**Prophetic Views & East and West Reconciliation: Multiculturalism in the works of Ameen Rihani**

**Abstract**

This article examines the literary and philosophical contributions of Ameen Rihani (1876–1940), a pioneering Lebanese American writer whose bicultural identity and visionary works positioned him as a critical bridge between Eastern and Western civilizations. This study holds considerable academic value as it highlights the overlooked contributions of Ameen Rihani, a key yet underexplored figure in Arab-American Literature. By examining his role in bridging Arab and Western cultural traditions, it offers important insights into current debates on identity, multiculturalism, and global exchange. The research explores how literature can rise above political boundaries by engaging with deeper questions about human existence. It also provides useful frameworks for scholars working across literary theory, cultural studies, and philosophy. Overall, the study combines historical depth with theoretical insight, making it highly relevant to understanding cultural hybridity in a globalized world. Focusing on his seminal novel *“The Book of Khalid” (1911),* the first English-language novel by an Arab author , collection essays, *“The Path of Vision” (1910),* the study explores Rihani’s advocacy for intercultural dialogue, reconciliation, and a synthesis of spiritual and material values. Through an analysis of Rihani’s bilingual writings, political essays, and travel literature, the article underscores his role in shaping the Mahjar (immigrant) literary movement and modern Arab American identity. It highlights his critiques of both Eastern stagnation and Western materialism, as well as his calls for Arab unity, secular reform, and global solidarity rooted in shared humanistic principles. Central to Rihani’s legacy is his prophetic vision of a harmonized world, symbolized by the “Great City,” where Eastern spirituality and Western progress coalesce. The Cultural Theory Post-Colonialism Theory and Orientalism will be followed in this study. The study situates his ideas within broader discourses on globalization, acculturation, and resistance to Colonialism, while drawing connections between his early 20th-century insights and contemporary movements like the Arab Spring. By interrogating themes of identity, freedom, and ethical governance, the article demonstrates how Rihani’s works prefigured modern debates on multiculturalism and transnationalism. His emphasis on mutual respect, nonviolent activism, and the transformative power of literature remains strikingly relevant, offering a timeless framework for addressing cultural divides. Ultimately, this research reaffirms Rihani’s stature as a foundational figure in Arab American literature and a visionary thinker whose ideals continue to inspire global dialogue and social change. To sum up, this study about Rihani literary and philosophical contributions offers nuanced insights into cultural hybridity, fostering a dialogue that transcends geographical and ideological boundaries. Future researchers can draw upon Rihani’s vision to explore themes of coexistence, identity negotiation, and cross-cultural understanding in both historical and contemporary contexts.

***Keywords:*** *Ameen Rihani, Arab American Literature, East-West Dialogue, Globalization, Multiculturalism, Reconciliation, Integration,*

**Introduction: -**

This study examines Ameen Rihani’s literary and philosophical contributions as a pioneering Lebanese American writer whose work bridges Eastern and Western cultures. Central to the analysis is “The Book of Khalid” (1911), the first English-language novel by an Arab author, which explores Lebanese immigrants’ struggles with cultural dislocation, identity, and spiritual belonging in New York. Rihani juxtaposes Eastern spirituality and intellectual traditions with Western scientific progress and egalitarianism, advocating for mutual understanding and synthesis. His critique of both societies Eastern dogmatism and Western materialism reflects a universalist vision shaped by American Transcendentalism and Middle Eastern spirituality. Rihani’s ideal of a transcendent “superman” figure, capable of harmonizing global traditions (Sheikh, 1972), underscores his prophetic call for a morally unified “Great City” rooted in cross-cultural dialogue.

Bushrui (1990) emphasize Rihani’s lifelong dedication to fostering East-West understanding, blending Enlightenment principles of tolerance with ethical universalism. His cross-cultural experiences informed a mutualist ethos, framing the “other” as a collaborator rather than adversary. “The Book of Khalid”, anticipates contemporary movements like the Arab Spring, reflecting Rihani’s foresight about American influence inspiring Arab reform. Through protagonist Khalid’s plea for reciprocal exchange Western material progress and Eastern spiritual heritage. Rihani envisions a symbiotic relationship, though he acknowledges challenges like materialism and religious orthodoxy.

Alongside contemporaries Gibran and H.G. Wells, Rihani contributed to an internationalist literary tradition prioritizing humanistic unity over division. His works, rooted in early 20th-century multiculturalism, underscore literature’s role in transcending geopolitical divides. By synthesizing Eastern philosophy with Western rationalism, Rihani emerges as both a literary innovator and a bridge-builder, advocating a world where diverse cultures coalesce into an enlightened global society. His legacy remains vital to discourses on multiculturalism, offering a timeless model for dialogue and solidarity in an interconnected world. Rihani believed in the potential for a mutually beneficial relationship between the Arab world and the United States. However, he also recognized the challenges: the West's tendency toward materialism and the East's rigid religious orthodoxy could become obstacles to cooperation. Still, in the words of Khalid, Rihani articulates a vision of cultural synthesis and mutual enrichment a voice that continues to echo with relevance in today’s global context.

