

# Critical Analysis of Khalil Gibran's Poem *Fear* and its Application to Life

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**Abstract-** Khalil Gibran was a Lebanese-American writer, Poet, Philosopher and Visual Artist. Khalil Gibran's poem 'Fear' is a simple and short poem, but it has a message useful to our life. In this poem Khalil Gibran expresses his philosophical views to overcome fear in our lives. Through this poem, the Poet sends a powerful message to the generations of human beings who fear losing their Identity, fear to accept the changes and fear to face the challenges of life.

Khalil Gibran was one of the Key figures in the Romantic Movement that transformed Arabic Literature in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote both in English and Arabic. Gibran explored different literary forms like "poetry, parables, short stories, fables, political essays, letters, and aphorisms." Gibran's simple and direct style was a revelation and an inspiration to the readers of his poems. His main themes cover longing, alienation, security, nature, death and exploration of religious themes.

The objective of this paper is to critically appreciate Khalil Gibran's poem 'Fear' and its powerful message given to the generations of human beings. This paper also aims to discuss the application the poem to our practical life.

**Key Words-** Allegory - Alliteration - Anaphora- Aphorisms - Assonance – Clericalism - Consonance- Enjambment- Irony - Khalil Gibran- Literary devices- Ottoman Empire- - parables- - Personification

## I. INTRODUCTION

Khalil Gibran's poem 'Fear' is a simple and short poem, but it has a powerful message useful to our life. In this poem Khalil Gibran expresses his philosophical views to overcome fear in our lives. Through this poem, the Poet sends a powerful message to the generations of human beings who fear losing their Identity, fear to accept the changes and fear to face the challenges of life.

## II. BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF KHALIL GIBRAN

Khalil Gibran was a Lebanese-American writer, Poet, Philosopher and Visual Artist. He was born in Lebanon on 06, January, 1883 in a small village called Bsharri, which was part of Ottoman Empire at that time. He migrated to United States of America in 1895, along with his mother and siblings. He got his school education in Boston. At school his teacher noticed his creativity in drawing. In 1904, he displayed his drawings and in 1905 he published his first book of poems in Arabic language. Thus began his career as an artist and writer at the same time.

Then from 1908 to 1910 he studied Art in Paris and during his stay in Paris he came in touch with Syrian rebel politicians. His writings reflected Anti-clericalism and they were banned by Ottoman authorities. In 1911, he settled in New York and continued his literary and artistic creations. In 1920, he re-founded Pen League with his fellow poets. In 1931 Khalil Gibran died of health issues and was cremated at his native village in Lebanon. But his poems like 'The Prophet' 'A Tear and a Smile', 'Song of the Flower', 'Fear' still resonate in this world even after a century of their writing.

## III. KHALIL GIBRAN, AS A WRITER

Khalil Gibran was a famous writer of Romantic Movement. He was very much influenced by European Modernists of 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was one of the important writers in the Romantic Movement that transformed Arabic Literature in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote both in English and Arabic. Gibran explored different literary forms like "poetry, parables, short stories, fables, political essays, letters, and aphorisms."

Gibran's simple and direct style was a revelation and an inspiration to the readers of his poems. His main

themes cover longing, alienation, security, nature, death and exploration of religious themes. He was a central figure of Arabic literary modernism and his reputation as writer kept on increasing. Gibran's reputation in the English-speaking world is mixed. His works have been hugely popular, making him the best-selling American poet of the twentieth century.

Gibran was active in New York based Arab American Literary Group called Pen league, which was a subset of Mahjar Movement. The members of this group publish both in Arabic and English. Throughout his life Gibran published nine books in Arabic and eight books in English. His literary and artistic output is highly influenced by the Bible, Fredrich Nietzsche and William Blake.

His Arabic works are not received positively by the critics of the Arab world, because it has the traces of English syntax and influences of European writers. His English works are not received positively by the English critics, because his ideology and thoughts are from the Arab world. He can be estimated as a highly talented writer at wrong place.

#### IV. LANGUAGE OF GIBRAN

Regarding Gibran's language in general, both in Arabic and English, it is observed that he has chosen less idiomatic vocabulary, which is simple and can be easily understood by the common people. The Rhetorical decoration present in the Arabic literature, which is difficult for the common readers, is also missing in the works of Khalil Gibran. The simple and direct style of Khalil Gibran attracted the common readers.

#### V. KHALIL GIBRAN'S POEM 'FEAR'

'Fear' is one of the famous poems written by Khalil Gibran. In this poem, he expresses his philosophical understanding of overcoming fear in our life. He took River as an object to discuss the fear that human beings encounter in their life. This poem showcases Gibran's profound wisdom about overcoming fear and accepting the challenges in our life.

#### VI. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Khalil Gibran belongs to the generation of human beings, who faced the World War for the first time in

the history of human beings. In the First World War (1914-18) millions of people died and Billions of people were disturbed physically and psychologically. During those days world was ruled by fear and people suffered from the fear for existence, fear for Identity, fear to face changes, fear for life. Through this poem the Poet tried to bring comfort and solace to the world, fearing from the devastating effects of World War I.

