democratic religion and autocratic religion:

The theocratic view of the world order is autocratic. The humanistic view is democratic. In the theocratic order God is autocrat; and under him are various minor autocrats, called divinities, angels, spirits, fairies, demons, and the like. In the democratic order the people are the rulers of their own affairs, and above them are no autocrats, supreme or minor, whose favor they must carry.” (qtd. in Murry 37)

Religious humanism emphasizes natural intelligence in making choices and guiding one’s action but religious dogmas go towards the opposite directions. They perform the role of a brainwasher. They have their legitimate institutions where they train innocent children for the use of their own devilish schemes.

Every element of the cosmos is essential for the survival of the system. The diversity in the religion, race, nationality, language and colour of each human being

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is a beauty of this wonderful world. There are people in our surroundings we do not like to talk. We need to learn how to tolerate them. It is the need of the time to spread the message of *The Coexistence*. Stephen Gill is a writer who has been attempting to harmonize people from different backgrounds. Mark these lines:

Multiculturalism refers to acceptance of the language and life of other groups, prohibiting ethnics and religious discriminations and the use of weapons to address conflicts. It refers to the situations beyond just tolerance to embrace equality in diversity and interdependence.... The groups which oppose the stalwartness of these bodyguards are myopic because progress and peace are the children of these bodyguards. Multiculturalism is an unimaginable powerhouse if it is managed effectively that includes recognition and respect of similarities and dissimilarities for the cause of blessings. (Gill’s The Coexistence 39)

Gill says that modern technology has made the world a global village and no one can survive in isolation; every country has to form economic, military, technical and political relationships with the other world on bilateral basis. To help other nations in building peace is to remain peaceful at their own ends. Diversity is an essential element in this global village and instead of escaping from this diversity, one need to accept it and work with this diversity. He says:

Loneliness is akin to death. Every individual needs company and all humans are interdependent. As a child, a human is dependent on parents. This dependence goes on for whole life. That is why coexistence is the core of life. Humans need nature and nature needs humans. No one can exist by his or herself. Even the earth needs the sun and the rains to give life to others. Humans need the caring hands of others, starting with mother. Life means coexistence. Human needs other organs of body, even to breathe. Loneliness produces the sounds of emptiness.(The Coexistence 77-78)

Nature depicts cooperation as the main ingredient for success. That is what all cultural and ethnic groups should do to make life meaningful. No organism is an island. The web of success as a network of interdependent efforts of cooperation is abundant in nature to convince those who notice only survival of the fittest. Take the case of the bee who receives nectar and pollen from flowers. This give and take procedure helps the bee and also the flower. Flowers reproduce better this way. After offering their nectar, the flowers stop producing food for bees and insects because they lose their scent. After this, flowers drop their petals or change their color to indicate to the bees to go to other flowers now. This cooperation is found among ants also, though in another way which is a healthy prototype of cooperation. Ants assist their wounded members back to their nests and are able to carry heavier

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material. Ants are the best example of cooperation in nature. The coaches of football and hockey teams know the worth of cooperation. (The Coexistence, 232-236).

Religious humanism is the need of today. In the present era of religious conflicts, every religion is divided in several sects. No one accepts other’s point of view. Many philosophies have failed in maintaining peace in this world. Human can make this earth beautiful and peaceful by following the advice suggested by Stephen Gill. In his novel *The Coexistence* he gives a blueprint to prosper. .

According to Oxford Dictionary, religious is the person who has faith in a religion. Stephen Gill has his faith in the religion of love and love is humanism.

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