CHAPTER I

Introduction

_Such is the Prophet, who arrives_  
_Veiled in the cloak of future thought_  
_‘Mid people hid in ancient garb,_  
_Who could not see the gift he brought._  
_He is a stranger to this life_  
_Stranger to those who praise or blame_  
_For he upholds the Torch of Truth,_  
_Although devoured by the flame._ (Gibran, _The Procession_ 52)

1.1. Introduction

Art is an eternal source of inspiration, of creativity and epiphany leading one towards an awareness of the universal consciousness. Authentic morality proceeds from this consciousness which ought to be the only religion of humans. It is a state of awareness where even through words, theologies, creeds, cults and dogmas, one can see deeply and penetratingly. When one moves into this state of consciousness, one becomes a column of light and a great blessing to humanity. Such a person in awareness is like a mustard seed or a rain bearing cloud ready to share the bounty with parched humanity. One such sage poet is Gibran Kahlil Gibran who has become the personification of a romantic vision – a vision that posits the interconnectivity of the human and non-human world. His immigrant status has made him a living link between the East and the West.

Merging Eastern and Western philosophies, rising beyond all man-made laws, overruling all differences, and tracing the unity beneath the various forms of religions, Kahlil Gibran’s canon-worthy accomplishments have made him an integral part of the literary legacy of both the East and the West. He has become the voice of global consciousness and his works continue to remain an inspiration to millions throughout the
world. In the hands of literary savants, true literature becomes a powerful medium through which the journey towards Infinite consciousness can be propelled.

This doctoral thesis entitled “Kahlil Gibran’s Aesthetics as a Spiritual Quest towards a Universal Humanity,” is a modest endeavour to read and critically analyze the works of Gibran Kahlil Gibran – a Lebanese born prophet and poet, with a view to delving deeper into his aesthetics, his eco-sensitivity and his quest for the Absolute. This study traces the development from ego consciousness to aesthetic consciousness, from aesthetic consciousness to eco-consciousness and from eco-consciousness to Absolute consciousness. Gibran’s very presence pervading the pages of whatever he wrote or painted triggers a journey in humans, ultimately leading to a spiritual quest and realization, capable of establishing universal humanity.

Any writer who strives to create a better humanity could be looked upon as a divine being and the present study attempts to investigate the sort of humanity that Gibran envisioned. Consequently, the pivot on which this research work revolves is the entire corpus of the creative works of Gibran – the most loved writer across the Globe. If only humanity could be sensitive enough to internalize his universal philosophy, it would transcend all barriers, and hear the spiritual melody of eternity behind the clamorous shrieking of the world.

Gibran has used his ontological freedom to work for social freedom. He has tried and embraced the human condition in its totality and in exploring a situation, has succeeded in uniting the specific with the Absolute. Like all good literature his works of art enable humans to become full and free persons in and through history. It acts as a catalyst, provoking them to strive for a better world and in so doing, change themselves in the process. As Sartre has put it “A writer is committed when he tries to achieve the most
lucid and the most complete consciousness of being embarked, that is, when he causes the commitment of immediate spontaneity to advance, for himself and others, to the reflective” (57).

Once in a while, the cosmic reality, the Supreme Creator is supposed to disclose his/her will for the advancement of humanity through chosen ones, who seek to recast diverse habits and institutions of life and extricate humanity from its cribbed, cabined and confined consciousness. A secret strand in their works of art bind the diverse parts for the generous and loving humans to be tuned to the divine will in it, and act with an attitude of generosity. Their works are never limited to the painted, sculpted, narrated or sung details, but are windows which are open on the whole world. They are poetry lived, and their poetry or painting, dance or song, carry the signature of God. They overflow in words, colour movement or song. If the artist happens to be a spiritual luminary, a seer, sage or a prophet, then the clarion call to humanity is to extend to Infinity, to the other end of eternity that opens the doors to a state of deep meditation and bliss. They awaken humanity to the inherent quest of their true state which is full of poetry and beauty. They extend an invitation to turn the eyes inward and embark on the endless journey towards self-discovery.

Gibran Kahlil Gibran, the twentieth century literary genius is one such sage artist who woke the peoples of the world to the voices of a larger humanity. Embarking upon a voyage of discovery, Gibran achieved name and fame as an established writer in two completely disparate cultures – Eastern and Western. His works bear the distinctive flavor of ancient wisdom and mysticism as well as scientific inclination of the West. His intentions cannot be fathomed easily. While the Western humanity closed its doors towards inwardness particularly after the death of Socrates and Jesus, the East had always
closed its doors to objective things and matter. In fact, the sages of the East were moving inwards conquering duality. Emerging from the East, Gibran too became the greatest voice of the twentieth century, whose art according to Josephine Preston Peabody, “pointed out the beautiful inwardness of things” (Bushrui and Jenkins 64). With great gratitude for existence, Gibran could easily embrace, absorb, revitalize and transcend alien cultures. With a distinct intelligence and a sensitive soul, he knew the world around him without the intermediary of the senses. Bushrui says that Gibran becomes “a compass needle for a ship lost in the mists of the sea” (30). His words go beyond the mere evocation of the mysteries and do not lend easily to induction, interpolation, extrapolation and interpretation. Viewing his paintings or reading his works brings about reconciliation between spirituality and temporality and the East and the West. By accepting his adopted culture, he has passed through it without being lost in it and with alertness, intelligence, consciousness, constant witnessing and watching, he has transcended it. To use his own words, “He is a garden without walls, a vineyard without a guardian, a treasure-house for ever open to passers-by” (Garden of the Prophet 39).

If, for William Butler Yeats, it was the sands of Sligo Bay, the emerald loughs, the rivers of Western Ireland and the legendary mountains of Ben Bulben that provided an inexhaustible store of symbol and image to fire his poetic spark; for Gibran, it was the sacred groves of Lebanon, its hills, streams, waterfalls, copses, ethnic groups, ruins of the temples of Astarte, the lofty snow capped mountains, the mighty cedars, and the blue Mediterranean that stimulated his dreams and reveries. His land also provided the social and geographical context for so many of his works. His imagery is close to the symbolism of the “Subliminal consciousness” and he lived up to his own declaration, “I know I have something to say to the world that is different from anything else” (qtd. in Bushrui and
Jenkins 16). He saw life as a mystery to be lived and not as a riddle to be solved. Gibran’s is an enchanting world which lies beyond the world of thought, of science, of research and of logic. In his letter to May he observes:

In my work I am as solid as a rock, but my real work is neither in painting, nor in writing. Deep inside me, May, there is another dynamic intelligence which has nothing to do with words, lines or colours. The work I have been born to do has nothing to do with brush or pen. (*Love Letters* 40)

Every attempt to explain produces contradiction and inconsistencies. To understand life beyond its range, his intellect, its terms and memory had to be put to rest in the regions of space and this he has achieved effortlessly in his later works. By this time he had known the ways of the world, had experienced life, moved to extremes, had delved deep and had finally come out of it. He was evolving when all distinctions were dissipating from his consciousness. He knew the possibility of his words and lines being misunderstood and misinterpreted. It was the pain of a sage to transmit this wordless experience through some media which could be understood by humanity. In *The Garden of the Prophet*, where a man beseeches Almustafa’s words, he replies, “You shall rise beyond your words, but your path shall remain, a rhythm and a fragrance; a rhythm for lovers and for all who are beloved, and a fragrance for those who would live life in a garden” (37). Today, what is available to humanity is only his writings and his colourful sketches which try to lift humans from racial supremacy, national ambition, sectarian superiority, caste and class struggles, conflicts and dichotomies towards a new mindset. His aim is to advocate a universal civilization, a new universal humanity that abandons resistance and subterfuge, cultivates the spirit of real oneness and moves towards Absolute consciousness. Gibran knew that the cause of societal disruption was the
abandonment of spiritual guidance. He saw a society that was decaying from within, and felt that only a fundamental change of consciousness can restore the lost balance. He made his entry into the world at a time when the land was yearning for powerful voices who would establish world unity and peace.

Gibran has aesthetically woven day-to-day experiences and occurrences of life in the powerful images of kaleidoscopic significance and his thrusts and protests flow like a stream in its quest for truth, bringing along with it, deep, dark, unknown, mysterious and unfathomable depths of meaning. In his art, he has evolved a mode of expression that made the great Auguste Rodin\(^1\) call him, “The American Blake.” The illustrations for his books consist basically of naked bodies, shadows drawn in gray and black. Their movements and the settings are a clear attempt to relate the known to the unknown and to depict love and sorrow, and to show life in their relation to humans and God. There are no clothes, no trees, no buildings, no churches and nothing to identify the scene with any section of the earth or any religious denomination. Like the frameless universe they are frameless. What is strikingly revealed is his connection with the handy work of God.

