

Literary Oeuvre of *Khalil Gibran*: A Resplendent Repository of Wisdom and Humanity

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Khalil Gibran holds a conspicuously scintillating position in the firmament of the twentieth century Arabic poets. The whole colossal corpus of his poetic work is bilingual comprising both English and Arabic writings with translations in more than forty languages that have garnered a worldwide readership and literary celebration of the same. With an emotional and intellectual appeal of his poetic voice, Gibran and his contemporaries, Mikhael Naimy, Rashid Ayyub, Nasib Arida called the *mahjar poets*, the *Arabic Diaspora* or the *immigrant poets* who had moved to America from Palestine, Lebanon and Syria at the turn of the twentieth century, exerted a prominent influence on the whole Arabic social topography as well the cosmos of Arabic literature just like the Romantic school of poets. With their literary exertions, they were already paving and shaping the future of Arabic poetics and literature.

The early years of his life had a huge impact on the formation of Gibran's poetic make up. Gibran had lived a life of deprivation as the family had to move to America owing to financial constraints brought in by his father. The life of lack and sorrow had a deep imprint on his psyche which can be attributed to the subsequent reflection of poignancy in his overall work. He felt

strongly the blows, tribulations and insults of life at a very nascent stage, which triggered the whole stock of a highly emotional and touching compendium that his work eventually became. Also, in years to unfold the patronage of Holland Day, an artist who, seeing the spark in Gibran, opened the floodgates of cultural and artistic knowledge to him, also forged an important way up the poet's artistic ladder. As such we witness a whole spectrum of world literature, classical mythology, paintings and contemporary writings come alive in his poetic canvas seeking self-actualization through originality of thought and expression.

Like the romantic poet Shelley, Gibran too was a rebellious soul who wrote both mellifluous as well iconoclastic verses and planted himself as a revolutionary poetic voice of his times. Moulding the Arabic language to suit his poetic framework, he jettisoned its timeworn and confining usage to bring in newness of forms and themes to heighten the very scope of his artistic endeavour. He permeated his verse with the rhythms of everyday speech and harnessed the colloquial idiom to enhance his poetic fabric. A champion of individual's freedom and an indefatigable crusader of social reform, he talked about multifarious themes in his poetic canvas. He etched in innovative

and creative manner, poems on nature, love, religion, divinity, brotherhood, philosophy as also on the individual's metaphysical struggle, his relationship with self and others, and his surroundings in totality. Amongst his major works are included books like *The Prophet*, *Spirits Rebellious*, *Broken Wings*, *A Tear and A Smile*, *The Madman*, *His parables and Poems*, *The Voice of the Master*, *Jesus the Son of Man*, *Mirrors of the Soul* and so on so forth.

Broken Wings is a poetic novel by Gibran written in 1912 in Arabic. It is a tale of tragic love on the surface though it intrinsically touches upon the theme of the social pitfalls in the Muslim societies of the east Mediterranean domain in those times entailing the maladies of religious corruption and the oppression of women. *The Madman*, *His Poems and Parables*, Gibran's response to the agony of war, marks an attempt to convey his Sufi wisdom through the medium of a so-called mad poet who is actually a mouthpiece and personification of a coruscating stock of sagacity and depth. This work was followed by *The Procession* and *The Forerunner: His parables and Poems* – works that addressed the need to dismiss the materialistic civilization and create a simple natural life and carve a shift towards the greater spiritual self. *The Prophet*, an anthology of twenty six prose poems written in form of stories, was originally published in 1923 and garnered maximum public liking. Using the character of Al Mustafa, the anthology deals with multifarious themes like joy, sorrow, love, hatred, marriage etc in a beautiful fashion, rendering the deep philosophy of Gibran in its most efficacious way to his readers. *Spirits Rebellious* becomes his invincible enterprise

awakening the people of Lebanon to their very own freedom and existence. It undertakes to castigate the political and religious hypocrisies that belittle an individual and rob him of his dignity. The book was burnt for its revolutionary and volatile energy and content that spoke volumes for egalitarianism and brotherhood. While *The Voice of the Master* is a celebration of love and faith, *Jesus The Son Of God* is a poetic hypothesis on Jesus and his life, as it would have been, seen from myriad perspectives.

In his English works, Gibran aimed a fusion of Arabic mythology and poetry with the tradition of romantic poetry. Although the promotion of a meeting or blending of cultures and traditions was much passionately expressed in his English works than the Arabic ones, he unequivocally and emphatically championed the concerns of human rights, women's rights, environment, religious unity and interfaith dialogue. Emphasizing unity as the exclusive prerequisite for the very creation of a culture of peace, this bard of sublime verse set out to write verses that validated at every level the exigent need to form a world devoid of parochial patterns, discord and hostility. His verse stands tall as an embodiment of his penchant for change or reform. While he tried to uplift the West by inditing verse calling for riddance from materialism and return to spiritual values, he exhorted the East to heed the alarm of a changing world and to understand and incorporate changes in the socio-cultural and also political landscape of theirs.

