



## *THE POET'S PREFACE*

One area that forms a foundation for peace has been largely ignored by reformers, politicians, humanists and activists. This area is the environment of the family. It is encouraging that the laws in democracies take care of families from the perspective of rights. At the same time it is discouraging that the future of peace is excluded from these perspectives. I am striving to examine this question of peace from a different perspective in my poem *Amputee* where I present the portrait of a sexually abused child. Before examining peace and the role of the family I would like to affirm that peace is the pillar of my poetry. I see peace and poetry unfolding their scope from the pasture of my passion. When I am tired or lonely in my bunker, both provide the source of my inspiration.

It appears to be a miracle to me when I look back to trace the long journey of my development as a poet and my ideology on peace. There was no way for me to develop as a poet and to focus on peace as I was growing up as a child. In other words, there was no way for me to mature as a poet, because situations were frustrating from every possible angle. To talk about peace openly in India was not possible, and it was impossible for me to come out, though I hear that the word impossible should not appear in any dictionary. I view my life as a web of supernatural landmarks in my relationship with my preferred mistress of writing. It is my unquestionable belief that Divinity has chosen me for the work I am doing as a creative artist for peace. I have discussed peace and my writing in my interviews and prefaces.

When I was a boy, perhaps in grade seven or eight, I developed a habit. How it was developed is a mystery. I was ashamed of this habit because I was ridiculed by those who happened to watch me, but the habit was a compulsion. I hear now that several literary figures had weird habits. In my case, I developed the habit of writing with my fingers in the void or air. I used to write as one would on a piece of paper. Some saw me doing this and laughed at my weird gestures. In those years, malaria was very common in India. I was once hospitalized. Lying in bed, I used to write in the void when I was sure no one was watching me. A couple of other patients saw it. They were in their thirties. One of them asked me how my arthritis was curing. I did not reply, but felt

embarrassed. The more I tried to control myself, the more my urge to write grew stronger. In spite of being watchful, some persons saw and interpreted my habit in different ways, including that I am possessed.

After passing my high school, I began moving in the company of poets and short story writers. They were in their thirties. How I was able to find them is another mystery. I began to love listening to them and later asking some questions and even discussing their works. As I began to write, this habit of writing in the void began to fade. My short stories began to appear in newspapers when I was fourteen. I contacted editors through the mail and they never came to know my age. I began to take refuge in my fancies as an established poet and novelist. When I think of this habit now, I come to the conclusion that Divinity had plans for me from my birth.

How I became interested in the issues of social concerns and peace is not difficult to understand because it has to do with the Partition of India in 1947, when the Hindus and Muslims started killing each other. I still feel pain to paint those heinous crimes committed in the name of religion. I have painted some of them in my prefaces and interviews. I cannot describe my feelings of those days as a member of an uprooted minority from Pakistan, living day to day in the hope that some day a portal would open for me to be a Moses. But there was no portal through education, finances or any other way in sight. But I continued imagining myself as a poet and novelist though due to lack of proper nourishment even my

physical health was not that good. Somehow from my early days I began to think that in order to achieve something worthwhile in life, health was important. I took care of myself as much as possible also through exercises. I suffered educationally, because my parents could not afford to send their children to better schools. All that I had was a strong determination to be a poet and write for peace, though both were not clear concepts for me. Due to religious riots, there used to be short curfews in Delhi where we settled after migrating from Pakistan. A couple of times, while on the street, I saw people rushing into shops for shelter, talking about the curfew. We used to stay in for that length of time, and shopkeepers were generous to provide shelter. People imagined the religion of others from the type of clothes they wore. There was fear in the air. Christians who were only tolerated did not know how to protect themselves. During these curfews of two or three hours people on the street had to seek shelter in the shops in whatever vicinity they were. In certain areas Muslim and Hindu shops were only a few blocks apart. It was my main fear that my name that is Biblical would indicate my religion if someone asked my name, posing danger to my life in Hindu as well as in Muslim vicinities.