Joseph Sheban,\(^2\) in his biographical notes says, “Gibran has been described as The Mystic, The Philosopher, The Religious, The Heretic, The Serene, The Rebellious and The Ageless” (Mirrors of the Soul 1). Also he adds that Gibran’s works reveal his familiarity with the works of the ancient Lebanese, the high priests of Eshtar, Baal and Tamuz. Gibran also knew Moses, the Prophets, the Beatitudes, and has also read deeply of both Christian and Islamic theology. Further, his thirst had taken him to the fountains of Buddha, Zoroaster, Confucius, Voltaire, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Jefferson, Emerson, William Blake and Lincoln. Barbara Young\(^3\) states, “Organized religion had no attraction for this man” (qtd. in Sheban 55).
With incisive insight, Gibran speaks of the interconnectedness of the universe and of the power of love that makes a universal humanity possible. The silence that lies behind his words can only be experienced. The way he has embraced peace and concord, the way he has employed silence, the way he has treated silences and gaps in human relationship defies logical approach and research. The Western critical tools are inadequate, but then to a larger extent his works easily measure up to the yardstick of the ancient Indian *Rasa-dhvani* doctrine of enjoyment and evaluation. Gibran shared a universal view, which he gleaned from discourses in many spheres and fields.

In a variety of literary genres, Gibran has recaptured human emotions in their passionate intensity, which marks him out to be essentially a poet of the earth, before his emergence as a prophet. The aesthete in him has experientially known that earthly life is a rich fabric with its lovely hues and loveliness of texture. The threads that form the warp and woof of this tapestry are what the ancient Indians have called – *Rasas*. As an artist, Gibran has artistically and aesthetically presented both to the viewer and the reader, slices of temporal life, making deft use of the nine *rasas* expounded by Bharatha in his *Nātyaśāstra*, and Abhinavagupta’s indication of the way in which the various *sthāyībhāvas* (primary states) can lead to *sānta rasa*. No human is born into self-realization, but is born to attain it at some point in his/her life time when he/she is directed away from the disgust, or through transcendence. *Sānta* has *sāma* (equanimity or tranquility) for its *sthāyībhāva* which leads one to *mokṣa*, which arises from *vibhāvas* such as knowledge of the truth, detachment and purity of mind. While some critics commented on a few aspects of the *Nātyaśāstra*, Abhinavagupta had commented on all aspects of the text, and this thesis confines itself only to the relative position of each of these in regard to the central concept of *rasa*, *sthāyībhāva* and *rasanispatti*. Both
Ānandhavardhana and Abhinavagupta have developed a theory of aesthetics on the premise that “art” is another path for the same goal of experiencing, if not permanently attaining the absolute freedom of universal and unmediated (anupāya) consciousness. Abhinavagupta considered śānta rasa as central and as the one attribute which permeated all else. Gibran’s aesthetic principles, effects harmony in diffused elements, creates unity in diversity and imparts form to the formless and the deformed. A harmony of emotional experiences elevates the soul towards a realization of the deeper truths of human existence. What has flowered in his heart bears fruit in the reader. Transcendence is achieved by passing through the emotions accepting it and going above it without being lost in it. As Jung has pointed out, “Art can have a spiritually alchemical role, that is, through his or her creative process in art, the artist may seek and effect a transmuting of aspects of self, some transcendence of the personal, limited self, to realization of a higher mode of being or higher awareness of reality” (Woodward 182).

A good work of art enables the individual self to embrace the universal self, to be lost to the knowledge of the inside and the outside, to discern truth and move into Absolute consciousness. The cosmic vision of humanity without barriers is gained by Gibran, in the frame of mind characterized by what is known as śānta (mental equipoise). Lovely images burst forth while employing the different rasas which call for an in-depth analysis. Abhinavagupta compares a poet to Lord Prajāpati thus:

The poet is like Prajāpati, from whose will this world arises. For the poet is endowed with a power to create wondrous and unheard of things. This power arises from the grace of parīvāk (highest speech), which is just another name for poetic imagination (pratibhā), which has its seat in the
poet’s own heart, and which is eternally in creative motion (udita). (qtd. in Vatsyāyan 157)

Whenever a part of the writer’s awareness penetrates the soul of the reading community, and whenever it aids in a partial transmutation of that invisible inner self from mere utterance to silence and from mere action to worship, there awakens a longing in the reader to go in for a deeper analysis of that mystic writing. It is with this yearning that Gibran Kahlil Gibran has been chosen for study in this thesis entitled: “Kahlil Gibran’s Aesthetics as a Spiritual Quest towards a Universal Humanity.” As this hypothesis unfurls in three core chapters, it shows, how good literature can move from humanity’s history of divisions, towards unity, inner harmony, and the transcendental state of consciousness. In the words of Paulo Coelho:

History will never change because of politics or conquests or theories or wars; that’s mere repetition. It’s been going on since the beginning of time.

History will only change when we are able to use the energy of love just as we use the energy of the wind, the seas, the atom. (Zahir 3)

When the mystical religion of love makes its appearance at a certain level of spiritual culture, with its syncretistic, messianic and missionary dimensions, it evaporates creeds and philosophies. Gibran appeared at a time when human resources for love had started drying up and when the distances between individuals had begun to widen and when acts of mercy, compassion and chivalry had been reduced to anachronisms. A crystallization of the “I” idea had been intense and the identification of “I” with body, mind, ideas, inherited conditionings, political ideologies and selfish purposes had contributed their share to the First World War. At such a critical juncture, Gibran came to remind humanity of a better world in not so distant a land where love rules supreme, and
warm human relations are Absolute. This oriental craftsman with his interior life of spirituality, his artistic expressions in music, drawing and verse sang from out of the heart of the common life, his rapturous intuition of divine excellence. He moved into a centreless consciousness purified and cleansed by the fires of non-duality and love.

Through his writings, he extols the simple union with the divine, speaks of the duty and joy of every human, independent of both ritual and bodily austerities, unfurls the discovery that awaits one and shows a joyful universe. Like the supreme mystics, St. Augustine, Ruysbroeck, Hildegard of Bingen, Kabir and Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, he has a syncretistic vision of God. His prime aim has been to resolve the perpetual opposition between the personal and the impersonal, the transcendent and the immanent, the static and the dynamic aspects of the divine nature. He melts and merges in the unity and like all mystics he does not see God as the final abstraction but the one reality, whose fullness could be discerned by loving eyes.

Gibran has woven contrasting threads upon his loom, has used all the colours of the spectrum to show the simple richness of white light; i.e. “Truth.” Love, detachment, bondage, freedom, joy and pain gripped his soul and from its conflict the unstrung music of the Infinite has proceeded. Gibran has tried to share with the common reader these “unheard melodies” and his mystical consciousness has over flown with missionary intuition. He reminds one, of Kabir, who says:

I live neither by law nor by sense.
I am neither a speaker nor a hearer
I am neither a servant nor a master
I am neither bound nor free,
I am neither detached nor attached
I am far from none, I am near to none
I shall go neither to hell nor to heaven,
I do all works, yet I am apart from all works
Few comprehend my meaning, he who can
Comprehend it, sits unmoved. (Tagore 82)

This is the state of a sage who has transcended division. It is a state beyond sense, speech, power, hierarchy, distance, hell and heaven. This is a state that transcends even the polar balance that exists in the world.

Gibran’s words, eddies around the unknowable, born of the knowledge of the universe, as a dynamic web, where each is viewed as being a part in the whole and the whole, being in each part. Through his literary output, he has transcended global dualities, cultural barriers and academic one-dimensionalism. In the words of Suheil Bushrui, “The existing critical apparatus of Western literary criticism lacks the relevant criteria by which to judge Gibran” (Bushrui and Jenkins 21). To the Irish mystic poet George Russel, “Our own words to each other bring us no surprise. It is only when a voice comes from India or China or Arabia that we get the thrill of strangeness from the beauty, and we feel that it might inspire another of the great cultural passions of humanity (qtd. in Bushrui 18). To the Tamil Scholar Puviyarasu, “Every word of Kahlil Gibran is a perennial imaginary magic fountain. His artistic expressions overflow with sweetness, clarity, depth, wider vision, profound essence and limitless humanitarianism” (Trans. Self. Gnānikalin Thōttam 3). Vairamuthu, a Tamil poet has accorded accolades to Gibran thus, “I’ve slept without pillow, but my eyelids refuse to close without embracing his works.” Also he adds, that, if he is asked to utter the name of a poet outside Tamil literature, even in his
sleep, he would utter only one name i.e. Kahlil Gibran (Trans. Self. Ellä Nadhiyilum En ēdam 148-49, 163).

To Osho, “Kahlil Gibran is a category in himself.” He feels that there cannot be another man, even in the future with deep insight into the human heart and into the unknown that surrounds life. To quote him, “he has done something impossible. He has been able to bring at least a few fragments of the unknown into human language and human consciousness as no other man has ever done. Through Kahlil Gibran it seems, all the mystics, all the poets, all creative souls have joined hands and poured themselves” (The Messiah, Vol. 1.15).

