CHAPTER: 4

Life and Works of Great Mahjar Writer Jibran Khalil

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Shakespeare, who was not of an age but for all time, is the best selling poet of all time. Second is the Lao-Tzu the master of the Taoist philosophy infinitely enigmatic in its meaning and therefore attractive at all times. Third is the Lebanese poet philosopher and writer Khalil Gibran who owes his place in the trinity for his greatest poetic-prose work the prophet.

Khalil Gibran who inspired a whole generation of writers in Mahjar literature was born in Bisharri, a Maronite Christian village in the mountains of northern Lebanon, in 1883. His mother was from a family of priests; his father was a minor agent in the local warlord. His childhood was spent in desperate poverty in this place of great beauty. A family friend taught young Khalil how to read when he was twelve unable to improve their lot at home the family migrated to the united State, in 1885 "to bury poverty forever".

CHRONOLOGY:

1883: Gibran Khalil Gibran was born on 6th January, near the Holy cedar Grove on the edge of wadi Qadisha (The holy or sacred valley) in the town of Bisharri, Lebanon.

His mother Kamileh, the daughter of a clergyman named Stephan Rahime, was a widow when she married Khalil Gibran his father. Kamileh's first husband was Hanna (Abd-es-Salaam Rahmeh, by whom she had one son, Burton who was six years old when Gibran was born. Gibran's full name in Arabic is جبران خليل جبران, the middle being his father's name. It is convention among Arabs to use the father's name after one's first name. Gibran always signed his full name in his Arabic works but dropped the first name in his English writings. He did this and changed the correct spelling of 'Khalil' to 'Kahlil' at the instigation of his teacher of English at the Boston school he attended between 1895 and 1997.

1883: Gibran Khalil Gibran was born on 6th January.

1885: Mariana Gibran's first sister was born.

1887: Sultanah, Gibran's second sister was born.
1895 Khalil his half-brother Boutros, his mother and his two sisters immigrated to the United States, settling in Boston's Chinatown while his father remained in Lebanon.

1897: Gibran returned to Lebanon, where he began a course of intensive study at al Hikma School. He studied a variety of subjects beyond those prescribed in the curriculum and devoted himself to the study of classical and contemporary Arabic literature.

In 1899: during the summer vacation at Bisharri, Gibran desperately in love with a beautiful young woman whose Identity remains a mystery, Gibran found his first love affair agonizing and exasperating. In the autumn he returned to Boston, by way of Paris, and several years later described the unhappy affair in Al- Ajniha al-Mutakassirah (The Broken wings).

1902: Gibran returned to Lebanon, this time as a guide and interpreter to an American family but was forced to hurry back to Boston on hearing of the death of his sister Sultanah and the serious illness of his mother.

1903: In March his half brother Boutros died, his mother died in June, leaving Gibran and his sister Mariana in Boston.

1904: Gibran has begun to attract attention as an artist. Fred Holland Day, a well Known Photographer, became his first patron, and in January, he held an exhibition at his studio of Gibran's paintings and drawings. In February a second exhibition was held at the Cambridge school, a private educational institution owned and operated by May Haskell, who became Gibran's close friend.

At the Cambridge school, he also met a beautiful and impulsive young woman of French origin, Emile Mile Michel, known as Micheline with whom it is said he fell in love.

1905: Gibran published al-Musiqah (music) his first book in Arabic

1906: Gibran published a savage attack against the established authority of the church and state in 'Ara'is al Muruj (Nymphs of the valley) which earned him the reputation of being a rebel and a revolutionary which was only
partially mitigated by the publications of his later mystical and spiritual works.

1908: Besides arranging for publication of Al-'Arwah al-Mutamarridah (spirits Rebellious), Gibran also worked on Falasfat-al-Din-wa-Tadayyun (The philosophy of Religion and Religiosity) which was never published through the generosity of Mary Haskell, who was determined to help him fulfill ambition to become a great artist and thinker, he went to Paris visiting London on way to study art at the Academic Julien and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. During his stay in Paris, he read the works of contemporary English and French writers and discovered a kindred spirit in the seventeenth century English poet and painter, William Blake, whose influence on Gibran's thought and art was immense and lasting.

1909: Gibran continued his studies in Paris, where he met an old class-mate from al-Hikmah, yussuf Huwayyik, also an art student. The two became close friends but neither of them could subscribe to the principles of the modern movement in art and instead renewed their commitment to the values and principles of classical tradition. Gibran rejected all that his teacher, Maitre Lawrence, represented and eventually left him to work on his own. A brief meeting at the academic with French sculptor August Rodin left an indelible impression on Gibran mind. Gibran's father died in Lebanon.

1910: Gibran, Ameen Rihani and Yusuf Huwayyik met in Paris and laid plans for the cultural renaissance of Arab world. Among these was one, to which Rihani and Gibran gave form and shape during a visit to London. The pan called for the funding of an opera house in Beirut, the outstanding feature of which was to be two domes symbolizing the reconciliation between Christianity and Islam. After this he return to Boston in October, Gibran proposed marriage to Mary Haskell who was ten years his senior, but she gently advised him against such a union and decided not to marry him.

1911: At a time of intense political activity, accasioned by the freeing of Arab territories from ottoman rule, Gibran funded al-Halaqa-al Dhahabiyyah (The golden circle), one of many semi-political Arab society
which sprang up in Syria, Lebanon Constantinople, Paris and New York. But the golden circle was not popular among Arab immigrants and was dissolved after the first meeting.