Fear was always in the air. I developed some other habits due to this situation of fear. I have conquered some, but one is still there and shall remain with me for the remaining years of my life. I have started using this habit for my benefit. Because of the fear lurking all the time in the air, I began to hate

nights and wanted to remain awake. I seldom enjoyed carefree sleeps. I was always tense at night, particularly while falling asleep. I began to fight against falling asleep. I have enjoyed relatively better sleep outside of India, but I have never been able to relax properly. I have learnt some yoga techniques. One of them I still practice. I normally lie flat and breathe slowly or let my breathing follow the palpitation of my heart, trying to slow down the heart's beat at the same time. It helps to tire me and to fall asleep. Because I always fought against sleeping, I began to go to bed late. Even now I go to bed usually after two in the morning. People say it is normal with poets. Whatever it is, there is still an unknown fear that disturbs my sleep.

When *Shrine*, a collection of my poems, appeared in 2008 I received appreciative reviews. One poem that was singled out for appreciation was "Amputee". I shared with friends that I would develop it further, but the more I tried, the more helpless I felt. I found no angle to develop it. I wrestled with the idea of developing it into an epic, along the lines of *The Flame*, but I found no way. Because I could not find a way to develop this poem, I gave up my attempts. I am sure that decision was for ever.

Ideas have their own ways of dawning and developing. They may hit in sleep, or driving, chatting with friends, taking showers or rambling for no reason. This is what happened when the 2011 results were announced by the Swedish Academy on October 7. I was disappointed not entirely by the

result but by the fact that the Academy was selecting winners from Europe and only novelists. It was becoming clearer that this trend would continue for a while. I was so displeased with this trend that I wrote a letter to complain.

In any case, writers and poets are not prisoners to academies. Their purpose is far above the touches of the radiance of their awards. I mused on these aspects while turning in my bed. Somehow I began to muse how I was able to come out of India and mature as a poet for peace. All the circumstances in India and even in Canada were not favorable, yet I was marching ahead, though not to my entire satisfaction, as a poet writing about peace and social concerns. Some appreciated my attempts and a few dubbed my attempts as political poetry. For me peace was not political. Rather it was breathe itself. While in that mood, my mind began to drift towards my poem Amputee. I don't know why and how this idea struck me again. I felt the burden of my soul dissolving as the whole structure of the poem kept emerging before me. I was impatient to go to my computer to unburden myself. I feel happy to share that one after the other cantos kept flowing from my strokes on the key board. Each canto appeared as I wanted it to be, though later I did house cleaning as usual.

I drafted its development, made a separate file and recorded what I wanted to do with the rest of the poem. There were minimum poet's blocks and no unnecessary tedious efforts. Ideas began to flow and my fingers began to respond in a most intimate and

warm manner. I was distracted for around four months when I had to visit some universities in India. That visit tangled some hair of my writing in a different direction, though my literary trip to India of 2011 was largely successful because I made new friends at the universalities of Khairagarah and Nalanda and elsewhere. Soon after that I had to go to Vancouver in British Columbia to receive an award and present my poems at libraries. It took another month from my schedule to complete the poem. These are distractions but also important in a poet's life. I believe that a person cannot always be just a winner. In order to gain something a person has also to lose something. Both go together and the winner has to accept this reality.

I believe in the formation of a parliament of nations to phase out the waste on armaments. I also believe that armed conflict does not solve problems. I have amplified this idea in my novel *The Coexistence*, interviews and elsewhere. However, humanity cannot sit down and wait for the emergence of a parliament of nations. Peace is a multidimensional problem and therefore it needs multidimensional approaches. One approach is the promotion of the ideology of a parliament of nations. Another approach is from the point of view of the system of education at the university level. I have discussed this educational approach in my paper on internationalism in universities. Our universities cater to national needs. They are aware that the world is moving fast towards globalization. Still universities

prepare students for cut throat competitions for a handful of jobs at the national level. This leads to tensions. I have discussed this aspect and others to show how universities should prepare their students for peace.

Peace needs to be discussed from the view point of education and education starts from the day a child enters the world. Parents are the first educators of the child. Right from baby sitters to nursery and school teachers-- all are educated and trained with the exception of parents who are the primary caregivers. Some of these parents are rappers, pornographers, child molesters, murderers, drug addicts, terrorists, and the list can go on and on. There are no requirements to be parents. Some accept the responsibility to raise children because of the force from their parents. In India, many elder brothers and sisters are put in an awkward position because their younger brothers and sisters cannot marry unless they marry first. Due to social norms they accept to enter into matrimonial relationships even if they are not mentally and economically prepared. In many cases parents want grandchildren and urge their sons and daughters to start their family. Nobody thinks of the social and psychological consequences of marriages that are based on ignorance about responsibilities as parents.