Give me ye mighty nations of the west, the material comforts of life; and thou, my East, let me partake of thy spiritual heritage. Give me American thy hand; and thou, too Asia. Thou land of origination, where Light and Spirit first arose, disdain not the gifts which the nations of the West bring thee; and thou land of organization and power, where science and Freedom reign supreme, disdain not the bounties of the sunrise. (Khalid 1911)

Briefly, if multicultural literature serves as a call for dialogue among nations, peoples, and civilizations, then the writers who embraced this vision were primarily driven by a deep concern for humanity itself beyond the political and social frameworks that may or may not serve it effectively. Despite coming from vastly different cultural backgrounds, three influential writers, Ameen Rihani, Khalil Gibran, and H.G. Wells converged on a shared ideal of internationalism. Each, in their own way, addressed political and social issues with the aim of fostering a spirit of mutual understanding among nations. Their works contributed meaningfully to shaping a vision of inclusive human globalism. These themes are central to a body of literature deeply rooted in its cultural heritage and shaped by the American experience of the early twentieth century. It is a vibrant testament to literature’s enduring role in bridging divides and promoting unity across cultures and continents.

**Ameen Rihani: Life, Works, and Literary Legacy**

Ameen Rihani (1876–1940), a Lebanese Maronite Christian born in Al-Freike, emerged as a pioneering figure bridging Eastern and Western cultures. Emigrating to New York at twelve, he immersed himself in American society while retaining ties to his Arab heritage. His self-guided education in literature, philosophy, and law, alongside encounters with thinkers like Emerson and Voltaire, shaped his intellectual trajectory. Forced by illness to return to Lebanon, he reconnected with Arabic traditions, later establishing himself in New York’s literary circles through essays critiquing Arab societal stagnation. His career blended literary innovation and diplomatic engagement. He co-founded *“Al-Rabita al-Qalamiyyah” (The Pen League)* with Kahlil Gibran, advocating for Arab cultural revival and interfaith dialogue. As a global envoy, he represented Arab interests at international forums, including the 1913 Arab Congress and the 1921 Washington Conference, while forging ties with figures like Theodore Roosevelt. His 1922 Arabian travels, documented in seminal works, highlighted the region’s cultural and spiritual richness. A central figure in the (al-Mahjar) (Emigrant) literary movement, Rihani revolutionized Arabic literature as the “Father of Prose Poetry,” critiquing rigid poetic forms and pioneering hybrid genres. His bilingual output spanning novels, essays, and translations established him as the first Arab-American author to write in English, notably through *“The Book of Khalid” (1911).* His vision of a “**Greatest City”** synthesizing Eastern spirituality and Western progress underscored his advocacy for mutual understanding. Rihani’s legacy endures as a cultural mediator and reformer, whose critiques of materialism and dogmatism remain relevant. His interdisciplinary contributions to literature, diplomacy, and intercultural dialogue cement his status as a foundational architect of Arab-American intellectual thought and modern Arabic literary modernity.

**Ameen Rihani’s Multicultural Legacy**

Ameen Rihani, recognized as the foundational figure of Arab American literature, pioneered intercultural dialogue through his literary and intellectual endeavors. While overshadowed in Western recognition by Kahlil Gibran, Rihani’s groundbreaking contributions include authoring the first Arab American novel in English and co-founding *“Adab al-Mahjar” (Emigrant Literature),* which reshaped modern Arabic literary movements. His poetic innovation, notably introducing free verse in *“Hutaf al-Awdiya”,* challenged classical Arabic forms, prioritizing structural experimentation over mysticism. Rihani’s essays and philosophical works blended Romantic idealism with socio-political realism, advocating for Arab independence from Ottoman rule and promoting East-West synthesis. In *“The Path of Vision”*, he envisioned a harmonious fusion of Eastern spirituality and Western rationalism, asserting that cultural progress arises from transcending geographic and ideological binaries (Najjar, 1999). His travel narratives countered Orientalist tropes, reframing Arabia as a nexus of intellectual and moral traditions.

A staunch anti-sectarian, Rihani emphasized Arab unity across Christian and Muslim heritage while acting as a bicultural mediator. He introduced Western concepts of liberty to Arab audiences and infused English literature with Eastern philosophical insights, epitomizing his belief in mutual enrichment. By championing individual freedom and rejecting dogmatism, Rihani’s legacy endures as a testament to literature’s power in bridging civilizations and fostering global understanding. He writes:-

“If we are concerned in breaking the fetters that are fastened upon our bodies and souls by external agencies only, we are doomed to failure. But if we become aware of the fetters, which we, in the sub-consciousness of centuries of submission, have fastened upon the spirit within us and strive to free ourselves of them first, then we are certain to triumph. For freedom of the spirit is the cornerstone of all freedom. And this can be attained only by realizing its human limitations and recognizing its divine claim. It might be said too that freedom is to spirit what gravity is to matter. It is inherent in it and limited, yea, fettered by it. To know and recognize this truth is to rise to the highest form of freedom.” (*The Path of Vision)*, Bushrui, 1990).

In that collection, Rihani expresses admiration for the cultural diversity embodied by America, highlighting it as a symbol of multicultural harmony: -

“The Melting Pot certainly has a soul. And this soul will certainly have a voice. And the voice of America…is destined to become the voice of the world. Its culture, too, its arts and its traditions, which…are being coloured and shaded, impregnated with alien influences, will embody the noblest expression of beauty and truth that the higher spirit of the Orient and the Occident combined is capable of conceiving…………, but, what is greater, an international entity.” (From *The Path of Vision)*, Bushrui, 1990)

**Rihani’s Western Influences and Intellectual Developments**

Rihani’s literary career was profoundly shaped by his early exposure to American education and Western literary traditions. Emigrating to New York at twelve for economic opportunity, he attended a church school before working in his family’s bookstore, where he immersed himself in works by Shakespeare, Rousseau, Hugo, Irving, and Carlyle (Dunnavent, 1991). His intellectual scope later expanded to include Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau, whose Transcendentalist ideas influenced his philosophical outlook. At nineteen, he joined a theatrical troupe, performing Shakespearean roles, but a lung illness interrupted his subsequent legal studies at New York Law School, prompting his return to Lebanon in 1898.

