CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Arab-American literature, popularly known in the Arabic literary circles as *Mahjar* literature, is known for its adoption of modern literary styles. It has greatly been influenced by the Western literary thoughts. There was a sea-shift in the approach of *Mahjar* writers towards modern Arabic literature. The Western ideas got prominence over the traditional values. Jibran Khalil Jibran says that if the meaning of beauty of thought requires the breaking of rules; break it; if there is no known word to express your idea, borrow or invent one and if syntax stands in the way of need or useful expression, away with the syntax. Arabic literature has traditionally been governed by the classical metric measurement styles. The *Mahjar* writers literally revolted against this literary orthodoxy and adopted free metaphors in their writings. Free thinking from the compulsion of metres, simple as well as easy language, theme and style were employed by the *Mahjar* writers. They wanted to make Arabic literature more people friendly, fascinating and easily understandable. Members of the different literary societies of the *Mahjar* brought a new revolution in Arabic literature. Simple diction, style and stanza form with short metres and techniques of expression borrowed from drama and narratives are the hallmarks of *Mahjar* writing. Apart from literary criticism *Mahjar* writers paid attention towards journalism as well. By the initiative of the *Mahjar* scholars the first Arabic news paper *Kawkab Amrika* started its journey in1892. By 1919, there were nine Arabic newspapers in the land of America. *Al-Huda* was one among the most popular Arabic dailies. Syria played a pivotal role in literary evolution of Arab Americans. Among the prominent literary giants of *Mahjar* literature is Jibran Khalil Jibran, the author of the *Prophet*. Jibran is the most celebrated and widely read the Arab-American writer. Jibran's *Prophet* remained the bestselling book for more than half a century. Another notable writer of *Mahjar* literature is Amin al-Rihani who is

considered as the father of Arab American Literature. His work The Book of Khalid is equally famous as *The Prophet* of Jibran Khalil Jibran.

The thesis is based on the topic entitled *Arab-American Literature: A Comparative Study of Jibran Khalil Jibran and Amin al-Rihani*. It is an important research topic in the present day research scenario. The thesis is divided into five chapters including introduction and conclusion.

Chapter-I introduces the Arab-American Literature. Between the two world wars, a new genre of Arabic literature flourished in the United States of America which is called *Mahjar* Literature or the Arab-American Literature. The writers of this literary movement were influenced by the western thought, culture and literature. They brought a new revolution in Arabic poetry advocating the usage of free verses and simple language without much intricacy.

In the course of history, the Levant fell under the rule of Ottoman Empire; being oppressed by the despotic regime of the caliph, the oppressed people had no other option than to humbly leave their country. In the last few decades of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th century, a group of Arab writers especially those of Lebanon migrated to the North and South America and produced there a literary forum. The writers of this forum wrote not only in Arabic but also in English, Spanish and Portuguese languages.

The literary and political forces of these immigrant Arab talents published many outstanding Arabic periodicals in America and these writers established some literary societies also like *Al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyyah, Al-Usbah al-Andalusia* and *Al-Rabitah al-Adabiyyah*.

The real significance of *Mahjar* literature apart from its own intrinsic merit is that it developed in an alien environment separated both

physically and culturally from its native context and in an atmosphere devoid of literary traditions, socio-political prejudices and pressures. Most of the chief characteristics and salient features of the Arab-American literature reappeared inside the Arab world especially in Egypt. For instance the book on literary criticism *Al-Ghirbal* of Mikhail Nu‘aima was published in Egypt in 1923 with a foreword by Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad.

The *Mahjar* poets were romantic, humanistic and mystical as well. They thought that they lived in an age of their own sensibility and its own expectations of literature. At the same time they adopted a new concept of language which was neither sacred nor profane, rather than a living medium of expression subject to changes and developments. Consequently they stressed to revive Arabic language and tried to restore simplicity and vitality which was destroyed because of stagnant conservatism. The *Mahjar* poets revolted against the traditional system of Arabic prose and poetry.

The idea of liberating influence upon modern Arabic poetry by introducing a new concept was exercised by the *Mahjar* poets. Searching for a quieter and more subdued tone, they turned away from rhetoric and declamation. The *Mahjar* poets concentrated on subjective experience of man in relation to nature and introduced biblical themes and images into metres and stanzas. Moreover, some *Mahjar* writers like Mikhail Nu‘aima composed free verses with light rhythm. Amin al-Rihani experimented with personified poetry which was an imitation of Walt Whitman’s Style. But the views of *Mahjar* poets were rejected by the poets inside the Arab world and their language was severely criticized for not being sufficiently correct.

