



# Impact of Spiritual Writings on Love, Marriage and Family: A Critical Study of *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran

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## Abstract

Ever since the world began, the significant, unique, and the most powerful dimensions of human life and experience is Spirituality. Across the nations, families, marriage, love, and relationships are nurtured by means of spirituality. It is believed spiritual beliefs, practices, readings, and writings have tethered, secured, and nourished families ever since the world came into existence. Spirituality, in general, is a broad concept that refers to the supreme, unsurpassable divine beliefs and practices experienced in our daily life and relationships as well. It is considered as heart and soul of the religion. The two words 'spirituality' and 'religion' are often misinterpreted allowing the followers to carry a blurred vision of them. Thus, it is important to distinguish the difference between religion and spirituality. Religion is an institutionalized faith system with an organized structure, set of doctrines, practices, and beliefs each community follows. It is widely acclaimed that spiritual writings provide standard set of instructions to the world in order to maintain their personal virtues, relationships, conducts, and family life. Nowadays, families began following multiple approaches to spirituality including religious practices, spiritual writings and so forth. The significant importance of spiritual writings in our daily life is that those writings become the part of our life as and when individuals start following them. In a nutshell, spiritual writings provide a deep-seated spiritual nourishment in the life of an individual thereby allowing individuals attain a balance between their social and personal life. The current chapter addresses the role of spiritual writings on concepts such as love, marriage, and life in general. It examines the impact of spirituality on the notions of love, marriage, and family with special reference to Kahlil Gibran's 'The Prophet'. In a nutshell, the current paper analyzes the meaning of spirituality in socio-cultural context and its vivacious changes in a family life cycle. Based on the secondary literature available, this study aims to come up with unique findings. It is observed that with spiritual wisdom, individuals understand the connection between god, life, love, marriage, family, and relationship. In other words, spiritual writings will exert a greater impact on love, marriage, and family. And the spiritual lines of Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* on different notions such as love, marriage, family, relationships and so forth will have great influence on the individuals. Tersely, the detailed survey on the topic says that Gibran's *The Prophet* that comprises the idealistic spiritual and psychological anecdotes on all the basic aspects of human life, teaches an individual all life lessons that are crucial while living in a community and at the same time aids to lead a peaceful life on earth.

**Keywords:** Spirituality, Love, Marriage, Spiritual writings, Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet

## 1. Introduction

Spirituality has always played a vital role in the life of every social being. To understand the significance of spirituality, firstly, difference between religion and spirituality should be addressed. Often, these two words are misinterpreted, blurred, polarized, and conflicted in both reality and literature. Religion is nothing but a defined set of instructions, beliefs, practices, and doctrines which are followed within a community. In short religion is an institutionalized faith system that is well-organized and structured. Religion provides theological teachings to the common man which enables individuals to maintain and preserve their personal virtues, behavioral conduct, family, love, and relationships. The religious teachings supports its followers in the need of hour. They carry rituals, ceremonies, traditions, customs, and principles that connect families and relationships in a larger community. In a broader perspective, spirituality is considered to be the heart and soul of the religion which can be commonly experienced outside the religious teachings and practices. Spirituality allows individuals to invest their unwavering faith in humanistic values that are not religious (Walsh, 2012).