Gibran began to earn his living through portrait painting.

1912: Gibran moved from Boston to New York, where he hired a studio at 51 west Tenth Street, Between Fifth and Sixth Avenue. 'The Hermitage' as Gibran called his studio, was to be his residence. He published Al-Ajniah-al-Mutakassirah, his autobiographical narrative, on which he had been working since 1903.

A literary and love relationship began between Gibran and May-Zaidah, a Lebanese writer living in Egypt. Although they knew each other only through their correspondence, which lasted for more than twenty years the achieved a rare intimacy and harmony of understanding, broken only by Gibran's death.

Gibran met Abdul Baha, the son of the founder of Bahai faith, who inspired unique portrayal of Jesus in Jesus, the son of Man, Gibran was so moved by Abu'l Baha that he said, For the first time I saw from noble enough to be a receptacle for the Holy spirit'.

1914: Gibran collected a number of prose-poems which had appeared in different magazines since 1904 and published them London the title Dam'ah wa Ibtisamah (A tear and a smile) In December an exhibition of his paintings was held at the Montross Galleries, New York.

1917: Two exhibitions of Gibran's works were held at the knoedler Galleries New York and the Doll and Richards Galleries, Boston.

1918: Gibran published "The madman" his first book written in English.

1919: Gibran published Twenty Drawings, a collection of his drawings, with an introduction by Alice Raphael and Al-Mawakib (The procession), a philosophical poem illustrated by Gibran himself which contains some of his best drawings.
1920: After publishing al-'Awasif (The Tempests) a collection of short narrative and prose poems, which had appeared in various Arabic Journals between 1912 and 1918 and his second English book, the forerunner Gibran became founder president of a literary society called al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyah (Arrabitah). The society, which included among its members distinguished Arab immigrants such as Iliya Abu Madi, Naseeb Arida, Rasheed Ayoub, wadi 'Bahut, william Catzaflies Abul Maseeh Haddad, Nadra Haddad and M, Khail Naimy, exerted a powerful influence on the work of immigrant Arab poets (shuar al mahjar) and successive generation Arab writers.

1921: Gibran published a thematic 'play' Iram Dhat al-lmad (Iram City of Lofty pillars), written in Arabic in the form of discourse of mysticism. Gibran's health began to deteriorate.

1922: In January, another exhibition of his work was held in Boston this time at the women's city club.

1923: Al-Bahayi 'waal-Tarayif (Beautiful and Rare sayings), a selection of his Arabic works was published in Cairo. These included his sketches drawn from imagination when he was seventeen) of some of the greatest philosophers and poets, such as ibn sina (Avicenna), al-Ghazzali al-Khnsa ibn al Farid, Abu Nuwas, Ibn-al Muqaffa and others. Gibran published the prophet, his most successful work.

1928: Gibran published Jesus the son of man, his longest work.

1929: Gibran Published sand and Foam a book of aphonsms some of which were written in Arabic and then translate into English.

1931: Two weeks before his death he published the Earth Gods. Gibran died on Friday, 10th April, at st vincents's Hospital, New York, after long and painful illness described in the post-mortem as cirrhosis of the liver with incipient tuberculosis in one of the lungs. His body lay in the funeral parlour for two days; Thousands of admires came to pay their last respects. His funeral service was conducted in Boston at the church of our Lady of the
cedars, after which his body was returned to Lebanon where he arrived at the port of Beirut on 21 August. After a magnificent reception, unique in the history of Lebanon, Gibran's body was carried to Bisharri to its final resting place in the old chapel of the Monastery of Mar Sarkis.

Not far from the Mar Sarkis, a Gibran museum has been established by the Gibran National committee of Bisharri. At this death, Gibran left two unpublished works which were published posthumously: the completed which appeared in 1932 And unfinished Garden of the Prophet which was published in 1933 by Barbara Young an American who claimed to have been Gibran's companion during the last seven years of his life.

Gibran's first works were written Arabic and are considered central to the development of Modern Arabic literature. Gibran also wrote for Journals published by the Lebanese and Arab communities in the U.S. From and 1918 he wrote mostly in English and managed to revolutionize the language of poetry in the 1920 and 1930s.

As a president of "al Rabitha a Qalamiyya" (The pen Bond", or Arabitah) much of the credit must go to Gibran for the dissemination of that society's pioneering and innovative ideas. Ar-rabitah by liberating the Arabic poetry from stupor and decadence transformed the literary art in every sphere of activities and instigated renaissance in Arabic creativity. Just as unconditional prose poem influenced writers of the thirties and ecclesiastical and political corruption inspired writers and artist of fifties and sixties. He opened doors to a new kind of creativity. He also illustrated a number of his books with his own drawings.

Salma Khadra Jayyusi wrote in 1987 that Gibran's rhythm "fall on ears like onagic intoxication in its frequent use of interrogations repetitions and the vocative by a language which was at once modern elegant and original; and by an imagery that was evocative and imbued with a healthy measure of emotion. His vision of a word made sterile by dead mores and conventions but redeemable through love, good will and constructive action depended his
readers' insights and enlightened their views of life and man"

REFERENCES:

2. Mikhai'l Nu'aima, Jibran Khalil Jibran, Haytuhu Mautuhu Adabuhu Fannuum p.36
4. Ibid, p 91