During this period, Rihani taught English in Beirut while reconnecting with Arabic language and culture, paralleling Gibran’s trajectory. Upon returning to New York in 1899, he contributed critiques of Lebanese sociopolitical and religious norms to Arabic newspapers *like “Al-Hoda” and “Al-Ayyam”*. His engagement deepened through involvement in literary-political circles and activism for Syrian independence, aligning with Gibran’s advocacy. The two shared a mutual intellectual respect, collaborating on cultural projects such as a proposed Beirut opera house to foster artistic exchange. His literary style synthesized Romanticism, Transcendentalism, and Sufism, the latter evident in his mystical exploration of divine unity in *“A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems”.* His work reflects a fusion of Western individualism and Eastern spirituality, underscoring his role as a cultural mediator who bridged Arab traditions with progressive ideals. This hybridity, rooted in his bicultural experiences, positioned him as a pivotal figure in modernizing Arabic literature while advocating for cross-cultural dialogue and reform. The following is an extract:

“We are not of the East or the West;

No boundaries exist in our breast:

We are free.

Nor Crescent nor Cross we adore;

Nor Budha nor Christ we implore;

Nor Muslem nor Jew we abhor;

We are free”.

(From *“A Chant of Mystics” and Other Poems*, 1921, p. 106)

Ameen Rihani’s prolific literary output spanned 26 Arabic and 29 English volumes, encompassing poetry, novels, essays, and translations. His seminal English works include “The Book of Khalid” (1911), the first Arab American novel, and translations of the 11th-century poet *Abu’l-Ala al-Ma’arri*, which bridged classical Arabic and Western literary traditions. During the 1920s, his focus shifted from mystical idealism in works like “A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems”,(1921) to political engagement, epitomized by his Arabian travel trilogy critiquing colonialism and advocating Arab self-determination. Though initially linked to the Arab American literary society *“Al-Rabitah Al-Qalamiyyah*”, Rihani distanced himself post-World War I, prioritizing Syrian independence. Scholars like Nada Najjar (1999) argue his Arab nationalism enriched his literary vision, while Geoffrey Nash (1998) highlights his bicultural advocacy for Arab unity within a global framework. Rihani’s universalist ethos transcended sectarianism, promoting democratic reform, Qur’anic reinterpretation, and cross-cultural dialogue. Suheil Bushrui (1990) emphasizes his integration of Lebanese identity into a broader Arab and global heritage. This study examines *“The Book of Khalid(1911)”* as foundational to Arab American literature, analyzing its themes of reconciliation, spiritual prophecy, and mysticism as reflections of Rihani’s dual commitment to cultural synthesis and political emancipation.

**Globalization, Reconciliation, and Rihani’s Vision**

Globalization and reconciliation seek to transcend national divides across economic, political, and cultural spheres, yet their impacts remain contested. While Western perspectives often link globalization to cultural and economic hegemony, Eastern critiques, as noted by Abdul Nasser (1998), frame it as a tool of cultural imperialism and exclusion, given disparities in technological and scientific advancement. For Arab nations, Muhdi, (2001) argues that navigating globalization’s challenges requires political cohesion and investments in innovation a stance echoing Ameen Rihani’s advocacy. Rihani reimagined globalization not as Eastern assimilation into Western paradigms but as a symbiotic engagement. He envisioned Arab unity as a foundation for equitable global participation, preserving cultural identity while contributing to shared progress. This model underscores the necessity of agency and collaboration in balancing global integration with regional integrity.

**Ameen Rihani’s Vision of Cultural Synthesis and Arab Identity**

Ameen Rihani’s life and work epitomized a negotiation between Eastern heritage and Western influences. Rooted in his bicultural experiences, he admired American ideals of liberty and equality while valuing Eastern spirituality and simplicity *(The Book of Khalid, 1911).* He prioritized fostering Arab nationalism and cohesion, critiquing sectarian divisions among Syrian immigrants in the U.S. advocating civic unity informed by Western thinkers like Emerson and Carlyle (Naimy, 1985). Post-WWI, he warned against assimilation eroding Arab identity, promoting instead a model where cultural distinctiveness coexists with integration a balance later realized in post-WWII Arab American hyphenated identities (Naff, 1994). Rejecting cultural hierarchies, Rihani envisioned a symbiotic exchange, blending Eastern spirituality with Western pragmatism. His poetry and prose, such as *“Ode to Brooklyn Bridge” (1910) and “The Book of Khalid”*, framed globalization as mutual enrichment, predating mid-20th century acculturation trends. He championed “Universality,” urging selective cultural adoption while preserving identity a precursor to modern globalization. To counter assimilation, Rihani reconnected Arabs with their heritage, advocating cultural pride as a foundation for global engagement. His travels across Arabia, documented in *“Muluk al-Arab”,(The Arab Kings),* fostered unity and dialogue, addressing modern globalization’s challenges (Mehdi, 2001; Abdul Nasser, 1998). His utopian vision, articulated in *“Ar-Rihaniyyat” (1910),* imagined an Asian “city” harmonizing science, freedom, and spirituality, led by a transcendent figure embodying East-West synthesis. This leader would revive Arab dignity, unify the region, and assert its active role in global progress, rejecting passive Westernization. Rihani’s legacy underscores cultural resilience and equitable dialogue as pillars of a pluralistic world. His concept of globalization was built upon the coexistence and mutual enrichment of cultures each incomplete without the other.