When John F. Kennedy cautioned his fellow countrymen “Ask not what your country can do but what you can do for your country,” he was quoting from The New Frontier also translated as The New Deal, which Gibran had written thirty six years earlier where he had asked, “Are you a politician asking what your country can do for you or a zealous one asking what you can do for your country” (Mirrors of the Soul 61). Even today, in many American homes there hangs a plaque commemorating this statement as that of its late President John F. Kennedy.

Sheban, in his biography quotes Barbara Young thus: “If he, Gibran, had never written a poem or painted a picture, his signature upon the page of eternal record would still be inerasable. The power of his individual consciousness of the age and the indwelling of his spirit is timeless and deathless. ‘This is Gibran’ ” (Mirrors 90). Gibran’s aspiration to live, stay in and act in a state of consciousness uninitiated by conditionings is identified by these literary luminaries, who also have these collective acquisitions within them.
Gibran was absolutely conscious of the process of creation. He could withdraw, gather, collect contain and concentrate his consciousness and translate his vision and experience in his writings. He could also examine the entire gamut of possible experience and lift human thought to divine consciousness. His works may not be dense and informative on the philosophical plane, but they are unparalleled, powerful, rousing, comforting, purging and elevating, raising one’s soul to the level of discerning truth. However, in the process of his transcendent journey he has never left any emotion untouched. Instead, he had handled them with deft attention and due sensitivity. In his letter to May Ziadeh he writes:

For I really do prefer the truth which is hidden to that which is apparent, just as I prefer that perception which is silent, complete and satisfying in itself to that which calls for analysis and justification. But I have found that an exalted science always begins with an exalted word. (Love 22)

According to the Vedic conception, a poet is supposed to be in conscious control of the Vāk (word). He/she is also supposed to have the Vāk, and know the four levels of Vāk, where it reveals itself to the seeker. In the Trika philosophy, “the divine consciousness is identical with the supreme word (parā vāk) and hence each word, every letter is inseparable from this divine consciousness” (qtd. in Vatsyāyan 156). Poets are also seen as forerunners of light, who have come to show humanity and tell humanity about this light which they have to ask and receive, seek and find, and knock at the doors of their consciousness. Ānandhavardhana in his Dhvanyāloka says,

In the shoreless world of poetry, the poet is the unique creator. Everything becomes transformed into the way he envisions it.
If the poet is emotionally moved (lit. ‘in love’) in his poems, then the whole world is infused with \textit{rasa}. But if he be without an interest in the senses (\textit{vītarāga}), then everything will become dry (\textit{nīrāsa}). (qtd. in Vatsyāyan 156)

The Bible says:

\begin{quote}
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

(John 1.1-4)
\end{quote}

Through the incarnation, everything human has been raised to an immensely greater dignity and human words become capable of bearing the mystery of life; not of fully expressing or explaining it, but bearing it and making it present. Gibran suffered the pangs of proclaiming this eternal word of God, who became enfleshed and lived among humans, as Jesus. It is the flowering of the consciousness of Jesus that he had been trying to establish on earth and see life through God’s light. His struggle had been to translate the language of the invisible world into that of the visible and to give humanity the meaning of the “white flame” that was burning within his soul (\textit{Letters} 92).

Gibran is a man of “being” incapable of spinning theories. The artistic realization of Gibran is the soul of the universe and he is one who has felt the deep stir of life in the world, and has known it to be Infinite. Like all prophets of the ever living spirit, Gibran has shown that the word of God is the necessary food of the soul, and humanity has to respond from their hearts in all totality to experience this living God. His appeal to humans is to dissolve in the mystery of life, rather than trying to see and solve problems
all the time. To achieve this, he has extended his art to the regions which seems to be hidden in the depth of mystery and has given it a form and voice. When a researcher steps into the innermost realm of Gibran’s works, what he/she finds is a treasure trove of embedded philosophy, psychology, mysticism, anthropology, axiology, ecology, aesthetics, eco-theology, spirituality etc., and every branch seems to open a wide door for a plethora of critical studies.

While the Western world had been looking at life and seeking practical solution to its problems through religion and science, the people of the East, especially the Arabs were immersed in poetic and philosophical thinking. Unlike the Western literati, the Arab writers did not suffer under religious bias, did not adhere to any scientific theory, but they experienced a kind of freedom to express freely in an unconventional pattern, unshaken by pressures from outside. In “A Poet’s Death Is His life,” Gibran acknowledges, “come, oh sweet Death, and deliver me from my neighbours who looked upon me as a stranger because I interpret to them the language of the angels” (Tears and Laughter 28-29). A poet who has to convey “truth” to others by word and speech has to pass through different routes of death to the self-pain, agony, frustration, knowledge, yoga, worship sacrifice etc.

In order to understand his sighs and lamentations for the oppressed, and to have a clear glimpse of the mystical revelations, one has to know about the places of his childhood and adolescence, the mountains and valleys of Northern Lebanon – his birthplace which has become an epitome of beauty and unity. All his early writings are set in Lebanon, and his philosophical notions of life are derived from the Christian Francis Marrash\(^{15}\) who was introduced French romanticism to the Arab world. His new ways of thinking and exciting modes of expression, visionary and allegorical interpretation of
thoughts were explored and assimilated by Gibran. Also the radical works of Adeeb Ishaq, a contemporary of Marrash, who stripped humankind of convention and reduced them to their essentials, influenced Gibran. In his early days, Gibran wore the mantle of a reform writer when his mind was desperately beating its wings to enter into the nest of silence.

Gibran lived an “inner Life” and felt himself a wheel turning against all other wheels. Without crusading or preaching he has given a healing message based on love and such a genius needs an introduction with brief biographical details. He came from a culture that cherished the virtues of honour and cleanness and decency – a culture that valued its environment and had internalized ecological truths. In his Preface to *Tears and Laughter* Martin L. Wolf observes, “The Arabs despite centuries of internal political turbulence and external interference, have retained and improved their strong aesthetic and imaginative spirit” (10).

### 1.2. Brief biographical profile

Gibran Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) was born in the Turkey dominated Syria into a Maronite family at the city of Bisharri, perched on a small plateau, at the edge of one of the cliffs of Wadi Qadisha. It is a place of wild and unbridled beauty, with a mystical ambience, in Northern Lebanon. Sheban has recorded the words of Barbara Young in his biography of Gibran thus: “To visit the Wadi Qadisha is to leave the modern world and to be plunged body and spirit into an atmosphere both ancient and timeless” (*Mirrors* 11).

Nurtured by the blue waters of the Mediterranean, caressed by the tall cedars, and lulled by the emotional and intellectual sustenance from the Lebanese countryside, it became possible for Gibran to discern the inner animating life principle of everything. It was to him the universal consciousness that sustained all manifestation. He strove to explore the
literature of internalized quest and Promethean aspiration. He reinforced his native mysticism with the visionary vocabulary of the English writers like Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley and American transcendentalists like Thoreau and Emerson. These writers, in turn, drew much of their inspiration from ideas that filtered indirectly from the East – Arabic and Persian poetry and the Sanskrit classics. Laden with poverty, Gibran did not receive any formal education or learning. His learning was limited to regular visits to a village priest who taught him the essentials of religion and The Bible, alongside Syrian and Arabic language. Taken aback, by his pupil’s inquisitive and alert nature, the priest also taught him the rudiments of alphabet and language, opening unto his pupil the world of history, science and language. When Gibran was eight, his father was accused of tax evasion, and his properties were confiscated by the Ottoman authorities. In such straitened circumstances, Gibran’s mother Kamilah Rahmi immigrated to the U.S. along with her four children Peter (Boutros) Gibran, Marianna and Sultana.

In 1895 the Gibrans embarked on a voyage to the American shores of New York. They settled in Boston’s South End, which at that time hosted the second largest Syrian community in the U.S. following New York. In the school, a registration mistake altered his name forever by shortening it to Kahlil Gibran which remained unchanged till the end of his life. Though he was placed in an ungraded class, he caught the attention of his teachers with his sketches and drawings. Also, his curiosity led him to the cultural side of Boston, which exposed him to the rich world of the theatre opera and artistic galleries.

After two years of schooling in Boston, Gibran was back in Lebanon finishing his education. During the summer, his father took him all over Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. After four years of studying Arabic and French, he left for Greece, Rome, Spain and then to Paris to do more study. After two years of study in Paris, he returned to Boston. The
other places that he visited includes Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Tyre (Sidon), Tripoli, Baalbek, Damascus, Aleppo and Palmyra. These places had a profound effect on his thinking, writing, and philosophy. It is said that while his feet were stumbling on the stones of Nazareth, he decided to write his book *Jesus the son of Man*. His book, *The Earth Gods* was conceived on the cliffs of Bisharri, and Baalbek became the setting for many of his articles dealing with religion and mystic life. Tyre and Sidon, the two main Phoenician cities which carried trade and civilization to the known world, colonized and civilized Greece. They founded the city of Rome, colonized North Africa and developed constitutional government in Carthage. Thus, the birth place of Gibran was also the birthplace of Western civilization and constitutional government and Gibran was one of its blessed sons and the latest contribution to his adopted land.