The *Mahjar* writers entertained a boundary relationship with both Arabic and English traditions. Their cultural root was the main reason for their nostalgic remembrance of the past. They used to write mainly in Arabic and English was their second language for creative writings. Ilya Abu Madi has shown more the feeling of being a stranger than other poets like Rashid Ayyub, Nasib Arida and Mikhail Nuʻaima.

The northern *Mahjar* writers especially Jibran Khalil Jibran, Mikhail Nuʻaima and Amin al-Rihani were influenced by the western romantic literature and American transcendentalists particularly Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, and Whitman. They were all acquainted with American romantic poetry than their counterparts inside the Arab world.

In their elementary education, which they received in western oriented missionary schools in Syria and Lebanon, they were exposed to western thought and literature rather than their own culture. Moreover, in America, they found a new environment which was completely westernized and their experience from the new conditions of life compelled them to search for new ideas. The strain and doubts which the *Mahjar* writers encountered in the new world made them play a decisive role in revitalizing Arabic letters and to shape the sensibility of their fellows who preferred to stay in their homeland.

A large number of contributors are found in the Arab-American literature. The most significant and celebrated writers, poets and philosophers of the *Mahjar* literature are Jibran Khalil Jibran, Amin al-Rihani, Mikhail Nuʻaima, Ilya Abu Madi, Nasib Arida, Abdul Masih al-Haddad, Rashid Ayyub and Nadra al-Haddad

Chapter-II, stuies the life and works of Jibran Khalil Jibran. Jibran Khalil Jibran is considered as one of the most prominent writers of the

Arab-American literature. He is regarded as a man of the East who brought much needed element of spirituality to the West. He even created his own unique literary style. In the 1930s Jibran's works influenced the American popular culture. His *The Prophet* was the best-selling book of the 1920s onwards.

Jibran Khalil Jibran was born and brought up at Bisharri, a lush region in Lebanon. He proved to be a solitary and pensive child who relished the natural surroundings of the cascading falls, the rugged cliffs and the neighbouring green cedars, the beauty of which emerged as a dramatic and symbolic influence to his drawings and writings. When he was a kid of eight years, Jibran's father was accused of tax evasion and was sent to prison as the Ottoman authorities confiscated the Jibrans' property and left them homeless and finally his family migrated to the United States of America in 1895 and settled down in Boston City. Growing up into another impoverished period, Jibran was to recall the pain of the first few years, which left an indelible mark on his life and prompted him to reinvent his childhood memories dispelling the filth, the poverty and the slurs. However, the work of charity institutions in the poor immigrant areas allowed the children of immigrants to attend public schools and kept them off the street. Jibran was the only member of his family to pursue scholastic education. His sisters were not allowed to enter school, frustrated by Middle Eastern traditions as well as financial difficulties and Jibran's remoteness from social life, his pensive nature was deepened, and his mother Kamila was there to help. The mother's independence allowed him to mingle with Boston's social life and explore its thriving world of art and literature.

In 1898, Jibran Khalil Jibran came back to Lebanon and studied Arabic at *Madrasat al-Hikmah* and in 1902, he left for Beirut forever.

During this period the misfortune overpowered him. His sister Sultana died at the age of fourteen. Illness struck again when his mother underwent an operation in February to remove a cancerous tumor. To compound his misery, Jibran was forced to take on the family business and run the goods store, which was abandoned by his half-brother Peter to pursue his fortune in Cuba. This new burden weighed on Jibran's spirit, depriving him from dedicating his time to artistic pursuits. During this time, Jibran tried to shy away from the house, to escape the atmosphere of death, poverty and illness. In the following month, Peter returned to Boston from Cuba fatally sick only to die days later on March 12 of tuberculosis. His mother's cancer continued to spread and she died later that year on June 28, a scene which left Jibran fainting and foaming blood from the mouth.