“Give me, America thy hand; and thou, too, Asia. Thou land of origination, where Light and Spirit first arose, disdain not the gifts which the nations of the west bring thee; and thou land of organization and power, where science and freedom reign supreme, disdain not the bounties of the sunrise….And remember Europa, remember Asia, that foreign culture is as necessary to the spirit of a nation as is foreign commerce to its industries. Elsewise, thy materialism, Europa, or thy spiritualism, Asia, no matter how trenchant and impregnable, no matter how deep the foundation, how broad superstructure thereof, is vulgar, narrow, mean- is nothing, in a word, but limited”. (The Book of Khaled, 267).

**Rihani’s Vision for Universal Spirituality and Religious Reform:**

Rihani confronted enduring religious conflicts by critiquing distortions in both Eastern and Western practices. He observed that Eastern traditions had become mired in ritualistic dogma, while Western societies prioritized materialism over spirituality. To bridge this divide, Rihani proposed a transformative spiritual awakening to purify religion of superstition and corruption in the East and reintroduce reverence for nature and the divine in the West. His reform sought to transcend sectarianism by emphasizing shared monotheistic principles—truth, love, and faith—as unifying forces. Rihani envisioned religion not as a source of division but as a catalyst for global harmony. By liberating minds from rigid orthodoxy and reconnecting humanity to universal spiritual foundations, he aimed to foster a higher consciousness that harmonized idealism, materialism, and theology. This synthesis, he argued, would elevate collective human understanding, positioning spirituality as a bridge between cultures and a remedy for hostility. Rihani’s approach underscores religion’s potential to unite rather than fragment, advocating for a renewed, inclusive spirituality capable of addressing modern existential and ethical challenges.

**Rihani: Bridging Civilizations Through Literary Dialogue:**

**Rihani emerged as a pivotal advocate for intercultural exchange, framing Eastern and Western civilizations not as antagonistic entities but as complementary systems capable of mutual enrichment. His literary and philosophical oeuvre, particularly his travel narratives, served as a medium for transcultural dialogue, reflecting 20th century Arabic literature’s broader engagement with cross-cultural intersections. Rihani’s bicultural existence residing extensively in the West, writing fluently in Arabic and English, and synthesizing dual identities positioned him as a mediator between worlds. His works exemplify how literature can both mirror and catalyze cultural understanding, transforming travel writing into a dynamic space for reciprocal critique and collaboration. By embedding his lived experiences of navigating multiple cultural frameworks into his texts, Rihani forged a “dialogue of civilizations” that underscored shared humanistic values. This approach remains vital in contemporary globalization, offering a model for leveraging literary art to bridge ideological divides and foster empathy across diverse societies.**

**Rihani’s Political Vision and Enduring Relevance**:

Rihani critiqued Lebanon’s and the Arab world’s sectarian governance and corruption, advocating for a secular state to dismantle religious fanaticism and colonial legacies that exploited minority divisions. He argued that secularism, grounded in mutual respect, could ensure minority rights and national cohesion, while promoting Lebanon-Syria unity through shared cultural values. Rihani emphasized that meaningful reform required ethical, spiritual, and intellectual renewal, informed by Western political systems yet adapted to regional contexts. His pragmatic governance model, prioritizing unity over fragmentation and ethical consciousness over dogma, remains salient for addressing contemporary Arab political challenges. This research underscores Rihani’s prescience, positioning his ideas as both a historical critique and a visionary framework for fostering inclusive, equitable governance in a fractured region.

***The Book of Khalid: A Philosophical Journey of East and West:***

At the heart of *The Book of Khalid* (1911), lies the central theme of bridging the gap between Eastern and Western values a recurring concern throughout Rihani’s writings and indeed a reflection of his entire worldview. Khalid, the novel’s protagonist, often reflects on America's future and its influence, drawing parallels between the political and social struggles of the Arab world, particularly under Ottoman rule, and America’s own contradictions and ideals. Much like Rihani himself who deeply internalized and synthesized both Eastern and Western cultures Khalid returns to his homeland after several years in the United States with a new vision. Disappointed by America's materialism and its failure to fully live up to its ideals, he nonetheless acknowledges the country’s potential as a global force, especially in its political institutions, scientific advancement, and religious tolerance. Inspired but disillusioned, Khalid returns to Lebanon with a mission to inspire change among his people, delivering a philosophy rooted in spiritual, cultural, and political reform. Rihani wrote the novel while living in the mountains of Lebanon, though it was published in New York in 1911. Though written in English, the book is distinctly Arabic in its themes, concerns, and language, borrowing numerous Arabic expressions. Many scholars consider it more a philosophical manifesto than a traditional narrative. As Dunnavent,(1991) notes, the storyline serves primarily as a platform for expressing Rihani’s ideas. The novel documents the immigrant experience and represents the awakening of the Arab intellect exploring themes such as spirituality, East-West reconciliation, and reform. The novel unfolds in three sections, each marking a phase of Khalid’s personal and spiritual evolution.

***Book the First: In the Exchange*** traces Khalid’s early life in Lebanon, his emigration to America, and his eventual disillusionment with the materialistic American lifestyle. It captures his intellectual, emotional, and spiritual awakening. Initially, Khalid views America as a utopia where Eastern spirituality and Western progress could coexist, but he becomes disenchanted.

***Book the Second: In the Temple*** describes his return to Lebanon, where he undergoes a profound spiritual rebirth after retreating into the woods. His criticisms of the church result in his excommunication.

***Book the Third: In Kulmakan*** follows Khalid as he lives in seclusion for a year, later moves to Egypt, and eventually vanishes from public life. Inspired to be a reformer and create an Arab empire that merges the best of East and West, the East’s soul and the West’s intellect he is hunted by authorities. His dream is shattered by the tragic death of his beloved Najma and their child, prompting his mysterious disappearance.