To have a deeper understanding of the impact of spiritualism on family, marriage, relationship, and love, it is important to describe the concept of family, marriage, love, and relationships in general. Most of the societies run based on the key concepts namely family and marriage. Basically, family and marriage are complex relationships that evokes interest to the sociologists. Marriage, is generally defined as legal contract between two people. According to Strong et.al, (2010) the most intimate relationship in the life of an individual is marriage as it fulfils the basic needs of a human being in their life. In short, marriage is a legal union of a man and a woman, which allows them to unite sexually and maintain the reproductive cycle. This union demands the individuals to be cooperative in all terms and hence it is considered permanent (Srivatsa and Yuthika, 2017). Coming to the notion of family, sociologists define family as a structure that fills the roles of an individual such as mother, father, child, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather, and so forth. In a family, one person relates himself or herself with the other and hence relationships evolves. Relationships are evolved when a person is born into that family. Therefore, marriage is the institution which forms a family and other relationships along with the society (Strong et.al, 2010). At this juncture, it seems important to say that it doesn't necessarily mean that marriage leads to the formation of family. Even without marriage, families and relationships can be formed. However, marriages lead to the essential formation of family. Hence, it can be said that marriage, family, and relationships are complementary to each other with the addition of love and spiritualism to make the relationships brighter than ever. Past researches have proved that spiritualism allows individuals to maintain, balance, and preserve personal faiths, conducts, behavior, and so on. Spiritual writings play an important role in the life of an individual as they guide an individual in their actions, conduct, and behaviors (Walsh, 2011). Keeping these facts in mind, the current chapter tries to analyze the role of spiritualism on love, marriage, and family with special reference to *The Prophet* authored by Kahlil Gibran, an Arab-American.

## 2. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim and other objectives of the study are discussed below. The primary aim of this study is to analyze the impact of spiritual writings on love, marriage, and family with special reference to *The Prophet* written by Kahlil Gibran. To achieve the primary aim, the study comes up with secondary objectives which has helped to develop and achieve the main aim of the study. The secondary objectives of the study are:

1. To define the concepts of family, marriage, and love with special reference to spiritualism
2. To explain the significance of spiritual writings
3. To analyze the major themes in the selected work, *The Prophet*
4. To explore the institutions of love, marriage, and family through *The Prophet*

## 3. Review of Literature

The aim of literature review is to specify, justify, identify, analyze and evaluate the existing literature in a systematic manner. Likewise it highlights the limitations of existing relevant literature. The main purpose of literature review is to amass adequate knowledge of domain, prevent overlapping and repetition, identify gaps

in research and open for future researches. Therefore, the current study presents literature review along with a theoretical model deduced from the light of existing knowledge. For this, the current study discusses the significance of spiritual writings, major themes in *The Prophet*, and explore the institution of family, marriage, and love through Gibran's, *The Prophet*. The review of literature will comprise the major portion of the paper as the results and findings will also be based on the critical review of this section of the paper. The following subsections will provide an orderly study of the literature which is relevant to the current study.

### 3.1 Significance of Spiritual Writings

Spirituality tend to outshine one's individual self by fostering a sense of meaning, harmony, connection, and wholeness with all other forms of nature. It allows people to maintain relationships, family bonds, and life with an extended kinship, with the whole universe. Therefore, spirituality can be expanded in different ways, need not necessarily be religious. Those who refuse to affiliate themselves with religious teachings and beliefs may also lead spiritual lives. Hence, it is not necessary that spirituality should always be associated with religious beliefs. Instead, spirituality permits an individual to invest their personal faith in a supreme belief, which holds, transcendent values to lead a human life, family, and other relationships. In fact, spiritual values embrace secular and humanistic values that guides the actions, conduct and relationships of common man. These spiritual resources include meditation, prayer, and other contemplative practices (Sani et.al, 2018).

Spiritual writings act as the foundation for every society. Without their presence, the whole society is violated. The culture of a society acts as the sphere of spiritual life. It is considered as natural because any nation is culturally linked to the spiritual culture. Culture is the sum total of both material and spiritual wealth accumulated by humanity and transmitted to the upcoming generations. The development of culture is possible by adopting the best examples of national and spiritual heritage (Abdullayeva, 2017). Thus, spiritual writings aim to develop rational relationships between different generations, and historical periods. Additionally, they provide indivisibility, integrity and eventually impact the society. Spiritual values combine the complex values that are within the scope of certain rules and norms. These spiritual values provide utmost satisfaction to an individual by fulfilling all his spiritual needs. It is believed that spiritual values serves the intellectual growth and development of an individual, thereby, helps to achieve moral perfection. In other words, spirituality is regarded as a universal and intellectual aspect of human life and experience. Therefore, spiritual values tend to cover all the aspects of human life, human activities, human actions, and so forth. In a nutshell, spiritual values reflects multidimensional process of an individual with respect to their culture, experience, contexts and society. Therefore it can be argued that spiritual writing carry moral qualities and spiritual qualities which significantly impacts the society in all aspects.