Among the many, who sculpted and changed Gibran’s destiny, a few deserve a special mention. His mother Kamilah Rahmi exercised a strong influence upon her sensitive son. Artistic, musical and fluent in Arabic and French, she ignited the young boy’s imagination, with the folk tales and legends of Lebanon, and stories from the Bible. Miss. Mary Elizabeth Haskell, (his close friend who paid his way to Paris to further his art studies) played a pivotal role in shaping his destiny. Gibran relied on her to have his manuscripts checked before they were submitted to his publisher. Barbara Young, who knew Gibran, the last seven years of his life, became the first of his disciples to shout his praise in a biography – *This Man from Lebanon*.

In his pen friend May Ziadeh – a foremost woman writer in Arabic Literature, he found his financial and moral supporter, a surrogate mother and a confidant. Gibran and May Ziadeh knew one another solely from the letters they exchanged and from each other’s work. Their love included spiritual and platonic elements, and they were united
“in a Sufi yearning and striving towards the “God-Self.” The “Blue Flame” which Gibran used as the symbol of God in man also became the symbol of his eternal love for May. The two lovers joined in a spiritual procession towards the blue flame, the eternal flame of reality (Love xv). The love letters between Gibran and May Ziadeh are of unparalleled significance to Gibran scholars as they carry literary merit. Others to recognize his talents were one of his art teachers – Florence Pierce at Denison House and Fred Holland Day, (a bibliophile, publisher, man of letters and a devotee of Oscar Wilde). Gibran absorbed the new and exciting set of literary and artistic impressions generated by his eccentric photographer’s unbridled energy and enthusiasm. He was also introduced to the established painter Lilla Cabot, who furnished him with his first painting materials and also to poetess Louise Guiney who left an indelible mark in his mind. Gibran’s teacher at Al-Hikmah, Father Yusuf Haddad became a tongue and pen to the attentive Gibran, and saw in him an alert and dynamic soul with a radical and rebellious intellect. His close associates Mikhail Naimy, Yusuf Huwayik, and Ameen Rihani, also played crucial roles in shaping his destiny.

1.3. Gibran’s artistic repertoire

Gibran’s Literary career can be divided into two phases, the first beginning in 1905, the date of the publication of his first Arabic work, and extending to 1918; the second beginning in 1918, the date of the publication of his first English work, and continuing to the time of his death in 1931. During the first phase, Gibran wrote exclusively in Arabic, but from 1918 onwards, his work was mainly in English. His eight English books were either published or written between 1918 and 1931, two books appearing posthumously.
In his early years, Gibran published five books in Arabic – *al-Musiqah* (Music 1905), *‘Ara’is al-Muruj* (Nymphs of the Valley 1906), *al-Arwaḥ al-Mutamarridah* (Spirits Rebellious 1908), *al-Ajnīḥa’l-Mutakassirah* (Broken Wings 1912), *Dam’ah wa’Ibtisamah* (A Tear and a Smile 1914). Between 1918 and 1931, during his second phase he brought out three additional Arabic books – a mystical poem *al-Mawakib* (The Procession 1919) and two collections of previously published work *al-‘Awasif* (The Tempest 1920) and *al-Badayi ‘wa’l-Tarayif* (The New and the Marvelous 1923).

His Arabic writings in the first phase of his literary career are characterized by a strong sense of bitterness and disillusionment, pain and pessimism. His ideas reflect feelings of alienation and a longing for the home-land. Gibran’s main purpose here is to reveal humanity’s ignorance that detaches them from the thread soul or the cosmic vital energy that connects all self. He also plays the role of a social reformer trying to incite his countrymen to action, to rebel against fossilized traditions that restrict their material and spiritual freedom.

*Al-musiqah*, a pamphlet published by *al-mohajer* displays the characteristics of neophyte apprenticeship. Packed with passion and inspiration, this is his first book in Arabic, probably inspired by his visits to the Boston Symphony Orchestra. As a lyrical eulogy of the art of music, it became popular with his immigrant readers. It has an ornate style, uncertain rhythm and a languid tone. Also he published a column in *al-mohajer* called *Tears and Laughter* which became very popular among the Arab literati. Here, he has seen nature as “the gospel of the spirit” (Bushrui and Jenkins 73).

Gibran’s fresh and passionate stories still hold an immediate appeal to his readers. The familiar settings, the working class heroes, the pithy aphoristic style and the strident anticlerical tones make them different from the formalistic Arabic writings of the day.
The Nymphs of the Valley contains three fictional parables - “Martha,” “Yuhanna the Mad,” and “Dust of the Ages and the Eternal Fire.” It carries challenging ideas about freedom and unity.

The story “Martha” deals with the oppression of women in the Middle East, and shows the contrast between nature and city. In “Yuhanna the mad” Gibran has attacked corruption, exploitation, and the hypocrisy of the Middle East. The third story in the trilogy “Dust of the Ages and the Eternal Fire,” deals with the themes of re-incarnation and pre-ordained love.

Like his earlier work, Spirits Rebellious takes as its central theme, the oppressive social conditions in Lebanon in a still more outspoken and defiant tone. At the same time it also offers positive alternatives. It is a collection of four narratives. The story entitled “Khalil the Heretic” Portrays the saintly hero in a similar vein to Yuhanna the madman. But, while Yuhanna is crushed by corrupted power, Khalil is strong enough to resist it. In the second story entitled “The Cry of the Graves,” Gibran deals with the inequalities of a corrupt and exploitative judicial system. The other two narratives “Madame Rose Hanie” and “The Bridal Couch” deal with the rights of women in the Middle East and the strictures of a bigoted, oppressive and patriarchal system.

Gibran’s passion for freedom, his quest for truth and his efforts to highlight the plight of the oriental woman, resulted in a Turkish attempt on his life, and the intelligentsia in Egypt vilified him calling him an enemy of just laws, family ties, and old traditions. This accusation was duly acknowledged by Gibran. To quote him:

Those writers are telling the truth, because I do not love man-made laws and I abhor the traditions that our ancestors left us. This hatred is the fruit of my love for the sacred and spiritual kindness which should be the
source of every law upon the earth, for kindness is the shadow of God in man (Self Portrait, S.T. bk. 4.28).

In his only novella Broken Wings, a tragedy of subtle simplicity, he tells the story of a love bound by the taboos of oriental tradition. It is the delicate story of young love that angrily depicts the plight of the Arab women in his time. Gibran is also seen striving and searching against all odds to locate the essence and spirit of all things. In “A Tear and a smile” which is a book of aphorisms, Gibran plays the role of a social reformer who is so tormented by the dire political, social and economic conditions prevalent at that time. His attack is against the social set up that restricts the material and spiritual freedom. His writings seem to beckon the lost humanity towards light in its clamor for oneness and unity.

The Procession is Gibran’s most complicated and truly creative poem. It was his first and last attempt to write in Arabic a traditionally long, rhymed and metered ode in classic Arabic. To George Kheirallah,22 “the poem represents the unconscious autobiography of Gibran – Gibran the sage, mellowed beyond his years, and Gibran the rebel who had come to believe in the unity and universality of all existence and who longed for simple, impersonal freedom, merged in harmony with all things” (qtd. in Daoudi 88-89). It is in the form of a dialogue between a youth who sings of freedom, joy and love of nature and a sage who laments the futility of the world. The enduring metaphor of the poem is that of the forest – a place where fragmentations and dichotomies do not exist.

“The Tempest” views the trappings, inventions, amusements, technological advancements and civilization of the world as nothing but vain fabrications. The protagonist Yusuf. Al.Fakhri clings to life with the conviction that there is only one
dazzling thing that the spirit longs for, and that is an awakening in the spirit. The dialogue between the narrator and Yusuf-al-Fakhri clearly encapsulates Gibran’s own internal conflict.

In his Arabic works, Gibran has used the short narrative to express his ideas, but this was gradually replaced by the parable, the didactic, the aphorism, the allegory and the prose epigram, all of which became distinctive features of his English works. However, his peculiar style bears echoes of the songs of Solomon and the Psalms, with strong echoes of Isaiah and the parables of Jesus. In his earlier writings, Gibran was trying to teach man about truth but later found out that truth has to be caught and not taught. With the advancement of years, Gibran realized that phraseology of the material world cannot be applied to matters belonging to the realms of the spirit. So he began to use words with caution sparingly and responsibly. However much, he had tried to weave a garland of mystic truths; he always had a feeling that he could not fully give expression to and systematize the truth that he realized.

The second phase of Gibran’s career saw the publication of *The Madman* (1918) *The Forerunner* (1920), *The Prophet* (1923), *Sand and Foam* (1926), *Jesus the Son of Man* (1928), *The Earth Gods* (1931), *The Wanderer* (1932) and *The Garden of the Prophet* (1933). *The Garden of the prophet*, left unfinished at Gibran’s death, was completed by Barbara Young – his amanuensis in his later years, who pieced it together from scattered manuscript materials and added many words of her own, utilizing passages from Gibran’s Arabic works.