Many critics regard *The Book of Khalid* as semi-autobiographical, reflecting Rihani’s own experiences as an immigrant and intellectual navigating two cultures. But its reach extends far beyond the personal it carries universal themes and ideals. The novel’s dedication itself is a testament to this, addressed “To my Brother Man, my Mother Nature, and my Maker God.” In New York, Khalid discovers his prophetic mission, feeling destined to be the voice of his homeland. He declares, “For our country is just beginning to speak, and I am her chosen voice. I feel that if I do not come to her, she will be dumb forever” (p. 128). He affirms the immense potential of the human soul, insisting it must be nurtured free from societal constraints: “There is an infinite possibility of soul-power in every one of us, if it can be developed freely, spontaneously, without discipline or restraint” (p. 71). In his nature retreat, he experiences a spiritual epiphany, perceiving nature as a reflection of the divine: “the voice of the dawn, the dawn of a new life, of a better, purer, healthier, higher spiritual kingdom” (Khalid. p. 236).

The novel introduced a new direction in Arab-American literature marked by prophetic voice, the harmony of matter and spirit, and the vision of East-West unity within a larger universal framework. Scholar Nash asserts that Rihani crafted a fictional prophet and constructed a prophetic discourse around him (1998, p. 29). Ameen Albert Rihani similarly emphasizes the novel’s role as a precursor to Khalil Gibran’s *The Prophet* (1999). Indeed, Rihani was a major influence on Gibran, serving as a mentor and inspiration. When illustrating *The Book of Khalid*, Gibran used powerful, symbolic imagery such as winged sphinxes and torchbearers that evoke a prophetic figure. The resemblance between Khalid and Gibran’s Al-Mustafa is clear: both speak with divine insight, grapple with questions of existence, and have loyal followers (Shakib and Al-Mitra, respectively). Both characters also spread Eastern spiritual teachings in foreign lands. As Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins observe, both works share the archetype of a sage who imparts wisdom in an unfamiliar cultural setting (1998, p. 99). They note that Rihani’s novel, written by an Arab in English, delivers Eastern insights through a Western medium much like Gibran’s *The Prophet*. In a broader sense, Bushrui recognizes the tremendous intellectual and literary impact of both Rihani and Gibran, stating that their contributions were among the most important in revitalizing Arab thought in the early 20th century (1990). Mikhail Naimy is often mentioned alongside them as another foundational figure who helped reshape modern Arabic literature.

**Rihani’s Ethical Framework for East-West Reconciliation:**

Rihani critiqued the legacy of Orientalism and globalization as mechanisms that historically marginalized non-Western identities while superficially promoting unity. He reconceptualized Orientalism not as a confrontational binary but as a discourse rooted in European intellectual traditions, capable of fostering mutual respect, “The White Way and the Desert”, 2002). Rejecting geopolitical reductionism, Rihani reframed East-West relations as an ethical imperative, asking when global conflicts would shift from territorial divides to questions of justice and morality (Rihani, 2002, p. 108). For Rihani, reconciliation demanded transcending political pragmatism through intellectual empathy a deliberate engagement with the “other” to exchange ideas, values, and traditions. This process required ethical discipline: acknowledging difference while constructing shared humanity through moral accountability. His vision positioned reconciliation as an existential and cultural endeavor, not merely diplomatic. By advocating for a pluralistic internationalism that temporarily accommodated nationalism, Rihani sought to harmonize civilizational identities without erasing their distinctiveness. His work remains a prescient call to prioritize universal ethics over exclusionary power dynamics, offering a blueprint for equitable dialogue in an interconnected yet fractured world.

**Perspectives on Reconciliation: Materialist and Spiritual Dimensions:**

Reconciliation, historically tied to undivided religious and political liberties, was framed by Gladstone (1883) as an indivisible principle requiring full equality. This foundation of tolerance rejects exclusion, advocating inclusive societal values. H.G. Wells extended this discourse by linking liberty to economic freedom, achievable through scientific advancement a materialist vision Rihani partially endorsed but critiqued for neglecting spirituality. While both agreed on the interdependence of political, social, and economic freedoms, Rihani emphasized spirituality as indispensable, contrasting Wells’ utilitarian focus (Rihani, 2002). Their divergence crystallizes in their views on Oriental culture: Wells dismissed the East’s “excess of poetry” as impractical, whereas Rihani celebrated Arab poetic and prophetic traditions as transcendent spiritual expressions (Rihani, 2002). Despite philosophical differences, Wells’ materialist pragmatism versus Rihani’s ethical-spiritual synthesis both aligned in viewing reconciliation as a human-centered endeavor, necessitating recognition of diverse beliefs and shared values. John Paul Lederach’s temporal framework positions reconciliation as a symbolic “place” where past reflection and future hope converge, reshaping present coexistence (Lederach, 1997). Both Rihani and Wells emerge as futurists, envisioning progress beyond technology or politics to encompass global ethical consciousness. Their works underscore that addressing contemporary challenges demands forward-looking visions integrating material and spiritual dimensions, uniting humanity’s diverse trajectories through shared aspirations for dignity and unity. In *The Shape of Things to Come*, Wells presents a prophetic vision of the future in three phases, beginning, he draws a visionary world of the future in three steps, first, when:

Traditions of nationality had to be cleared away for good, and racial prejudice replaced by racial understanding… Next a lingua-franca had to be made universal and one or other of the great literature-bearing languages rendered accessible to everyone. And thirdly, the issue had to be joined with the various quasi-universal religious and cultural systems. (The Shape of Things to Come:1933).