### 3.2 Major Themes in *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran

Before going for the detailed analysis of the themes of Gibran's greatest work *The Prophet*, it is better to understand Gibran's disposition through the reviews of some of the renowned gibranic biographer, scholar and philosopher. And the critical work *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet (1998)* by Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins, who were the famous gibranic scholar at the very outset of Kahlil Gibran Research, is a good place to start with. Apart from the various biographical aspects and critical commentary, this book clearly reflects the highly mystical and spiritual essence of Gibran. We come to know that Gibran's spiritual self is a combined result of Christian mysticism and Sufism. These two factors come up with the seminal character Almustafa, the spiritual prophet of "East and West" (Bushrui and Jenkins 9). Again Mikhail Naimy, a close friend and companion of Gibran, wrote a beautiful critical prose *Kahlil Gibran: His Life and His Works* in 1974 and turns out to be a reliable scholar and biographer of Gibran. This work which was originally published in Arabic and later in English, acknowledges that charms of Gibran's spiritual discoveries actually result in the very inception of the ever soothing handbook *The Prophet* that conveys the "mystic bond of love" (Naimy 185). But Naimy is not credulous about his friend's sense of compassion and spirituality. He thinks Gibran's spiritual repercussion is, to some extent, due to his will to power and greatness as Gibran often does not follow his preachings in real life. However, another biographer and scholar Robin Waterfield is



also a noteworthy source of academic study on Gibran. His *Prophet: The Life and Times of Kahlil Gibran*(1998) is a critical account that throws light on the disparity Gibran's sincerity and poetic disposition. But the scholars who were insinuating Gibran's reputation, ultimately concede him as a pioneer the New Age Movement<sup>1</sup> that rejects institutional religion and embraces subjective spirituality. Now let's critically analyse the major themes in *The Prophet*, one of the best selling books of all time.

According to Gibran, the external world is deprived of care, love, and peace. The world is disfigured in terms of morality and ethics. In order to get rid of the evil, Gibran suggests the different ways to preach in this modern world. After the World War I, the whole world has been destroyed and thus through his works, Gibran teaches the ways to eliminate the vicious, corrupt, and sinful thoughts. Traces of spirituality is found in the world after the First World War. This section apparently throws light on Gibran's thoughts, ideas, understanding, and observations on different themes such as love, marriage, friendship, relationships, family, work, and so forth. It is observed that Gibran is highly influenced by other religions such as Christianity, Sufism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Earlier studies claims that Gibran through his works has tried to balance the Eastern Spirituality and Western thoughts. However, his notable work '*The Prophet*', has an appealing charm which attracts the reader's attention and transform all the knowledge. In other words, Gibran's *The Prophet* is widely considered as the beloved poetry with full of knowledge and wisdom, and that is usually followed at marriages, funerals and others across the world (Al- Khazraji et.al, 2013).

Gibran, through his masterpiece, *The Prophet* aims to share his spiritual writings and sensitivities to the readers and listeners. He tries to present a few aspects of life and the problems the world faces in general which are of universal interest. According to Al- Khazraji, Abdullah &Wong, (2013), Gibran adopts all his principles, messages, and thoughts from all religions and presents a world that is free of problems. Through Al-Mustafa, Gibran tries to present a world with full of teachings, support, and guidance adopted from spirituality. In other words, Gibran presents his views on various traditions, customs, disciplines, practices, beliefs, and so on through the mouth of Al-Mustafa (Buck, 2010). Al- Mustafa is represented as a man of wisdom, knowledge, and with a great vision just like Gibran. Gibran teaches all the life values such as moral, ethical, and spiritual, which include marriage, love, children, friendship, work, clothes, dress, pleasure, relationships, family, and death through the mouth of Al-Mustafa. Hence it can be argued that *The Prophet* is the reflection of Gibran himself who puts all his efforts to unify varied beliefs, faiths, and religions.