*The Garden of the Prophet* which was supposed to be the second book of a trilogy beginning with *The Prophet* and ending with the unwritten but planned *The Death of the
Prophet is seen lacking in clarity of vision and sincerity and hence some critics and scholars doubt its literary value.

During this second phase, Gibran also published his first and only collection of drawings. In 1919, Twenty Drawings appeared with an introduction by Alice Raphael. This book is supposed to contain Gibran’s finest art-work up to that date and it lays emphasis on Gibran’s mystical bent. It also emphasizes the direction he was to follow in his paintings, drawings and writings. The New York City Metropolitan Museum of Art owns five paintings by Gibran. The Fogg Museum in Cambridge Massachusetts, exhibits the original painting of “The Slave” (Illustrated in The Forerunner), while the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston owns “Nude Figure kneeling among clouds.”

The Madman and The Forerunner established Gibran’s standing as a writer in English of great promise. The Madman powerfully reflects the Sufi concept of the “Unity of being,” and the parables in The Forerunner define his social concepts. The underlying theme here is the need to awaken to enter into the interiority, into the innerness and then to work for social transformation.

In The Prophet – the pinnacle of Gibran’s artistic endeavours, East and West meet in a mystic union, unparalleled in Modern literature. It provoked the critic Claude Bragdon to comment on its extra ordinary dramatic power, deep erudition, lightning like intuition, lyrical loftiness and metrical beauty. It teaches humanity to overcome the forces that enslave them. One significant influence evident in this work is that of Friedrich Nietzsche’s Thus Spake Zarathustra. However, Gibran was more attracted with Nietzsche’s form rather than his formulations. Also Jesus Christ becomes one of the models for Almustafa.
Sand and Foam is a collection of Arabic aphorisms translated to English. Some of them reflect his personal experience. This book appears to lack a unifying theme. But its depth is unfathomable. Jesus the son of Man – His words and His deeds as told and recorded by those who knew Him, bears a close relationship to the New Testament in its content. Here Gibran has drawn a biographical sketch of Jesus in the tradition of the apostles, supplementing fact with fiction. He has portrayed Jesus as the human incarnation of God, as God revealed in human form. This book records seventy eight different impressions of Jesus imaginatively attributed to his contemporaries, both real and fictitious.

The epic backdrop of The Earth Gods is awesome, especially in its representation of humanity conceived on a cosmic scale. It is a long prose poem consisting of a dialogue between three Earth Gods on the destiny of man. The Wanderer is a collection of parables which crystallizes Gibran’s whole message of life and captures the mood and atmosphere of his homeland Lebanon, as well as his native mode of thought and phraseology. It is a movement from curiosity to quest.

In 1908, Gibran also worked on Falsafat al-Din wa’l Tadayyun (The Philosophy of Religion and Religiosity) which was never published. Gibran’s thematic play and his last major Arabic work Iram Dhat al-Imal, (“Iram, the City of Lofty Pillars”) takes the form of a discourse on mysticism. The profound message that permeates every scene can be seen as a fitting precursor to The Prophet. Gibran emphasizes the spiritual foundation of all existence. To him all elements are intrinsically interrelated and today it is a view supported by modern physics too. (Bushrui and Jenkins 71).

The two plays Lazarus and His Beloved and The Blind are the most developed of five short dramas Gibran wrote in his last years. While the Biblical character Lazarus,
raised from his death by Jesus symbolizes a revival from spiritual death, the Lazarus of Gibran resents being restored to his mother and sisters after experiencing such a blissful union with “His beloved, the space virgin, the beloved of every man” (60). But the madman justifies this act of Jesus thus, “He brought you back out of pity for the wingless who would not be along” (Dramas of Life 60). Lazarus understands that he had been sacrificed by Jesus just as He sacrificed Himself. Gibran’s The Blind is noted for its economical language and imagery. The blindness of David Rugby symbolizes the inner transformation of a man, who has allowed his energy to flow inwards. The energy no more flows from the eyes towards the objects, instead it starts moving towards the inner and that energy had opened the third eye in Rugby. It is with this third eye that he sees his step daughter Anna, his wife Helen and her lover Kingdon. It is the play of the birth of an “inner self”- a blossoming of the divine. Apprenticed to his ways, Anna too trains herself to see with her “fingers.” She says, “I have taken your books to my room – you know the ones with the raised letters – and I’ve already learned much. I can read when there is no light. Please don’t tell mother. She will not understand. You see, father, I want to live in your world. I feel that you would not mind my coming to your world” (86).

The Banshee, The Last Unction and The Hunchback or the Man Unseen have survived in manuscript form with no contemporaneous clues as to their dates. They are fragmented and still unpublished. They are supposed to be his “test” plays, symbolic short trials which synthesized his personal philosophy or “Gibranism,”24 which he once defined to the poet Witter Bynner as “freedom in all things” (37). David Rugby, the blind musician in The Blind and the poet Padraic O’Shaughnessey in The Banshee belong to the divine tribe that escapes society’s restriction and corruption and through deep self awareness become reunited with the “Greater Self” or the poet’s personal vision of a
cosmic God. In *The Hunchback or the Man Unseen*, Gibran grants his death wish to the weary misshapen Prime Minister who predicts, “I am a spent string in an ancient harp, but when the day is ended, we shall have a little sleep and then the dawn of the second day will be upon us. And we shall be returned to new music” (38). *The Last Unction* is based on an earlier Arabic poem “Behind the Curtain.” This play centers on a priest’s monologue to a woman who has just received the final sacrament.

Even at a very tender age Gibran was fond of sketching shapes and figures on fresh snow. Barbara Young has recorded of how he used to dig holes in the ground and carefully plant scraps of paper hoping to have a copious supply of it during the summer harvest. He was also fond of drawing on walls and casting images in lead using old sardine tins. At the age of six, Da Vinci’s picture “The Head of St. Ann” is said to have plunged him into a “longing for the unknown” (Bushrui and Jenkins 31).

Gibran’s paintings are the expressions of the sacredness of his inner life. They are the quintessence of his universalism. In his paintings one can see a seismic shift in his artistic ambition. They are the expressions of the inner freedom of the individual, of mystery, passion, love, imagination, tragedy, beauty, romance and truth. His paintings can be compared with that of Michelangelo and Rodin. His official debut as an artist in an exhibition at Wellesley College received a warm review and *The Boston Evening Transcript* paid accolades to this emerging artist thus:

*The ponderous beauty and nobility of his pictorial fancies are wonderful. All told, his drawings make a profound impression, and, considering his age, the qualities shown in them are extraordinary for originality and depth of symbolic significance. The series of drawings entitled “Towards God”*
(20) recently executed is perhaps as remarkable as any of the works in the exhibition (qtd. in Bushrui and Jenkins 67).

Like Rodin, Gibran’s work is a great step towards the unknown. Gibran was versed in the mystical paintings of Eugene Carriere and his first artistic epiphany was ignited by Puvis de Chavannes, Carriere, Moreau, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci (90). Also, Gibran was acquainted with painters like Rubens, Velazques and the visionary painter Pierre Marcel Béronneau. He has offered his art and life for the redemption of humanity. Each colour seems to have a spiritual nature by itself, and it also seems that no artist can teach the other, the art of understanding that spiritual nature. However, these colours may mean different things to different people and no two people will find it alike.

In his effort to reevaluate the ethical and spiritual foundations, the philosophies, dogmas and artistic beliefs that had been shattered by the global cataclysms, Gibran resorted to these vital forms of self-expression to effect a transition between the death agony of the old world and the travail of the new. As a supreme artist, Gibran’s main concern is with the life of the inner world. His paintings and drawings are deeply symbolic and are infinitely expressive. Gibran also had a flair for the principles and structures of music. He preferred pieces known as symphonies, sonatas and cantatas and his favourite composers were Beethoven and Debussy. Of his own drawings and paintings Gibran says, “Art is a step from nature toward the infinite… a mist carved into an image” (Sand and Foam 83). He was becoming more and more attentive to the subjective or “inner” world of experience.

Gibran’s drawings portray movement, outward movement suggesting the struggle of the inner world of human beings. The twelve illustrations found in The Prophet surpass his earlier illustrations and particularly the frontispiece depicting the face of Almustafa.
Actually his art can be approached in the same manner as his writings, and his illustrations harmonize well with his poetry. Apart from his writings, through his paintings and drawings too, he has tried to illustrate or enforce some great spiritual truth of Infinite Consciousness. He has acumen for an uncanny precision in evolving a system of correspondence between the material, physical, psychical, mythical and spiritual. He has synthesized diverse disciplines to show how art has the latency and potency to unite the physical into a meaningful whole. Alice Raphael in her introduction to twenty drawings has set forth the province of an artist such as Gibran in the following words:

Life in its elemental functioning is but a transformation of the processes of birth, love and death. The hunger of the appetites and the fear of the unknown; to love and be loved; out of these essential simplicities, man has erected the vast complexities of life and to these essential simplicities the artist must return who seeks new means of expression amidst the clutter of religions, arts and moralities. (qtd. in Bushrui and Jenkins 235)

Thus the aesthetics of his drawings and paintings too direct humanity from the circumference to the centre. Further, the notion of rasa and bhāva in the Indian aesthetics, which will be dealt in chapter II, are seen to be relevant not only to drama and poetry but also to painting, music, sculpture and other arts too. They all make the world emotionally accessible to humans and enable them to expose its various contours and possibilities, to arrive at the highest bliss. In fact every work of art is replete with aesthetic properties.