In 1904, Jibran started writing articles and published them in the immigrant newspaper *Al-Mahjar*. According to Jibran, rules of language were meant to be broken and he went on to advocate Arab émigré writers to break out of tradition and seek an individual style. Throughout his life, Jibran's Arabic writings did not receive the critical acclaim as his English books. Jibran's first Arabic written work came out in 1905 with the publication of *Al-Musiqa* (Music) and in 1906, Jibran published his second Arabic book called *Arais al-Muruj* (The Nymphs of the Valley), a collection of three allegories which take place in the Northern Lebanon. The allegories were heavily influenced by the stories he heard back in Bisharri and his own fascination with the Bible. Jibran was to return to the subject of madness in his English book *Al-Majnun,* whose beginnings can be traced to Jibran's early Arabic writings. Jibran's early Arabic publications were characterized by the use of the irony, the realism of the stories, the portrayal of second-class citizens and the anti-religious tone,

all of which contrasted with the formalistic and traditional Arabic writings. Jibran Khalil Jibran died on 10th April, 1931 at the age of forty eight in New York.

Jibran Khalil Jibran is one of the most daring writers who liberated Arabic literature from its sterile form. He combines prose with the art of the painter, sculptor, musician and poet. He often depicts himself as a lonely poet who is more sensitive than other people and who is capable of revealing eternal truths.

Jibran's writings are known for their prophetic tone against the evils that reigned in his beloved homeland at the time and against other evils that bring humanity to decadence. His message, however, is a healing one. He asserts that this modern world, corrupted by conventions, oppression, and hatred is redeemable through love, good will, and freedom. Jibran's unique poetic expression, characterized by beauty and spirituality, became known as Jibranism. His language touches the inner souls of readers and his parables teach them spiritual lessons. His early short stories, prose poems, and later collections of aphorisms made him widely acclaimed as the greatest of Arab romantics.

As Jibran's interest shifted to mysticism and primitivism, his writings returned again and again to the beauty and purity of nature. He romanticized nature and found in it an inspirational power for his poetry. He identifies the divine essence with the natural world, a pantheism he had absorbed from his readings under Fred Holland Day's tutelage. Jibran's writings establish a mystical union with nature, a relationship of love and harmony. The natural beauty of Jibran's home village Bisharri was a strong source of inspiration and nurture to his imagination. His poetry is nostalgic of the magnificent scenery of his childhood. It portrays

Jibran rejoicing in peace and freedom among the immortal cedars of Lebanon, the famous holy valley of Qadisha, and the mountains of Sannin and Famm al-Mizab.

For Jibran, true religion is not an organized but a liberating and personal one. His poem *The Crucified* echoes his life-long belief that the mission of Jesus was not to build institutions and structures, but to build the human spirit. His interest in the teaching of the Bible, Torah and Buddhism, and in the personalities of Christ, Muhammad and Imam Ali were to have far-reaching influence on his writings. Jibran considered himself as a spokesman of both cultures. The astonishing success of Jibran Khalil Jibran in America is a success matched by no other writer whose mother tongue was not English as he succeeded uniquely in articulating the noblest values of this great country in terms that are powerfully direct and simple, but enlightened by his Oriental soul. Impressed by the great technological achievements of America, and mindful of the material well-being of the majority of its citizens, Jibran viewed his adopted home from the vantage-point of his own cultural heritage and recognized that the picture was incomplete. Consequently he sought to infuse some Eastern mysticism into Western materialism, believing that humanity was best served by a man capable of bestriding the two cultures and acknowledging the virtues of each.

Chapter-III discusses the life and works of Amin al-Rihani. His life and education, his emigration, and his literary career and outputs form core of this chapter. Amin al-Rihani is acknowledged as the Philosopher of Freike. He is also considered as one of the most prominent figures of Arab-American Literature. He is the first author who published a book in English from the East.

Amin al-Rihani was born and brought up at Freike, Lebanon. He was one of the youngest talents who migrated to the United States of America and settled there down permanently. He took his early education in a French missionary school. His father and uncle, having established themselves as merchants in a small cellar in lower Manhattan, soon felt the need for an assistant who could read and write English. Therefore, the boy was taken away from school to become the chief clerk, interpreter and book keeper of the business. Rihani became familiar with Middle Eastern poets in 1897. Among these poets was Abul-Ala al-Maʻarri, whom Rihani discovered to be the forerunner of Omar al-Khayyam. In 1899 he returned to New York and translated some of the quatrains of al-Maʻarri into English.

Amin al-Rihani joined several literary and artistic societies in New York and became a regular contributor to an Arabic daily newspaper *Al-Huda*, published from New York. He wrote about social traditions, religion, national politics and philosophy. He published his first two books in Arabic in 1902 and 1903.