The most important theme of *The Prophet* is nothing but the unshakable power of love, unity, and respect which heals the universal pain. Besides, unity of all religions and humanity serves as other underlying themes. Thus, Gibran tries to present a world with a humanist message which serves all cultures, religions, and times. In any relationship, the most important element that keeps it alive is love. Love is the only feeling which is never compromised and is always associate with happiness thereby leading to less frustration, depression, and zero anxiety. Love is the most recurrent theme that runs across *The Prophet*, where it reveals the inner secrets of an individual's heart to a spiritual being. To put it differently, love replaces spirituality and turns into the heart of God. The relationship between love and life is constantly discussed in the work. Love is constantly linked to several other aspects of life. It possesses the ability to transform, elevate, and enrich an ordinary to supreme or sublime level. For instance, in "On Work", Al-Mustafa preaches that work when done with love reflects love and enables the worker to connect with God (Al- Khazraji et.al, 2013).

The other recurrent and significant theme in *The Prophet* is relationship between God and human beings. There are several instances in *The Prophet* where the relationship between God and human being is revealed. For instance, in the chapter titled "On Crime and Punishment", the prophet states that all human beings are basically good. Any presence of evil within an individual is considered as apart of "god himself" or "unblemished god-self". In addition to, the same poem narrates the significance of God's relationship with the spiritual evolution of human being. To be clear, human beings innately have divine aspects namely human and unhuman. The prophet teaches the world that the human divine aspect is in close relationship with God and hence it stand spiritually close to God. Likewise, in the chapters, "On Good and Evil" and "On Prayer",

<sup>1</sup>. The New Age Movement, which became prominent in the 1970S and 1980S, had focus on spirituality outside religious asceticism.

the prophet discusses the pursuit of the God-Self. He asserts the “longing for your giant self lies in your goodness” (41), which implies that understanding one’s own self is an act of goodness and can relate to god himself. The consciousness of the expanding one to giant self is observed in prayers and hence can be described as the spiritual “expansion of yourself into the living ether” (42). In simple words, one can experience god in his prayers, work, passion, love, relationship, and several other aspects. Thus it can be concluded that god’s relationship with human beings finds expression in several aspects of life such as work, passion, love, patience, knowledge and so forth.

The third prominent and recurrent theme in *The Prophet* is the relationship between joy and life. In the chapter “On Joy and Sorrow”, the prophet discusses on the nature of joy stating that joy can never be separated from sorrow and hence is termed as “sorrow unmasked” (18). It is declared that spiritual and emotional extremes of joy and sorrow should be in balance with one rising as the other falls. The prophet says that the source of joy is the source of sorrow. Only when one experiences deeper sorrow, he/she will be able to enjoy greater heights of joy. Likewise, the prophet teaches about joy in other relationships as well in other chapters. For instance, in “On Marriage”, the prophet advises husband and wife to “sing and dance together and be joyous” (9); in “On Friendship” the prophet commends the sharing of “all thoughts, all desires, all expectations” (36), because sharing always gifts joy in the life of other individual; in “On Giving”, the prophet says that the act of generosity is praised with joy and “those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward” (11). Giving to those who are in needs is always celebrated as a joy that is greater than giving; in “On Pain”, the prophet advises that joy is linked to even the most profound emotional and spiritual pain. Such pain is necessary and stems from “the breaking of the shell that encloses [a person's] understanding” (2); in “On Work,” the prophet says that work performed in love reflects love. Seeds will be sown with tenderness, and the harvest reaped with joy. Finally, the prophet teaches the virtue of praying in times of joy. The prophet tells the people, “You pray in your distress and in your need” (42) the prophet then urges them to “pray also in the fullness of your joy and in your days of abundance” (42). All these themes will have a significant impact on the perceptions of an individual towards each of the concepts discussed in *The Prophet*.