1.4. Literary survey

Much said and done, the history of Gibran studies has had a chequered flow, and the recent resurgence of interest in his life and works testifies to the permanence of his utterances. Both in Arabic and in English the recognition has been very reluctant and
slow and the pendulum of criticism had been swinging violently from the eulogistic to the condemnatory. But the recent trend is that when academia started its probing and explorations into the Gibran works, his reputation has started soaring high. Now there is nothing to hold his works back from serious critical attention, and valid critical assessment, though they defy all critical apparatus and tradition.

During the turn of the twentieth century, the absence of a comprehensive bibliography and the unavailability of reliable and authentic records such as original manuscripts prevented it from serious critical attention. The earliest pioneering attempts were the bibliographic compendiums of Yousef Sarkis published in several volumes between 1920 and 1926, his index published between 1928 and 1929 and As’ad Daghir’s sources for literary studies published in 1956.

Habib Mas’oud published an enormous anthology with primary and secondary source material on Gibran in Sao Paulou, Brazil in 1932, under the title *Jubron Hiyen wa Mayeten (Gibran in His Life and Death)*. A year later, Ameen Khalid published his critical study entitled *Muhawalat fi si Jubran (Attempts in the Study of Gibran)* followed by Shukrallah al–Jurr’s *Nabi Orphalese (The Prophet of Orphalese)* and Jameel Jabr’s *Jubran : Siratuhu, Adabuhu Falsafatuhu, Rasmuhu (Gibran : His Life, Writings, Philosophy and Art)*.

Three years after Gibran’s death, Mikhail Naimy published his Arabic biography *Jubran Kahlil Jubran: Hyatuhu, Mawtuhu, Adabuhu, Fannuhu* which was later translated into English (1950). The first introduction to Gibran in English, written in 1945 by Barbara Young, was entitled: *This Man from Lebanon: A Study of Kahlil Gibran*, and this remained the only study in English for the next twenty years.
The first attempt in English at a serious critical analysis of Gibran was made by Kahlil S. Hawi25 when he published his doctoral thesis on Gibran. In 1970 the American university of Beirut held the first Gibran international festival under the patronage of the president of Lebanon and the event produced an anthology of Gibran’s writings in both English and Arabic. It was the first attempt at presenting Gibran’s works in a bilingual and bicultural context, together with as comprehensive a bibliography as was possible to construct at that time by Suheil Bushrui. The event also initiated the first academic programme in Gibran studies at the department of English at the American University of Beirut – A new authoritative critical biography by Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins entitled “Man and Poet.”

In 1972 the correspondence between Kahlil Gibran and Mary Haskell was published under the title Beloved Prophet: The Love Letters of Kahlil Gibran and Mary Haskell and Her Private Journal. There were also many other sources who were trying to reconstruct a definitive biography of Gibran, with the help of the original material, primary sources, letters and manuscript material. The work of Jean Gibran and Kahlil Gibran (Gibran’s cousin and namesake) published in 1974 under the title Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World, represents the most up to date biography and includes unpublished materials, especially the diaries of Josephine Preston Peabody, documents of Gibran’s Boston years and new information on Gibran’s American experience.

The Gibran museum was opened in Bisharri in 1975 and with the publication of Gibran of Lebanon: New Papers, a new critical apparatus was provided to Gibran’s work. Also the publication of Salma Khadra Jayyusis’ seminal work on modern and contemporary Arabic literature provided a ground-breaking analysis of the importance of Gibran’s work in the Arab world. This work also includes an unparalleled critical
assessment of Gibran’s Arabic works. Between 1974 and 1980 fragments of Gibran’s English work such as *The Madman*, *The Prophet*, *The Earth Gods* and *The Forerunner* were edited and published by William S. Sehadi. From 1972 to 1983, The Gibran National Committee, under the guidance of its chairman late Professor Emile Geagea and its consultant advisor critic Farid Salman have done yeomen service in promoting Gibran studies across the world. While Farid preserved the Gibran heritage and helped create the new museum with artistic integrity and refined sensibility, Wahib Kayouz, himself a Gibran scholar and a competent curator of the museum contributed two major publications based on unpublished papers: *Alam Jubran al-Rassam (The World of Gibran the Painter)* and the two-volume *Alam Jubran al-Fikri (The Thoughts of Gibran)*.

To mark the fiftieth anniversary of Gibran’s death in 1981, the Gibran National Committee and The Ministry of Education along with a series of activities organized by the American University of Beirut also published *Fi Thikra Jubran: Abhath al-Mu’tamar al’Awal Li al-Dirasat al-Jubraniyah. (In Memory of Kahlil Gibran: The First Colloquium on Gibran Studies)*. In 1983, “The Gibran International year” drew worldwide attention to the life and works of Kahlil Gibran. It also saw the issuing of a commemorative stamp; the founding of Gibran archives, education programs and conferences; radio and television coverage and various publications. A conference on Arab-American literature “The vision of Gibran” attracted leading international scholars. However, the first academic programme in Gibran studies started with the establishment of an endowed Kahlil Gibran Chair on *Values and Peace* by the University of Maryland at College Park. This chair initiated studies, emphasizing, the enduring human values advocated by Gibran in his writings, and which are very essential to the creation of a world vision based on the principles of “Unity in diversity.” The Kahlil Gibran Research and studies projects have
developed an energetic program of research and publication, and its significant achievement is the birth of the new comprehensive biography entitled *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet* brought out by Suheil Bushrui, recognized as the foremost international authority on Kahlil Gibran and Joe Jenkins, a research fellow at the Kahlil Gibran Research and Studies Project. A sizeable portion of this chapter leans heavily on this work for its biographical details and literary survey up to the year 2009.

*The Prophet*, on record, by Richard Harris, bronze depictions of the themes from *The Prophet* by Neil Lawson Baker, creation of the Kahlil Gibran park in Boston and an exhibition of forty of Gibran’s paintings at the Boston Public Library have opened up new vistas for Gibran scholars to know more about the author and widen their vision. Thus, in slow but steady degree Gibran is evolving into an integral part of the literary legacy of both the East and the West – Gibran the voice of global consciousness. In the year 1996, UNESCO housed the exhibition at the UNESCO palace in Paris on the life and works of Gibran. In the same year, the British readers voted *The Prophet* as one of the most popular books of the century.

The first International conference on Kahlil Gibran was held under the auspices of the Kahlil Gibran Research and Studies Project, with the theme “Kahlil Gibran and the Immigrant Traditions.” In the twenty first century, the exceptional quality of Gibran’s works have attracted many research scholars from all over the world to theorize, philosophize, systematize and argue to discern the essence of his utterances (Bushrui and Joe Jenkins 288-94).

The thesis entitled, “Kahlil Gibran’s ‘Pen Bond’: Modernism and the Manhattan Renaissance of Arab-American Literature” by Karam Nicoletta of Brandeis University runs up to two hundred and fifty five pages. It examines the poetry and fiction of Gibran
and his Arab-American colleagues. It explores how their writings contributed to a more inclusive understanding of American modernism and of how these writers engaged in a discourse of conscience to reformulate their values and institutions. It also investigates how these writers rewrote conventional forms of literary expression, and used literature to contest restrictive gender roles, to assail the provincialism of organized religion and to explore methods to embrace a more cosmopolitan form of faith.

The thesis titled “Gibran Kahlil Gibran and William Blake: Poets of Peace and Redemption” by George N. El-Hage, State University of New York at Binghamton, speaks of the artistic responsibility of Gibran and Blake in leading people back to Eden. It lays bare their socio-political visions, highlights their basic prophetic vision and apocalyptic view of the universe. The author hails them as the “Columbus of the psyche” and also does not fail to point out some dissimilarity between them.

This thesis was later condensed under the title “William Blake and Kahlil Gibran: Poets of Prophetic Vision” and published in a book form by Notre Dame University press, Lebanon in 2002. “Kahlil Gibran and Other Arab American Prophets” is a dissertation by Sana Mcharek which has been accepted for inclusion in electronic theses, treatises and dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digninole Commons, Florida State University. Its focus is on a group of Lebanese writers who initiated the Arab immigrant literary tradition in America. It explores the new ideas presented by Gibran, Ameen Rihani and Mikhail Naimy, glorifies their Arab essence and also touches upon the phenomenal success of The Prophet. The ‘Blue Flame’: An ‘Elliptical’ Interaction between Kahlil Gibran and Rabindranath Tagore by Indrani Datta focuses on certain aporias in the life and works of Gibran. It critiques his life and writings through the theoretical framework of Nico Israel’s “Outlandish”-ness, a state that exists between
“exilic emplacement” and “diasporic self-fashioning. It shows how Gibran’s “sense of identity, generated out of trans-cultural and trans-national spaces, not only engenders a counter discursive practice to the Westcentric politics of exclusion but also tries to rescue non-Western writers, and their literatures, from the ‘anamnesiac order’ of such politics” (Datta).