In 1905, Amin al-Rihani returned to his native place and spent there for an ensuing six years of solitude. During this period, Rihani published two volumes of his essays in Arabic. It is a book of allegories and a few short stories and plays. Amin al-Rihani was influenced by Walt Whitman, and introduced free verse in Arabic poetry. His new style of poetry was published in 1905. In 1910, Amin al-Rihani published his famous collection of poems *Al-Rihaniyyat* that established him as a forward thinker and a visionary. As a result, the Egyptian media hailed him as ‘The Philosopher of Freike’. During this same period he published his most popular book *The Book of Khalid.* The illustrations for this book,

which was the first English novel ever written by a Lebanese or Arab writer, were provided by Jibran Khalil Jibran.

On the political front, Amin al-Rihani advocated several causes and worked tirelessly towards these goals: the rapprochement between the East and the West as a major step towards global cultural dialogue, the liberation of Lebanon from the rule of the Ottoman Empire. In 1904 he was entertained, honoured and crowned by laurels by the American Pleiades Club in New York. One of the many receptions in his honour, held in the desert in the shade of the Pyramids, was attended by nearly five thousand guests. The report was cabled on the event to the New York Times, by its owner, Mr. Ochs, who was then in Cairo. He even entertained as guest of honour by diplomats and men of letters in various cities of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Morocco, England, Mexico, and by the Lebanese and Syrian people in New York and Boston. A honourary degree of Doctor of Philosophy was awarded to Rihani by the University of Illinois.

Amin al-Rihani's writings reflect his experiences in America balanced with concerns for freedom and justice in the Arab world. His ideas of Arab unity first occur in fictional form in Khalid's mind as he dreams of the soul of the East, the mind of the West, the builder of a great Empire. The triumph of the Idea, the realization of a great dream: the rise of a great race who has fallen on evil days; the renaissance of Arabia; the reclaiming of her land; the reviving of her glory.

In Rihani's writings one may see the inclusion of his trip to the Arabian Peninsula. He had the earnest desire for Arab unity expand and take on a less ephemeral quality. He actually made the journey to the Arabian Peninsula to meet the Arab kings and ask for unity among them.

His identity also seemed to change in the 1920s. He seemed to identify more with being Arab and was looking for a way, as a Christian Arab, to fit into the dominant Muslim Arab culture. He is looking for this new way of belonging not only for himself but for Arabs in general to make the Arab world stronger.

From an early period of his career, and constantly moving between the East and the West, al-Rihani's main concerns were channeled in two inter-related intellectual pursuits: an active commitment to the cause of his people, and an increasing openness towards, and participation in, the Western literary and cultural life. His interaction with the Arabic communities in New York and Arab societies back home alerted him to the issues of Arab backwardness, ignorance and religious fanaticism.

Rihani's political activism helped crystallize his idea of Pan-Arabism, a most cherished idea in the modern Arab world since the beginning of the 20th century. As early as 1909, he had provided the first territorial definition of the 'Arab homeland' as comprising geographical Syria, Mesopotamia and the Arabian Peninsula.

With his deep appreciation of the Arabic cultural heritage and his pride of being part of this culture, al-Rihani considered it, with the exception of religion, as being the same in the whole Arab world. In this vision, language takes priority over religion. Naturally, Arabic was the first expression of his Arab identity. Of course, al-Rihani acknowledged the Islamic dimension in Arabic culture, which, he insisted, was upheld by Muslims as well as Christians. But he distinguished between Arabism and Islam and asserted the priority of Arabism.

Rihani also recognizes the cultural, social and economic achievements of the Jews in Palestine and throughout the world and

invites the Jews to continue their cultural mission within Palestine without the idea of establishing a Jewish nation there.

The themes and problems central to Rihani's work were typical of many progressive figures in the Arab society in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, such as Muhammad Abduhu, Qasim Amin and Abdur Rahman al-Kawakibi; these writers and thinkers raised the problems of the society and politics of Arab life of the day, striving to resolve them in the interests of progress, which was of great educational importance in the Arab society.

Chapter-IV compares Jibran Khalil Jibran with Amin al-Rihani. The similarities and the dissimilarities between the *Prophet* and the *Book of Khalid* are discussed objectly. Cultural thought of Jibran Khalil Jibran and Amin al-Rihani and the views on democracy, peace and society furnished throughout their writings are concentrated in a great extent. The concept of love of Jibran Khalil Jibran and Amin al-Rihani is shown clearly.

Moreover, this chapter emphasizes the concepts democracy, peace, culture and society imaged by Amin al-Rihani and Jibran Khalil Jibran. According to them democracy, peace, culture and society are the pivotal elements of a common society.