### 3.3 Exploring the Institutions of Love, Marriage and Family through *The Prophet*

According to Al- Khazraji et.al, (2013), love is the most prominent theme discussed with reference to its relationship to life. Most of the human beings definitely come across love in their life and thus it is the most recurrent theme. Love is an emotion or feeling which is carried away with several other emotions such as gratitude, grace, and happiness. It is widely accepted that love can bring changes in the life of an individual. While dealing with children, the emotion love is essential. Besides, while at work, love is essential as it fulfills life. Just as Love brings workers near to God, so with friendship. The above sentence can be justified in the lines: “Much have we loved you. But speechless was our love, and with veils has it been veiled.”(5)

The institution of love carries a sense of appreciation in life, sense of gratitude, and sense of happiness in the life of an individual. As love is considered to be self-sufficient, it is free and purifies the human soul. The path of love need not always be pleasure some and peaceful. The prophet advises his followers that love might be painful, but is sacred. The lines given below substantiate that the path of love can be painful and at the same time sacred:

For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as  
he is for your growth so is he for your pruning.

When you love you should not say, "God is in my heart," but  
rather, I am in the heart of God."

Love has no other desire but to fulfil itself. (*The Prophet*,7)

Likewise, the institution of marriage requires unity, togetherness, and love. The prophet describes that marriage should keep up love as well as space, as the individuals involved in are two specific identities. Hence, the individuals should not be bound by possessiveness, which leads to conflicts in a relationship. The following lines speak about the institution of marriage:

Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.  
 Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same  
 loaf.  
 Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of  
 you be alone ,  
 Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping. (*The Prophet*, 9)

Likewise, the prophet advises parents of a family stating that children should experience the love of parents. Within the family, individuals should not be imposed with restrictions which might lead to replications. Thus, imposing norms and rules within a family should be avoided that ultimately avoids replications within the family. To be clear, children should not be imposed on with strict rules and norms within the family as they do not belong to anybody , not even to the parents. They have their individual selves, their own world. Hence Gibran says :

‘Your children are not your children.  
 They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
 They come through you but not from you’ (*The Prophet*, 10)

It is generally believed that a successful marriage requires falling in love many times, with the same person. In the institution of marriage, people should accept each other which remains the key factor for any relation. In any relationship, especially in marriage, individuals should fulfil the other person's desires, appreciate them for their success, support them for their failures, and appreciate their thinking, attitude, and individualism. Individuals stand for each other in need, care for each other's health, share each and everything with each other. It determines the relationship of people be it within in a family, relationship, marriage, or love. Implementing all these above said qualities, any relationship can have a better experience. Individuals in marriage, family or love enjoy each and every moment which eventually effects the upbringing of the future generation. The prophet, in the chapter “On Marriage”, talks about love and marriage and says that couples exist in joy and peace without any kind of bondage or possession.

#### 4. Conclusion

The current study discussed the impact of spiritual writings on love, marriage, and family in general. The main aim of the study was to analyze the role of spirituality or spiritual writings on love, marriage, family with special reference to Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*. From the detailed literature review conducted, it can be concluded that spiritual writings on different notions such as love, marriage, family, relationships and so forth will have great influence on the individuals. It is found that with spiritual wisdom, individuals understand the connection between god, life, love, marriage, family, and relationship. Through the aphoristic delineations of the basic aspects of human life with keen psychological observation captioned in the poetry compilation *The Prophet* the life of an individual can be changed, worth-living and soothing as they teaches life values such as love, marriage, family, relation, happiness, joy, sorrow, work, giving, prayer and so on. To conclude, the prophet Al-Mustafa in *The Prophet* of Gibran has tried to preach the entire human community and it had a great influence on human life.

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