There are couples who want to be good primary caregivers, but their ideas of care giving come from neighbors, visitors, relatives, and parents. Some are extremely stern with their children and

some do not care at all. Some of them are from abusive families. There is no training available for the spouses who want information. There are family councilors, but not all can go to them for one reason or another that I have pointed out in my poem *Amputee*. Male adjusted parents normally produce male adjusted children. This cycle keeps going on and on. To control undesirable parenting, compulsory legislation is the answer.

Licensing may be objected to on the ground that it is against human rights to force a person to pass courses for parenting. I believe that to ask someone to be enlightened with education to raise responsible citizens is in the interest of parents as well as in the interest of the country. The present generation may not benefit from this approach because it is a long process. The trees which benefit the modern generation were planted by the generation before. In the same way, this approach is beneficial for our children and children's children. This approach would eliminate the expenses of running several hospitals to treat amputees. The money that would be saved would be invested in laboratories to find means for lengthening life and making it more disease free.

It can be pointed out that there are laws to punish abusive parents. However, abuse can be concealed behind domestic walls under different norms and fears. Often children are fearful of reporting abuse, and also they have neither the courage nor proper knowledge of the proper door to

knock at. They may also not know what to report and how to put incidents and their feelings into words. Moreover, reporting can be late and by that time the harm could have been done. Licensing will reduce the numbers of undesirable parents, causing awareness.

I was a director of a children's aid organization for some years. When the cases of abuse are reported and authenticated through legal procedures that are complicated and expensive, the children of abusive families are put into foster homes, where they may not be more safe. In some cases, foster homes are also houses of horror. Such children may go through a chain of terrifying experiences. One can imagine the mental and physical states of the victims of such environments which produce amputees. Who is to blame in such cases? In spite of government spending on homes for such kids, and agencies to find them, such cases cannot be stopped. My argument is that why not generate a healthy climate through education and enlightenment to minimize producing psychological amputees.

It has been discovered that abusive behavior runs in the family. In other words, the children of abusive parents often become abusive. I am not against the existing preventive system to penalize abusive parents. The question is about the children who are abused and spend their childhood under a tyrannical rule. Who is going to compensate their sufferings and how? Another question is how to restore them to a normal life? I would suggest introducing another system through licensing. I

believe that all are not capable of parenting just as all are not capable of driving or owning a gun without proving their capabilities through tests. These steps for education are to remove ignorance. The word education means light and this light is to tear down the curtain of darkness. Government laws intervene after the commitment of outrages. My approach is also to light the candle of self-awareness among would-be parents to structure a culture of peace that is the responsibility of every citizen at every step.

Parenting is more complicated today than it ever was. A sure way to have a miserable life is to have parents who do not love their children or have distorted beliefs about parenting. To have a better world, it is imperative to pay attention to the environment in which children are raised. Caring for children is vital because they are the makers of heaven on earth. They have been termed as the angels, who will be prime ministers, ambassadors, business magnets, admirals and military generals. The future belongs to them. They are the foundation of posterity, and an investment for economic development in peaceful ways.

Dignity is as important for a child as it is for an adult. It is another shape of self-esteem, called self-worth. A healthy self-esteem provides protection against the challenges of life. Adults with healthy self-esteem can handle negative stresses and conflicts without much fuss. They are optimistic, and can enjoy the gifts of life better. My studies have convinced me that children with healthy self-esteem are ready to try

new things in life. Their talk does not focus on negativities. They develop a higher tolerance for failure. They do not give up, presuming temporary failures as permanent. Self-esteem is the meter to evaluate the capacities of one's own self. It is also the light that shows if we are lovable and unique. All this depends on enlightened parenting, and for enlightened parenting education is needed to get a license to play the role of responsible care givers. The sense of self-esteem or self-worth should be nourished from early childhood, because it is difficult to make changes in adulthood that needs self-control and hard work. Still the result may not be satisfactory.

Low self-esteem is a mighty risk factor that would often lead to abnormal behaviors. Esteem is about how much a person values himself or herself, and how important they think they are. A healthy self-esteem shapes muscles to build the castle of self-faith. It is a path that leads to self-respect that attracts friends, who value the safety and feelings of that person. On the other hand, the kids who feel that they are not important are sad, and usually refrain from making friends. They may resort to violence to enhance their self-esteem that may result in rape, killing and gang activities.