**Rihani and H.G. Wells: Divergent Futurist Visions of Global Unity:**

Rihani and H.G. Wells, though separated by cultural contexts, shared a futurist commitment to global reconciliation yet diverged in their conceptual frameworks. Wells’ “The Shape of Things to Come” (1933) proposed a three-phase transformation: dismantling nationalism, adopting a universal language, and harmonizing religious systems to forge a homogenized world state transcending cultural divides. Rihani, predating Wells by over a decade, envisioned in 1920 a post-1950 world shaped by a peaceful workers’ revolution in the U.S. and Britain, sparking global labor solidarity and the creation of a United Nations-like body to regulate militarism (Ar-Rihaniyat, 1920). Their visions diverged fundamentally: Wells prioritized scientific rationalism and political centralization, while Rihani advocated pluralistic internationalism rooted in the moral autonomy of small nations. For Rihani, cultural diversity exemplified by nations excelling in justice, ethics, and artistic heritage was indispensable to global unity. He framed reconciliation as ethical inclusion, where difference is embraced as a catalyst for justice and equity. Conversely, Wells’ utopian universalism sought unity through erasure of cultural distinctions, emphasizing technocratic governance. John Paul Lederach’s temporal-spatial model of reconciliation as a “place” merging past reflection and future hope resonates with both thinkers’ futurism. While Wells anchored progress in social sciences, Rihani integrated moral and intellectual principles, arguing ethics must underpin political systems. Despite differences, both recognized reconciliation as a human centered endeavor requiring mutual respect. Their intellectual reciprocity is notable: Wells symbolically honored Rihani in his work, while Rihani celebrated Wells as a Western ally in reimagining global discourse. This study underscores their shared goal of transcending division but distinct pathways Wells’ scientific universalism versus Rihani’s ethical pluralism highlighting reconciliation’s dual potential as both a political and moral project. Their legacies challenge contemporary globalism to balance unity with cultural integrity, offering frameworks for equitable futures.

**A Bridge Between East and West**

Rihani’s political thought is deeply rooted in his comparative analysis of Eastern and Western societies and political systems, through which he sought to formulate a vision for an ideal international community what he termed “**The Great City.”** This comparative approach initially led him to critique both cultural spheres. He found Western civilization to be overly driven by materialism, describing it as excessively commercial in its social, civic, ethical, and even religious dimensions (Rihani, Adab wa Fan, 1957, p. 7). Despite these criticisms, Rihani acknowledged the invaluable contributions of the West, particularly in the realms of science and progress areas he believed the East urgently needed to embrace. He poetically described this exchange by stating, “From the land of the Scientists to the land of the Prophets, the stream of mind comes divinely for rebirth and reincarnation” (Ar-Rihaniyat, 1968). Through the character of Khalid, Rihani stages a symbolic comparison between the two cultures. The West, in Khalid’s view, represents ambition, while the East embodies contentment. Torn between these two worlds his heart in one, his soul in the other Khalid ultimately arrives at a clearer vision of a new world order, a synthesis he envisions as the emergence of “The Great City.” His heart is in one, his soul is in another, until his vision of the new world, the new great city, is clarified:

The Orient and Occident, Khalid sings, the male and female of the Spirit, the two great streams in which the body and soul of man are refreshed, invigorated, purified, of both I sing, in both I glory, to both I consecrate my life, for both I shall work and suffer and die…… Give me, ye mighty nations of the West, ……………. Give me, America, thy land, and thou, too, Asia. Thou land of origination, where Light and Spirit first arose, disdain not the gifts which the nations of the West bring thee; ………., where Science and Freedom reign supreme, disdain not the bounties of the sunrise. (The Book of Khalid. 2000: 245-246).

It is the voice of peace and brotherhood among nations, and cultures, that was heard in the early twentieth century from a Lebanese, Arab, Eastern thinker who experienced both his own culture of the old world and that of the new world, of America. Rihani envisions a “Universal Spirit” that serves as a catalyst for the awakening of both Eastern and Western civilizations toward the collective advancement and unification of humanity. He writes: - *“I dream of the awakening of the East; of puissant Orient nations rising to glorify the Idea, to build temples to the Universal Spirit to Art, and Love, and Truth, and Faith” (The Book of Khalid, 2000, pp. 325–326).* This vision of a Universal Spirit, however, does not blind Rihani to the cultural contradictions and misunderstandings that characterize global relations. On the contrary, he actively critiques these ambiguities, believing that they must be addressed and clarified as essential steps toward achieving global harmony. This Universal Spirit that Rihani called for did not prevent him from criticizing the cultural ambiguities of the world. His objective was to clarify and overcome these ambiguities in order to reach the Universal Spirit and secure peace among nations:

“Curiosity with the Occidentals, he says, is a commendable quality of the mind; it is welcomed as a bid for intellectual or even social intimacy. But with the Orientals, curiosity is decidedly bad manners. Accept the exterior and divine the interior, is generally the prevailing Humor. The tendency ……….. But both methods, to be sure, do not exclude the possibility of a morbid growth. On the contrary, they stimulate it.” (*The Path of Vision*, 1970, p. 132).

For Rihani, the path to global progress lies in fostering mutual understanding between East and West. He emphasizes the value of highlighting the strengths of both cultural traditions. In one of his unpublished English manuscripts titled *Turkey and Islam in the War*, which reflects on the events of World War I, Rihani continues this effort to bridge perspectives by analyzing and interpreting the roles played by Eastern societies within the broader global context,he mentions that:-

“Europe is superior in science, but not in philosophy, in those branches of knowledge that require observation and thought, not in those that require imagination and intuitive power. She is superior in military art, but not in the business of fighting. She has better mechanicians, tacticians, engineers, financiers, and thinkers. This is a fact, which the Oriental now realizes and to which he has surrendered. The surrender is improving him. On the other hand, the Oriental has a better understanding and appreciation of elemental things, is more genuinely pious in the face of great calamities, more sincere in his faith, more ingenious too in invention, more capable of abstract reasoning. And this is a fact, which the European is slowly realizing and to which he will ultimately surrender. The surrender will improve him also. (*The Third Collection of Poetry* MS: 134)”.