Gibran comprehended too well the onus on the shoulders of a poet whom he considered as an important link connecting the world that is and the world hereafter. To him, the

poet was like a dove, a seraph of God who was to edify the ailing humanity and make it turn inwards for meaning and fruition while treading this temporal trajectory. Like the romantics, he viewed the poet not merely as a singer of the innermost recesses of the heart and soul, but more significantly like a prophet, a sublime visionary entrusted by the divine with the responsibility to guide and illuminate the mankind with his transcendental wisdom and goodness. He perceived mankind as inhabiting a state of slumber and sought, with his poetic voice to awaken it from that state of inertia. Poetry for him was the slice of light, the fragment of inspiration that would shake humanity from its passivity and lead it on the pathways to self-knowledge and self-discovery. A piece of poem therefore was not like a source of light but a shaft of radiation itself – consummate and complete in itself.

Quite adroitly, Gibran like a true metaphysical poet and artist manages a marriage of his poetic imagination and usage of language to make for a perfect mould for the transmission of his prophetic messages. Honouring the delicate and grave role of the poet-prophet, who is the penultimate liaison between the creative power and the world, he practiced a use of language that could touch the masses. His precision is remarkable because for him poetry was a placement of an inevitable word in an inevitable place. Mikhael Naimy admiringly speaks of Gibran's poetic finesse and calls him the leading poetic light of melancholy and loneliness as also of deep yearning and enlightenment.

Gibran's concerns for Nature and her protection or conservation are palpable in his verses. He effusively sings of Mother Nature's bounties and her innate strength

and compassion. Remarkable eco critical notes can be heard in his eulogies for Nature as he looks upon her as inspiration and power and talks of her interactive dynamics with the human world.

"...How beautiful you are, earth, and how sublime!...

You are weak and powerful and humble and haughty.

You are pliant and rigid, and clear and secret.

I have ridden your seas and explored your rivers and

Followed your brooks.

I heard Eternity speak through your ebb and flow...

How generous you are, earth and how strong is your

Yearning for your children lost between that which

they have attained and that which they could not obtain.

We calmor and you smile: we flit

But you stay!.." (Gibran 623-624)

His love for Nature is unmistakable and he finds her absolutely in sync with the human world. The natural fabric had a great influence on his psyche since childhood and in his mature verses we witness the fine fusion of Nature and the spiritual philosophy as in *The Prophet*. He enlightens the petty and egoistic human being as he juxtaposes Nature and God and explains the ways of God to mankind. He limns the whole panorama wherein man is nothing but a mere breath or a leaf in the grand delusional cosmic design. He writes,

"...Among the hills when you sit in the cool shade of white poplars,

Sharing the peace and serenity of distant fields and meadows – then let your heart say in silence. 'God rests in reason'.

And when the storm comes, and the mighty winds shake the forest and thunders and lightning proclaim the majesty of the sky, then let your heart say in awe, ' God moves in passion' And since you are a breath in God's sphere and a leaf in God's forest, you should rest in reason and move in passion..." (70-71)

He is full of encouragement and inspiration for the struggling human soul who is constantly prodding on the way to attain his or her temporal goals. Like a Tennyson exhorting his Ulysses, Gibran makes for a lucid conversation with human beings inspiring to combat all challenges and forge an original staircase to success and happiness.

"...March on. Do not tarry. To go forward is to move towards perfection. March on, and fear not the thorns or the sharp stones on Life's path..." (506)

Gibran's verses are replete with felicity of expression and richness of intellectual thought. He ponders over the existential odyssey of human beings and discusses how one stage of life prepares, -- with its full quintessence -- into another. What one seeks is what one gets -- this dictum is aptly juxtaposed by Gibran to explicate the gaining of knowledge on the course of life.

"..Life is a resolution that

Accompanies youth, and a diligence

That follows maturity, and a

Wisdom that pursues senility; ...

Knowledge is a light, enriching

The warmth of life, and all may

Partake who seek it out..." (189)

His musings on death are as transcendental and allaying as are his ruminations about the sweetness of love and passion. He seems at perfect peace with death and looks upon her like a beloved and not as some somber,

formidable envoy of pessimism and ultimate annihilation of the human being. He even revels in a delightful imaginary rendezvous with death and writes about the state of a sheer blissful intoxication and trance that would envelope his being on becoming one with death. He even goes to the extent of delineating how the air above his grave shall be unified with the all-enveloping atmosphere and sunlight and proffer humankind its very own fragrance of immortality,

"...Let me sleep, for my soul is intoxicated with

Love, and

Let me rest, for my spirit has had its bounty of days

And nights;

..Grow above me and thrive on my body's element

they will

Breathe the fragrance of my heart into space;

And reveal even to the sun the secret of my peace;

And sail with the breeze and comfort the wayfarer..." (72,77)

A thorough reading of Gibran's soulful repertoire infuses the readers with an overwhelming sense of psycho-emotional enthrallment and spiritual awakening. We feel a stream of divine consciousness at work through his verses and hear him prophetically meander through the labyrinth of worldly motifs and bring home the exigent supplanting of the ideals of peace, fraternity and equality. Gibran comes across as a crusader of reform giving a clarion call to redeem this world tarnished by avarice, brutality, injustice and inequality. Like a dreamer and visionary, he pens the most potent poetic thesis

addressing the need for conducive social environment where people may live in mutual harmony and acceptance. Like a healer, Gibran sets out on a poetic mission to ameliorate the decadent humanity by sprinkling his lofty and magnificent philosophy of humanism and oneness.

Works Cited :-

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