Legalization of parenting has nothing to do with eugenics that advocate the use of devices to improve the human species by discouraging reproduction by persons who have genetic defects and encouraging reproduction by the persons who are highly intelligent and healthy. The eleventh

edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica says that the eugenics is for “the organic betterment of the race through wise application of the laws of heredity.” This way of thinking has a long history, going back to the days of ancient Rome, and even before. This extreme form of restriction, called eugenics, was practiced by the Nazis under Hitler. I have discussed this subject in my novel *The Coexistence*. I am not in favor of the extreme form.

I do not believe that legalization of parenthood is a utopian ideology. All that legalization needs is the backing of philosophers, educators and political leaders to spread the seeds of this enlightened way. Just as citizens pass bachelor and master’s degrees or pass driver’s tests, it should be obligatory to pass this test for parenting. For certain jobs a minimum educational level is needed. For plumbing and electricity related work, workers have to pass examinations. Parenting is also a job—a profession that needs a specialized training. I am not advocating banning matrimonial relationships. I advocate restricting parenting to those who are qualified for this job. Parenting is an exciting as well as a responsible job. Like other jobs, it is not for everyone to handle. While talking about licensing, there are bound to be questions about requirements, approval, setting of tests and other questions related to text books. In my mind the first step is to approve licensing parenting. After legislating it, the other steps, include selection of qualified psychologists, psychiatrists, marriage councilors, health consultants and educators to assist

in preparing tests and texts that can be divided for primary and advanced studies. Nothing is permanent, including the existing medical and non-medical curricula. They are always under revision. So shall be the curriculum related to parenting.

Legislation of parenting is for the sake of peace, health and dignity of children. It took a harsh fight to ban smoking. Like smoking, bad parenting pose dangers to others. Just as a badly driven car is dangerous, so are the badly equipped parents who can drive a society to destruction. Teachers who take care of children at school go through years of studies to qualify for that role, but parents who are the first educators of children and greatly affect their future are not required to prepare themselves to prove their abilities for their roles. There are laws and examinations to pass for the couples who want to raise someone else's children. Day-care providers, foster parents, and even high school teachers prove their competencies to handle children before they receive their licenses. But there is no restriction on biological parents to prove their competencies. They are not required to read even a simple pamphlet to know how to raise their children. To allow non competent persons to raise children has resulted in unnecessary heavy toll on society at every level. Children brought up by ignorant, drug addict and alcoholics pose a great danger to community. To have a peaceful community it is important to start the work from the family.

I sincerely believe that both adoptive and birth parents should be treated equally before the law of the country. There are laws for adoptive parents. The same laws can be extended to biological parents. The state should be certain that the biological parents like the adoptive parents have enough income to raise their kids and their homes meet the safety standards and have enough room for the new arrivals. In the absence of adequate income and proper accommodation, the citizens who pass courses should be encouraged to apply to the state for the supplement of income and housing. This would help further to build a future structure of peace if the state is sure that the applicants do not have serious criminal records that may affect their responsibilities as parents.

The couple who brings babies in the world should assume responsibilities for caring for them. Those who think that procreation is every one's birth right are wrong. As a result of this thinking, human population is growing much faster than the population of animals. In this age when crime is on the increase, along with poverty and population, it is necessary for the states to force citizens to be licensed to be responsible and enlightened parents. As I have said before, any activities that can harm others are regulated, including driving, adoption and baby sitting. Harm may not be caused always knowingly. Due to lack of education, biological parents damage society. To protect innocent lives, the absolute freedom should be regulated. Even the introduction

of moderate courses and examinations will weed out incompetent parenting. Such laws are desirable because millions of children are abused or neglected physically and many more who are victims of psychological abuses become maimed. The children who do not receive their legitimate rights of love and respect carry their scars all their lives. They may turn to crime, and are likely to abuse their own children.

Irresponsible parenting appears in all races, among people of all economic levels, believers of all religions and families. Families are the templates for children. The houses of horror become normal for them, and loving relationships become foreign. Children from such environments often also become abusive and this cycle continues from one generation to another. The symbols of love and trust become their enemies. Children of such abusive surroundings need friends and psychologists to learn self-control and reconstruction of self-esteem.