Apart from these, there are various essays and papers on Gibran and his works. The recent development is that William Nix and his creative projects group has launched the development of a biopic, centering on Kahlil Gibran. Scripted by sibling screen writers Grace Shalhoub Yazbek and Rob Shalhoub, this biopic is likely to begin with Gibran’s early years in Lebanon, his family’s emigration to America, his ascendency in New York and Paris during the early twentieth century, his death and the creation of the Gibran museum in Lebanon.

A deal for Gibran’s life rights has been signed with the Gibran National Committee of Lebanon, which has agreed in 2010 to license an animated version of The Prophet. The production is expected to be completed by the end of 2013. Also, an agreement with the Gibran National committee has been signed by Nix to develop and produce an international art exhibit. The expected outcome is a spike in interest in his art work and an understanding of his inspirational, spiritual, philosophical and artistic side of life. The animated adaptation of The Prophet is to tingle the taste buds for the regional literary heavy weight before the Kahlil Gibran biopic goes into production in 2014 (McNary).

To the best of the knowledge of the investigator, research has not been carried on this area of aesthetics. This skeletal work restricted by space and time provides scope for future scholars to pursue research on an art experience which to the Indians is as
important as Vedic knowledge. As far as the researcher’s knowledge could collect, analogous studies have been made between Gibran and Blake, between Gibran and Tagore, studies have been undertaken on the influence of Lebanese culture in his writings, his enigma has been studied, his women characters have been analyzed and he is seen as a poet, painter and philosopher and as an Arab expatriate in America. The Researcher has already done a comparative study on Gibran and Tagore. But a study of this kind has not been made. Here the attempt is to show that a literature that looks beyond the human realm is a healthy antidote to the “weaknesses and excesses of our own cultures” (Shukla and Dwivedi 36). This type of literature can probe depths, and aid in the dissolving of individuality to reveal the treasures sunk in the sea bed of consciousness. Art is proposed as one way of reaching *mukti* which is known as the fifth Veda. Studies can also be held on how aesthetics includes other sciences such as psychology, theory of language etc. and of how aesthetic consciousness, is a branch of axiology (Science of values). It also paves way for the revival of interest in this neglected branch of Indian poetics both at home and abroad. Instead of a wholesale dependence on the Western critics, in the second chapter an endeavour has been made to draw stimulus regarding literary enjoyment from some recent Indian critics in English Like Bharata, Bhāmaha, Ḍaṇḍin, Vāmana, Ānandavardhana, Kuntaka, Mammata, Abhinavagupta and Kśhemendra and their contributions of various epoch-making critical theories like *Rasa, Alankāra, Riti, Dhvani, Vakrokti* and *Aucitya*. However, the main stay of the study is on the *Rasa-dhvani* doctrine.

Through Gibran’s super–mundane and non empirical works of art the connoisseur/reader forgets himself/herself and enters into those situations, the mind shedding its natural fickleness and residing solely in *rasa* with single minded concentration. Gibran
directs humanity toward *tattvajñana* (Knowledge of Truth) and that becomes his means of enlightenment or *moksha*, which is also the *sthāyi* of *śānta rasa*. *Tattvajñana* is nothing other than knowledge of the self (*atmajñana*). This spiritual quest had made Gibran treat his art as a discipline (*sādhana*), yoga and a sacrifice (*yajna*). His form of *sādhana* is treated as a means of achieving a state of complete universal harmony where differences dissolve and integration takes place at the imaginative and emotional level, with the cosmos. Like a unified science, his works recognize no frontiers but forms an interrelated whole, transcending limits of languages, parochial cultural values, traditions and customs that divide common human understanding and promote compartmentalization and overspecialization of departments of knowledge. It is the beginning of the science of the Absolute. Gibran, through his works, affords the reader a unique experience of pure joy of detachment, elevates him/her from the situations of actual world stress, strife and selfishness and advocates a universal humanity which is nothing but a new humanity – a centered humanity envisioned by great spiritual masters. It is an externalization of his inner desire endowed with balance, rhythm, proportion and harmony.

Gibran’s offering of the best to the seeker of the best is the target of the study and much can be studied in this direction by future scholars. To a certain extent physics and metaphysics are treated equally by Gibran in guiding humanity purposefully and consistently towards the search for Infinite consciousness. With the beauty, power and charm of his words, he has tried to lift humanity from its soporific ignorance. Truth cannot be sought solely from the laboratories alone. In the words of Albert Einstein:

*The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science.* He to whom
this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms – this knowledge, this feeling is at the centre to true religiousness. (Singh 171)

Below the surface show of life, in search of underlying connections, Gibran knew that the world of sense impressions, so transient and superficial, is not enough in itself to satisfy the quest for meaning. Knowledge of consciousness seems to holdout the promise of central principles that unify all of life. Like a road map provided by Gibran in his works, humanity too has to move from creative art to the created world towards the creative energy in his/her fullness and indivisible oneness. The chapter divisions in this thesis correspond to these three stages and are entitled accordingly with the hope to invigorate the conscience of humanity regardless of religion, creed, nationality and ethnicity leading to peace and harmony in a strife-torn world.

This chapter delineates the aim and objective of this study, speaks of the all inclusive, all embracing eclectic methodology used, gives a brief biographical sketch of Gibran, a short analysis of his works, explicates the title, with a skeletal outline of the thesis profiling the three core chapters, highlights the thesis statement, defines the meta language employed in it, states the reason for the choice of this author and does a brief literary survey of the seminal works of Gibran.

The second chapter entitled “From Ego Consciousness to Aesthetic Consciousness” traverses into the realm of the science of poetry using the poetical theories of India, with special reference to the Rasa-dhvani doctrine. Humanity in its
quest for pure joy has to have an experience of this beauty and truth only in art, till they enter into pure awareness and be enrapt in ecstasy. The transcendental character of art experience born of the aesthetic rapture is identifiable with the ultimate goal of life in the Indian aesthetics. It speaks of the kinship between art and humanity and its soulful strains for the uplift of the groping humans. This chapter also speaks of the doctrine of dhvani as an extension of the rasa theory propounded by Bharata in Nātyaśāstra and highlights Gibran’s capacity to use this element of suggestion in his poetic works. His capacity to fuse both word and meaning in his works elevates it to a transcendental or supersensible reality. Unlike Nietzsche to whom art remains permanently dependent upon lower forms which are not so pure, to Gibran, art ranks in the highest echelons of the system of spirit. It recognizes higher stages in religion and transcends and purifies it. Like Schopenhauer who believes that art towers above all else, achieves the shedding of duality, rises above particular appearances and contemplates underlying ideas, Gibran too, believes in good works of art as “words taken from the book of God and as manifestations of the eternal and undying spirit” (Love 41).

Further, this chapter analyses the springs of art, its functions and purpose and the appreciative readers’ response, who retrieve the enshrined glory in it. It considers the Western critical apparatus disarmed with its limited unmeditative evaluative principles, which, if broadened with the spiritual foundation of the East, can scale heights and be more accommodating. There is reconciliation between the Apollonian and the Dionysian dichotomy – the Apollonian that captures a part of the reality that aspires for the attainable clarity from a particular perspective and the Dionysian that strives after the universality which embraces all extremes and blots out boundaries.
While Hegel and Schopenhauer have investigated the place and role of aesthetics on the ladder of knowledge and have determined the relations of art to other manifestations of the human spirit, Indian aesthetics is concerned with the ontological status of aesthetics where the *rasa* experience is rendered as taste/essence. Tradition has treated God Almighty Himself as the first and foremost of creative artists. Taitriya Upanishad describes him as “Joy.” Art emotion elevates the reader from the confines of excitement, depression, or grief, takes him/her beyond the dualities of life to a state of delight, against a backdrop of peace. The Upanishads says, “Bhrigu meditated and found that joy / Is Brahman. From joy are born all creatures./ By joy they grow, and to joy they return” (*Easwaran* 257).

In art, aesthetic experience can be “a momentary stay against confusion,” where there is the substratum of peace and delight, and where the particular and the individual get universalized. In an aesthetic experience when all the readers are absorbed in the same thing to the exclusion of all other things, the diversity ceases momentarily to exist and gives rise to the manifestation of unity, of the unlimited consciousness. One finds oneself withdrawing from awareness in the components of mind, the senses, emotions, and intellect while reading the works of Gibran. One knows how the mind is only an instrument of consciousness. When concentration is profound, the mind is stilled, space is conquered, time is attenuated and there comes the *śānta* – “the peace of God which surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4.7). One rests in meditation as the thin envelope of personal identity gets dissolved.