#### VII. STRUCTURE & FORM

The poem is written in free-verse without specific rhyme scheme and meter. There are 19 lines in simple language. This poem consists of three couplets, one tercet, one quatrain, and a six-line stanza. The lines are loosely arranged throughout the poem. There is no specific rhyme and metric scheme, but with close observation, we can find the poet's unintentional usage of iambic feet. The rising rhythm of an iamb encourages the readers to face their fears.

#### VIII. MEANING

The Poem 'Fear' gives us a glimpse of how a River feels before merging into an ocean. Here a River starts its journey from the peak of a mountain and transverses through forests and villages. Before entering the vast Ocean it trembles with fear and looks back at its path of journey. In front there is a big ocean and it feels that it is going to disappear in the ocean.

*"And in front of her,  
she sees an ocean so vast,  
that to enter  
there seems nothing more  
than to disappear  
forever."*

At this juncture Poet says the River cannot go back and there is no other way to accept its merging into the Ocean. Poet philosophically says-

*"But there is no other way.  
The river cannot go back."*

He suggests the river to move ahead to enter the Ocean. He says River's fear will disappear by entering into the ocean. At the end when the Rivers fears for losing its identity due to merging into the Ocean, the Poet tries to console her. He says the merging is not disappearing into ocean, but becoming the Ocean.

*"The river needs to take  
the risk"*

*of entering the ocean  
because only then will fear  
disappear,  
because that's where the  
river will know  
it's not about  
disappearing into the  
ocean,  
but of becoming the  
ocean."*

#### IX. POETIC DEVICES

Gibran used the following poetic devices in this poem "Fear".

*Allegory:* Although the poem is about the emotions of a River, it has hidden message to the human beings. Through the reference to the river, the Poet addresses the readers. He suggests them to take risks and not to hold back.

*Alliteration:* The poet used words like "she sees" and "to take," which begin with the same sounds to create internal rhyming.

*Enjambment:* The stanzas consist of a single sentence broken into many lines; for example, the lines: "She looks back at the path she has traveled,/ from the peaks of the mountains,/ the long winding road crossing forests and villages." The use of small letters at the beginning of each line denotes that they are parts of a single sentence.

*Personification:* Throughout the poem, the river is given human qualities. This is indicated in phrases like: "a river trembles with fear," "The river needs to take the risk," "She looks back at the path...", etc.

*Irony:* The irony is that Khalil told the river that, merging with the ocean as a risk, at the same time, he says it is inevitable by saying "But there is no other way."

*Assonance:* The vowel sound "o" is prominently seen in the line: "the long winding road crossing forests and villages."

*Consonance:* The consonant sound "s" is heard repeatedly in the line: "she sees an ocean so vast."

*Repetition:* The literary device Repetition is used to stress the core message of the poem. The words "go back" are repeated in the poem thrice in consecutive lines to stress the core message.. "The river cannot go back./ Nobody can go back/ To go back is impossible in existence."

*Anaphora:* Anaphora is the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of each line of a poem. In the lines: "because only then will fear disappear/ because that's when the river will know," the word 'because' is repeated.

#### X. MESSAGE

Khalil Gibran's poem "Fear" deals with the universal fear that each and every one of us faces in life. The fear of merging into the ocean refers to different types of fears human beings face in their life like fear of losing identity, fear of risk, fear of failure, fear of death etc.

The poem denotes the journey of becoming something. Humans fear during their life journey. It is about the fear of leaving comfort zone and taking risks to achieve something larger than life. In this journey of life, we lose many dear things, but the process of moving forward should not stop. As the stream of the river cannot flow back, so is our life. This poem teaches us to overcome fear and to take risk to achieve something great.

Through the emotions of the river, here the poet sends a powerful message to the readers, who fear losing their identity, death, change, being forgotten in this universe. He advises people to accept the fact that there is no other option but to move forward. They must take risks to achieve success and believe in themselves. Thus, the message of the poem is "overcoming fear".

#### XI. APPLICATION OF THE POEM 'FEAR' TO LIFE

"Fear" is a poem of changing consciousness. It is a poem with a powerful message about human psyche. The central theme of this poem 'Overcoming Fear' can be applied in different situations of our lives.

In the Indian context, after marriage the Bride also faces the emotions faced by the river in this poem. The Bride trembles with fear to go to Mother-in-law's house. She looks back her comfortable life at her birth house. But she has no other way. She can't go back in life. Marriage is completed. She must move forward to live with her husband. At this juncture she may fear that she is losing her identity and disappearing into a new family. By applying Khalil Gibran's message, the bride should overcome the fear by saying to herself

that she is not disappearing into a new family, but becoming a new family.

In another example, when a student finishes his education and finds for first job, he also faces the fear of the river mentioned in the poem. In front there is a big ocean like company. He fears to enter the company, which is very new. New working atmosphere, new colleagues, new job rules make him fearful. He looks back at his happy childhood and joyful college days. But he can't go back, because "to go back is impossible in existence." At this juncture he may fear that he is losing her identity and disappearing into the company. By applying Khalil Gibran's message, the student should overcome the fear by saying to himself that he is not disappearing into the Company, but becoming a part of the Company.

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