To produce a better world, a few more steps are needed and one of them is to legislate parenting. It is not interfering with the democratic values of freedom. There is no absolute freedom anywhere, except in the mind of some people. Even freedoms of the press, free speech and expression of religious beliefs have restrictions. The freedom for free speech has a restriction against spreading hatred. The same is true with the freedom of the press. Free speech has restrictions because it does not include hate and slander. Religious expression does not include human sacrifice. In India, Sati, the burning of a widow

alive at the pyre of her husband, is illegal in spite of the fact there are still believers in this practice. In the same way the right of procreation should be restricted to those who demonstrate their competency to take care of their children. Citizens often read in newspapers about the parents who starve their children to death or the mother who throws her infant in a garbage can and about fathers who molest their daughters, particularly step-daughters. Unfortunately, cases of child abuse are on the rise. Many cases are not reported in the media because they happen behind closed doors.

Non-sexual and non-physical abuses are the most difficult to pin point. They can be part of emotional neglect that is also a serious matter to consider, especially when it is difficult to detect and report. It comes in many shapes, forms and sizes. It is not only in the form of sexual abuse, but also in the forms of jokes and of habits, punishments and lies. These abuses include degrading, name-calling, excessive criticism, refraining from communication, failure to provide food and shelter, medical treatment, educational need, threats, rejection, withholding love and support. Victims of these abuses may either become shy to interact with other children or resort to violence. Their self-blame builds in them low esteem that impairs their emotional development, causing depression in later life. It washes away self-confidence. They are most likely to develop an exaggerated sense of fear of being alone, and

therefore remain in the abusive climate, presuming that no one else likes to be with them.

There have been cases when the innocents have been compromised to feed the wrong impulses of parents. Sexual is one of them. There are other factors due to neglect or lack of education. Many parents do not know that certain TV channels should not be allowed to children. One can learn all this from education at college. There is no harm in attending classes and come up with a better knowledge and with a certificate to emerge as confident parents. Many of them will find out during those classes that they are not yet suitable or ready for parenting. They may become aware of their financial or other hardships. To raise a family just to please their parents may result in disasters. During the period of their studies they will have time and opportunity to think if they are suitable and ready to shoulder their responsibilities. Freedom to have children will become more meaningful if the undesirable elements are controlled.

There is a clear relation between the growth of crime and the growth of population. Violence is common in overpopulated areas. Problems including poverty, pollution and crimes are related to the unchecked growth of humans. Licensing is a way to spread awareness and to control the eruption of population. By controlling undesirable parenting, the state will be able to control the mushrooming of sociopath demons that disrupt the calm waters of peace.

Through my long poem *Amputee* I am crusading for the urgency of legislating parenting. I am attempting to unveil here a girl's stings from the icy winds of sexual abuse and emotional brutality. There is hope towards the end, as there is in my previous epic poem *The Flame*. Hope is an energy that solidifies one's faith in brightness to shine one day, and also it is the oxygen when dreams are dying. Not every victim is able to receive this oxygen and see the beauty of hope in the streaking sunset. Hope keeps victims anticipating the best from the eternal flame even after a glorious part of their childhood is destroyed in the fire of the impulses of the caregivers.

*Amputee* is the poem that was revealed to my soul in October 2011 when the result of the Nobel Academy was declared. I smelt the bloom of its graceful elegance, and saw the curves of its lips, locks of its hair, the shape of its waist, and the contours of its body as clearly as it could be in the resort of the god within. I am reincarnating this being here.

The poem is divided into four parts. The first part is in the form of an invocation in the tradition of epics, though it does not follow exactly the established pattern. Part two is about the child who is sexually abused and its consequences. In part three, the victim finds a weapon to stop the arrows that wound her. She urges others who are in the same situation to use the same weapon to protect them. In the final, chapter four, she finds a vocation to express herself. This vocation is her refuge and a meaningful

way to express her. She comes up with an ideology to educate parenting.

I have used similar tools to chisel my poem *Amputee* that I have used in chiseling *The Flame*, and even *Shrine*. I have discussed these tools in the preface of *The Flame* and also in my interviews which are available in a book and also online. There is no need to repeat those tools which I use to chisel my poetry. I still believe in my conviction about the god within and the tools to bring it out. *Amputee* is the result of those tools, and also my concerns about world peace.

Stephen Gill

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