Despite the potentially controversial and debatable nature of these ideas, it is rare to encounter such a direct and nuanced comparison between the contemporary traits of Western and Eastern individuals. This comparison, however, serves a distinctly constructive purpose: to dismantle the barriers that separate cultures, civilizations, and their diverse social and historical contexts, while simultaneously fostering meaningful connections between nations and peoples in the modern world. At its core, this approach is rooted in a deeply humanistic vision one that aspires to promote peace and shared prosperity for all of humanity.

**Rihani’s Comparative Analysis of Eastern and Western Intellectual Traditions:**

Rihani’s *“The Path of Vision”,* offers a nuanced critique of Eastern and Western intellectual dispositions, framing their differences as complementary rather than oppositional. He characterizes the “Oriental mind” as deductive, capable of sweeping philosophical vision but lacking the empirical rigor and organizational precision of Western scientific thought. This limitation, Rihani argues, hinders the East’s engagement with “elemental truths” of sociomoral and planetary realities *(The Path of Vision, p. 116).* Conversely, he acknowledges Europe’s dominance in scientific innovation while critiquing its underdevelopment in spiritual and intuitive realms areas where Eastern traditions excel. Rihani posits that mutual recognition of these strengths is vital for global progress. The East’s resilience and moral-philosophical depth, paired with the West’s empirical advancements, form a symbiotic relationship. He observes an evolving convergence: the East’s embrace of Western science parallels the West’s growing appreciation for Eastern spirituality a dynamic fostering reciprocal growth. This exchange transcends intellectualism, aligning with broader sociopolitical shifts: the West’s moral-spiritual awakening mirrors the East’s pursuit of self-determination and national identity. Rihani’s vision culminates in “The Great City,” an idealized international society rooted in universal ethics and mutual respect. While his optimism may appear utopian, it reflects a pragmatic call for unity amid diversity, emphasizing collaboration over assimilation. His framework challenges civilizational hierarchies, advocating a future where Eastern and Western contributions coalesce to advance human freedom, peace, and collective progress. This synthesis, though aspirational, underscores Rihani’s belief in reconciliation as both a moral imperative and a pathway to equitable global coexistence.

During his early 20th-century residency in New York, Rihani drew profound inspiration from the Statue of Liberty, reimagining its ideals as universal catalysts for intercultural harmony. In an Arabic address, he personifies Liberty, urging its expansion beyond the West to illuminate global oppression: “When art thou turning your face towards the East... mixing your light with that of the full moon?” *(Ar-Rihaniyat I”, 1987, p. 88).* This rhetoric envisions symbolic “sisters” of Liberty across the East from the Pyramids to the Black Sea challenging parochial nationalism. His perspective starkly contrasts with Rudyard Kipling’s dichotomy of irreconcilable East-West divides. Rejecting Kipling’s assertion that “never the twain shall meet,” Rihani championed continuous, reciprocal exchange. His literary works, such as “*The Book of Khalid*” and “*The Path of Vision”,* exemplify this ethos. Notably, his 1922 bilingual poem (Arabic/English) positions the East as initiating dialogue, asserting its identity while inviting Western engagement a symbolic gesture fostering mutual respect and shared aspirations. Through such creative acts, Rihani reframed intercultural encounter as a collaborative pursuit of universal freedom and equity, grounded in ethical reciprocity rather than hierarchical domination. He symbolically sets the stage for a cultural encounter grounded in respect, shared values, and the pursuit of common human aspirations: -

I am the East; I am the hunchback of the world;

I am the archer of the universe… I laid the corner stone

Of man’s first dream, first temple, first throne

And ever since I began to build and dream

For myself and for the gods that be,

I have been bowed down, and I have been free…

Indeed, my pockets and my hands are full…

For those who build and dream

For those who travel far,

For traveling minds, for traveling visions too,

And I am traveling still. (*Third Collection of Poetry:* 183)

This global vision of unity and peace enables the East to speak directly to the West with greater ease and purpose, extending a hand in the pursuit of deeper mutual understanding and cooperation:

I am the East

A phantom, O my Brave Lad of the West,

In the material pageantry of Time.

But hear you not the phantom’s voice!

A voice of strange discordances, indeed,

Which echoes in the temples of my many headed Truth,

As well as in the universities of your own land. (*Third Collection of Poetry* MS: 183).

The convergence of cultures and backgrounds, peoples and nations, languages and social systems, traditions and beliefs this very principle stands at the heart of the East’s message to the West, serving as both its focal point and its highest aspiration.