The third chapter entitled “From Aesthetic Consciousness to Eco-Consciousness,” draws attention to Gibran’s way of looking beneath the surface of life to its underlying causes, to an at-homeness in the world, with its infinite variety. Gibran
does not check or negate passions but channelizes them, reconnecting them with their original source in deeper consciousness. The more the heart can be opened in spontaneous concern for the universe, and the more it becomes a vehicle for social coherence; spiritual unity can be attained. Unity in what appears as diversity is the global consciousness aimed at by Gibran, and he knew that the world has no choice but to develop sustainably.

At the heart of any apparently separate thing lurks its essence, its *rasa*, literally “sap” that has brought that thing into being. His strong belief was that when one’s eco-consciousness is able to see the essence, in all that surrounds him/her, one gets one step closer to the ultimate reality, and this is emphasized in *The Tempest*. To ordinary humans, sudden awakening may be impossible, and so it is achieved in gradual stages through great literary works that have the potential to spark off the initial interest. With every reading new layers of existence begin to surface, demanding a “second attention”35 (Chopra 93) from the reader. The animate and the inanimate world with its intrinsic value lead one to self-knowledge. Gibran’s eco-awareness is the result of his investigation into consciousness itself, and the unearthing of his precious legacy to humanity demands deeper insight, intuition and investigation.

This chapter shows Gibran’s attempts to find a unifying principle that connects the slipping threads into the long unit, and studies his works in the light of eco-poetics. This new and emerging critical theory cannot fully accommodate the spiritual ecology of Gibran and only a spiritual foundation of the East can make the study more fulfilling. Several loose strands can be strung together to evolve an adequate formula that could make aesthetic consciousness and eco-consciousness, expand into Absolute consciousness.
Gibran’s eco-spirituality has enabled him to traverse untrodden realms where theory has not reached. His spiritual ecology is a new religion of creativity promoting sustainable living on earth and thus becoming part of God, of Godliness and of evolving to higher planes of consciousness. Gibran seeks to make his readers contemplative, alert transcendental and then leads them from apparent diversity to indivisible unity. The message that he tries to put across is that; that which moves the world is consciousness, which in the human being becomes cognition among other vital functions. All of creation is implicit in Absolute reality called “Sat” just as a huge tree lies coiled in a tiny seed. Humanity is joined at the roots though its branches are separate and the universe is a haven for the infinite manifold of unanimated and animated forms to exist and evolve together. Although dualism is evident in nature, the fusion of opposites holds the secret of balance. Like Pythagoras and the deep ecologists, Gibran has postulated the divinity of humanity in the natural laws of harmony, of the microcosm of music, of the human soul, of biological life and of the cosmos. His conviction lies in tackling environmental and ecological issues with a spiritual response. The Bible being the chronicle of the beginnings of our civilization, establishes almost a mystical bond between humanity and environment, a simultaneous sense of awe and kinship with the spirit that dwells in all things. It is this kinship that gets expanded into higher consciousness in the third core chapter entitled “Eco-Consciousness to Infinite Consciousness.”

The fourth chapter is a gradual ascend from the lower relative states of consciousness to Infinite consciousness – a leap from the dissipated rays of personal consciousness to the establishment of Self in homogenous essence. It is the transcending of the finite consciousness to the fullness of infinitude. From the thralldom of relational life, through the language of the Self, Gibran tries to shatter the appearance of pluralistic
consciousness and move into the empyrean of undifferentiated Absolute consciousness. Integrity is all inclusive, and Gibran moves from relational understanding to an integral vision, and his aesthetics becomes a spiritual quest for self-discovery that can restore the lost harmony and balance. It is a smooth transition from nescience to essence through the prescience of Gibran. It is the saga of transcending all man-made barriers to enter the realm of eternity by tracing the principles of underlying unity.

Gibran’s works are a precious legacy to humanity, as their goal is realization of one’s true nature, and to help one live in the world in full awareness of life’s unity. Through the rasāsvādha, the reader moves into brahmāsvādha targeting the unitive state. Through his works, Gibran turns humanity away from unreality, from negativity and separateness and facilitates the building of a world that is not only sustainable, but nourishing and helping humanity to realize its deepest longing for peace. After a winding journey, it aids humans to rest on the bedrock of satya or truth. From the aesthetic experience, where one experiences the first three levels of consciousness, i.e. vaiśṭyanāra, Taijasa and prajna, the reader is expected to discern the underlying message veiled in metaphors and aspire for the fourth level of super-consciousness called Turiya.

The chapter adumbrates how Gibran’s pen and brush have the capacity to awaken the seeds of self-realization that slumbers in the hearts of humanity. The three major divisions in this chapter are, “From nescience to essence,” “The underlying unity” and “From eternity to eternity.” His prime aim is to raise their hearts and minds into those regions of universal cosmic knowledge. Through his art that has the third eye of Chaldean, Phoenician and Egyptian art, he could see beyond the chimera of a fleeting world. He believes that the poets’ task is to open the eyes of humanity inward and into
eternity. He continually experienced the truth of the created world with the depth and intensity of an awakened one with his esoteric, figurative and imaginative style. His works apply dynamically and with striking timelessness to the momentous challenges of today. In *Sand and Foam*, he says, “there is not struggle of soul and body save in the minds of those whose souls are asleep and whose bodies are out of tune” (*G.W.* bk. 3.26).

The world of these mystic poets can only be seen by the eye of the eye and never by the eye itself, for they paint the human experience on a cosmic canvas.

It also speaks of Gibran’s capacity to aid humanity in becoming one with the soul of the universe, what is called *Aleph* (which is the point that embraces all things at once). No longer connected to the material objects one identifies one with the universe. Thus, Gibran discloses humanity through different “mansions” leading to the ultimate reality and the three core chapters aim at a transfusion, and not a transplant. They appeal to the different levels of consciousness that ultimately lead to the one reality, through intuition, integration, syncretization and synthesis. This is the spiritual reality that is envisioned and perceived in multiple shades by different ego centres.

The fifth chapter titled “Summation” encapsulates the recapitulated details from the preceding chapters, and serves as a fitting paean to a literary artist inviting further positive contributions from the academia. It appeals to the reading community to re-examine Gibran’s works and retrieve the embedded wisdom for the betterment of humanity. Orientation towards higher realities, and sustainable living should be the concern of a Gibranite. The study attempted here, is only an introductory foray and the loose strands here have to be picked up and strung into one coherent whole. A suitable critical theory to study such wisdom literature spanning two disparate cultures, yet unbound by the prejudices and limitations of both the cultures could be evolved. It could
also include the science of the soul backed by Quantum Physics. As per the statement of the UNESCO constitution “war arises in the mind of men.” Therefore, in such turbulent times, the ultimate aim of Gibran’s writings may be seen as a means to get this mind stilled, and move towards a new extension of consciousness. The two major critical theories, the Indian Rasa-dhvani doctrine and eco-poetics are employed in chapter II and III respectively in an attempt to distill the essence from perambulatory descriptions, expressions and metaphors. Also in this chapter, suggestions are given and the findings are registered with due acknowledgement that this thesis would have served its purpose if only it equips the readers with the idea that what has been captured is insufficient and that they will have to spin and break their own cocoons to be liberated and soar into space.

1.5. Conclusion

Humanity exists in the physical and material realms, and Absolute consciousness goes beyond these. This involves a collation of experiences that has three important stages. At the beginning, one just experiences reality and absorbs knowledge unconsciously from everything around. The mind has not mastered the technique of handling thoughts and emotions, and one is always pre-occupied. To an individual, who is at this stage, Gibran’s aesthetics opens the gateway towards “truth” through his paintings and writings. The eager reader/sahṛdya enters into an aesthetic experience, enjoys the aesthetic equipoise, by harnessing and cultivating his/her energies in the right direction tentatively and elevates himself/herself to a state of ānanda (bliss).

After having experienced this first stage, the thirsty seeker glides with ease into the next stage of spiritual development, of inter-connectedness with the things around oneself. This again is achieved through Gibran’s difficult, clarifying details narrated with luminous details, care and compassion. The works of Gibran help one to get grounded in
the basic nature of existence – the foundation on which everything else is built. They feed the ego, crystallize it, and then transcend it through the *rasa* experience. In aesthetic consciousness the reader’s outlook becomes amoral, and having reached this point of consciousness, helps one to stretch this experience till one dissolves in the final peak of consciousness. When an artist of the high order pours his very “being” into human souls, contradictions meet, interact and then dissipate in their hearts. The reader is invited to travel on ripples and waves to have a glimpse of the depth, to move with the visible and the presentable towards the invisible and the eternal, cling to the words, and understand the incommensurability at the heart of all linguistic practice and then to move beyond, into the unknown. A new meaning blooms “within” and the search that starts here courses through the next three core chapters leading one towards realization of the Absolute!