Turkish oppression, cultural death and fear ruled over the Middle East and freedom was a gift and luxury only afforded by those who immigrated in search of it to distant lands. The Napoleonic conquest of Egypt and Mohammad Ali's rebellion against the Sultanate was the first sparks to trigger Arab Renaissance and nationalism. European Christian missionaries' schools opened in Lebanon and Egypt to feed souls hungry

for knowledge and freedom. As a result, democratic principles began to bloom in a somewhat shy cultural outburst at home and abroad.

Thousands of Arabs, specifically from Levant, took up the search of a new life that would offer them recognition, self-respect, freedom and success; hence there was the birth of groups of scholars, painters, philosophers, poets and journalists such as Jibran Khalil Jibran, Mikhail Nu‘aima, Amin al-Rihani and many others. These scholars wasted no time and spared no effort in their search for knowledge, self actualization and fame. Their souls displayed loyalty to their new homeland, but their hearts remained deeply rooted in their ancestral countries. They experienced in their new home freedom, liberty, justice, respect, culture and peace as they were exposed to the writings and thoughts of great Western scholars such as J.J. Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, John Locke, Thomas Carlisle and many others. Al-Rihani and Jibran Khalil Jibran’s views, definition and perception of the modern socio-economic system as they based it on a triangular concept beginning with education and culture, leading to the formation of democratic institutions and practices, and culminating in human development and peace.

Amin al-Rihani and Jibran Khalil Jibran considered themselves as spokesmen of both Arab and American cultures. They admired America’s achievements and its value of individualism, dynamism, and freedom, while they also praised the Arabs’ contributions to the world, but advised them to evade the past and build one’s own future, and to adapt the good aspects of Western civilization instead of blind imitation. Amin al-Rihani and Jibran Khalil Jibran appealed the new generation of the Arab-Americans to be proud of both the Eastern and Western backgrounds.

However, the cultural dualism of Amin al-Rihani and Jibran Khalil Jibran experienced different roles among the literary circles. Nevertheless, it could be argued that Jibran Khalil Jibran and Amin al-Rihani balanced both the Eastern and Western sides of their identities and came to resolve their cultural divisions.

Likewise, Amin al-Rihani and Jibran Khalil Jibran are the lovers of many cultural thoughts and visions; they researched, read and travelled, and actually lived the principles they believed in, proclaimed and fought for. These convictions turned al-Rihani and Jibran into a defender and fervent disciple of democratic principles and a resolute promoter of culture and peace.

Both Jibran Khalil Jibran and Amin al-Rihani praised technology that has brought to humanity the telephone, electrical equipment and modern transportation, but in his opinion such technology is not able to develop the county's culture and soul. It might help the monarch become more despotic and more fanatic. It does not necessarily educate him in the art of government.

Education and culture cannot be limited to specifically selected subjects or issues treated and presented to the reader from a very subjective, often narrow-minded and prejudiced point of view.

For both Jibran Khalil Jibran and Amin al-Rihani, true education cannot be subjected to censorship by ignorant, narrow-minded and self-appointed judges. True education is above censorship. It is the true expression of freedom, culture and democracy. Education is the light that flows from the Eternal Truth. The people must be exposed to all types of cultures and writings so that they may learn to scrutinize, analyze and enjoy acquiring information to reach a better understanding not only of

their own cultures but of those surrounding Muslims in the west prefer Muslims and so consequently peacefully co-exist with others.

They warn that if the government fails to wipe out the fortresses of ignorance, soon ignorance itself will destroy the walls of the government. They even call upon the Christians, Muslims and followers of other religion to set aside their differences, open up their minds, and free themselves from their prejudices and blind fanaticism. Let the government build schools where all the children would grow together in love, respect, and unity he pleaded. Rihani was not an atheist and anti-religious man. Just on the contrary, he believed in the most sublime doctrine of love, fraternity, freedom, coexistence and peace. He rejects religious practices and teachings if they lead to violence, blood, destruction and oppression of the people. He refers to the crusades and other religious wars in these words. They spilled human blood in rivers in the name of religion; they destroyed the sources of life and the monuments of civilizations in the name of religion. They covered the earth with human bones in the name of religion. They filled the sky with poison and darkness in the name of religion. They reproduce and live under tyranny and misery in the name of religion. Chapter-V i.e. the final chapter briefly discloses the findings of the thesis and it follows a systematic bibliography.