I am a thousand colors melt and fuse

And luminate one through the other ‘neath the brush of Time

In me a thousand voices speak:

They shout aloud in my own heart

A rhapsody, a psalmody of silence

A thousand Gods. (*Third Collection of Poetry* MS: 183 g-i)

In his endeavor to construct a bridge between East &West and vice versa, Rihani arrived at a striking paradox: he characterized each side of the world with qualities that were both complementary and contradictory. To him, the East and the West could each be seen as conservative and progressive, liberal and illiberal, materialistic and spiritual, vibrant and neutral, reflective and indifferent, meaningful and ambiguous. These dualities, Rihani believed, depended on the degree to which each side understood the other. The question of whether such characterizations are objectively valid is ultimately irrelevant. What matters, rather, is that Rihani employed the principle of relativity as a means to ease the journey across this symbolic bridge between cultures. Are we crossing that bridge today? The answer, again, is relative. Such a crossing may happen on multiple levels spiritually, culturally, economically, or geographically either simultaneously or sequentially. What is essential is the conscious and sustained practice of engaging in this crossing: a journey between two distinct yet interdependent realms, two different worldviews, for the sake of fostering global peace and human unity. Like his contemporaries Tagore, Emerson, and other forward-thinking intellectuals of the early twentieth century, Rihani called for the adoption of this principle of mutual understanding and cultural dialogue. His method for bridging the gap between East and West may be outlined in the following stages:

1. **Engagement**:- Actively immerse oneself in the social and cultural dimensions of both Eastern and Western societies.
2. **Comparison**:- Critically assess the material and spiritual dimensions of both civilizations.
3. **Invocation of the Universal Spirit**:-Appeal to a higher sense of unity that transcends cultural ambiguities and fosters a shared human consciousness.
4. **Envisioning the “Superman”**:-Imagine a future figure who embodies this “Universal Spirit,” an international human who harmonizes matter, spirit, and intellect.
5. **Ideal Society**:-Aspire to create a “Great City,” a model international society marked by rational, moral, and material well-being.
6. **Pursuit of Liberty**:-Advocate for freedom across all dimensions—individual, communal, and national.
7. **Cultural Dialogue**:-Initiate and sustain meaningful exchanges between East and West as a foundation for achieving the aforementioned goals.

Rihani came to see the world as his homeland and all of humanity as his people. His legacy continues to exemplify the timeless relevance of intercultural dialogue as a cornerstone of peace, unity, and global progress.

**Conclusion: -**

Rihani’s literary and philosophical legacy stands as a testament to the transformative power of intercultural dialogue and the enduring quest for a harmonious global society. As a pioneering figure in Arab American literature and a visionary advocate for East-West reconciliation, Rihani transcended the cultural and ideological binaries of his time, crafting a body of work that remains profoundly relevant in an era marked by globalization and renewed struggles for justice. His seminal novel, “*The Book of Khalid*”, not only heralded the emergence of Arab American literary expression but also articulated a prophetic vision of societal transformation, one that resonates uncannily with the aspirations of the Arab Spring a century later. Through Khalid’s journey, Rihani envisioned a world where spiritual awakening and ethical consciousness precede political revolution, underscoring the interdependence of inner and outer liberation. Rihani’s intellectual contributions extend beyond literary innovation. As a critical voice in the Mahjar movement, he redefined Arab identity within a universalist framework, advocating for a synthesis of Eastern spirituality and Western rationalism. His critiques of materialism, sectarianism, and colonial oppression were balanced by an unwavering belief in the potential for mutual enrichment between civilizations. By championing a “Universal Spirit” that transcends cultural and religious divides, Rihani laid the groundwork for a cosmopolitan ethos rooted in compassion, equity, and shared humanity. His call for acculturation rather than assimilation or isolation anticipated contemporary discourses on multiculturalism, emphasizing the preservation of cultural distinctiveness alongside collaborative progress. The political dimensions of Rihani’s thought further reveal his foresight. His advocacy for Arab unity, secular governance, and nonviolent resistance foreshadowed modern movements for self-determination and social justice. While he critiqued the West’s materialism, he equally challenged the East to embrace scientific advancement and political reform, envisioning a revitalized Arab world capable of engaging with global modernity on its own terms. His dialogues with figures like H.G. Wells exemplify his commitment to bridging philosophical divides, seeking common ground in the pursuit of global peace. A century after its publication, *“The Book of Khalid”* and Rihani’s broader oeuvre invite renewed reflection on the ethical imperatives of our time. The Arab Spring, with its echoes of Rihani’s ideals, underscores the timeless relevance of his message: that true liberation begins with the cultivation of moral integrity and that justice must transcend geopolitical binaries. In an increasingly interconnected yet fractured world, Rihani’s vision of a “Great City” a symbolic convergence of diverse traditions guided by mutual respect and universal values offers a compelling blueprint for fostering solidarity amid diversity. Ultimately, Rihani’s legacy challenges us to reimagine reconciliation not as a passive coexistence but as an active, ethical engagement with the “other.” His life and work remind us that the pursuit of global harmony demands both critical self-reflection and a courageous embrace of shared humanity. As contemporary societies grapple with the tensions of globalization, Rihani’s voice endures as a clarion call for empathy, dialogue, and the unwavering belief that, in his words, “the most highly developed being is neither European nor Oriental; but rather he who partakes of the finer qualities of both.” In this spirit, Rihani’s contributions transcend their historical context, inviting each generation to continue the vital work of building bridges between worlds. Rihani’s critical question remains ever-relevant: “How long will it remain, in the saluting of our foreign problems, a question of East and West? When will it become, in other words, a question essentially of justice, if not also of ethics?” His call was to transcend geopolitical binaries and elevate the discourse to one of shared human values. Ultimately, Rihani envisioned a reconciliation between East and West not grounded merely in politics, but in ethical and intellectual understanding. He argued that only through tolerance, reconciliation, and mutual respect could the ideal of a true “United Nations” be realized a concept more powerful than mere national unity. His optimism is evident across his works, as is his unwavering belief in the possibility of merging the best of both civilizations into one harmonious, global society. Today, we begin to understand just how prophetic his vision truly was.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

I declare that no AI technology was used in the writing of this article. Throughout the writing process, I used translations and Google websites and where necessary and included the transliteration of Arabic words within the text.

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