CHAPTER - IV

ABÛ’L-‘ALĀ’ AL-MA‘ARRĪ AND HIS POETICAL WORKS
Abū'l-'Ala' al-Ma'arrī (973 – 1057 A.D.) was the last great poet of the Abbasid period which witnessed the Arab way of life to shift from a nomadic mode of existence to a more settled and sophisticated urban style; and the literary standard developed to the great extent. In fact, the poetic form thereof was simplified: the complex and highly refined metres of the traditional Arabian poetry were replaced by shorter and freer metres.

The poetic style of Abū'l-'Ala' al-Ma' arrī was replete with varied forms that reflect the pessimism and skepticism. Nevertheless he transcended his age to become one of the major figures of Arabic literature, as well as a special favourite of Western scholars. (1)

Life of Abū'l-'Ala' al-Ma' arrī:

Abū'l-'Ala' Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ma'arrī was born in 973 A.D. at Ma'arra, which is a name of country-town located in the district of southern Aleppo. In the prime of his life, he was inflicted with a disease of small pox only at the age of four years old, and it took away his eyesight completely and became a blind man that prolonged to his last breath. He lost his father in his adolescent age and mentally prepared to
study only at the age of fourteen years old. For which he visited many places like Aleppo, Antioch, and other Syrian towns. He dared to get by heart many manuscripts which were preserved in the libraries of then institutions. As his intuition goes, he used to attend the lectures delivered by many celebrated scholars of then period. His learning aptitude gives us proof that undoubtedly he had very much sharp brain and powerful intelligence. In fact, he possessed prodigious memory. Having finished his studies, he came back to his home town Ma'arra in 993 A.D. (2)

In fact, his real name was Āḥmad son of 'Abd Allāh son of Sulaimān al-Tanūkhī, while it related to Tanūkh, one of the tribes of Yemen. His father 'Abd Allāh was one of the reputed the scholars of al-Ma'arra, where he was appointed to the post of Qāḍī. As Abūl-'Alā' lost his eyesight of the left one and the right turned to white. For which he had to suffer a lot of problems. He knew no colour except the red one. His elders made him to put on the yellow coloured dresses. As soon as he reached the age of learning, learnt Arabic language and literature under different teachers of then time; at last finding no parallel scholar to teach him more, he returned to his abode. Again at the age of twenty years old, he started teaching Arabic language and literature and exploring into the minuteness of language and its specialty; at last he obtained superiority that no individual was parallel to him. In 392 A.H. he left al-Ma'arra for Syria and visited the library of Tripoli and stopped over Latakia (West Syria) where there was a monastery of the monks; he remained there among the people thereof for two years to study the two periods – ancient and modern. Afterwards he did travelling around the cities of Syria. In fine, he desired travelling to Baghdad, the seat of learning and scholars in view of studying the Greek and Indian philosophy as well, since it was felt by him that it was
the advancement of the people of Baghdad, who desired his meeting out of thirst for literature. He started living among them and they took knowledge from him of education and literature. He was searching the science of philosophy and continued for a distant goal. It is a matter of fact that Abū’l-’Alā’ al-Maʿarī found a good situation at Baghdad for intellectual works at par excellence. There from his views diffused spreading all around as and when he met with the group of philosophers at the abode of Abū Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Salām ibn al-Ḥasan al- Başrī on every Friday and thereby he was influenced by his wisdom and literature. (3)

It is imperative to know that ‘Abd al-Salām was the head of one of the great libraries of the city. As noted above, every Friday a circle of freethinkers was held at his house and of which Abū’l-’Alā’ al-Maʿarī soon became a member. Some of these men were rationalists, like the Muʿtazilites, others were downright materialists. In fact, their society exercised a powerful influence on the poet’s opinions. One year and seven months passed on Abū’l-’Alā’ al-Maʿarī at Baghdad, he was recalled to Maʿarra due to the illness of his mother; but when he reached there found his mother already dead. In this connection, he mourned her departure in verses full of the deepest feeling, and never left his native town again. (4)

From then onwards he was away from meeting other people except his students and regarded himself subject to detention: blindness and house. He adhered to teaching and writing about the taste of life from which no animal eats neither produce; keeping patience on food and sweet with pulses and fig fruit and on the wealth of thirty dinars beneficiary for every year, having satisfaction on the dress and bed with coarse cotton and cold mattress. He made forbidden for himself the marriage in order to spare
his progeny for having safety from the blame of people and distress of life. He remained bachelor all his life till he took his last breath in 449 A.H. He found 84 years of life to live on the surface of the earth. He recommended inscribing the following verse on his tomb:

هذا جناه أبي عليّ (م) وما جنيت على أحد

(It is my father who did this wrong to me, but I did not commit one against any other.)

It has been informed that after his death and last rite of his bury about eighty people with great fame and reputation and one hundred scholars who belonged to the knowledge of jurisprudence i.e. legists, scholars of the prophetic hadith and other Sufi-saints stood near to his tomb.\(^{(5)}\)

**His Outstanding Works:**

Some biographers of the seventh / thirteenth century dared to record that Abū‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī wrote nearly seventy works, including four diwāns of verse. The following have survived and it is to be hoped that manuscripts of others may yet be discovered. Here an attempt has been made to deal with a list of all his works, either lost or still remaining, may be mentioned in chronicle order as follows:
His Poetical Works of Distinction (أعماله الشعرية الممتازة):

1. The Saqt al-Zand (سقط الزند):

   It contains inter alia laudatory poems, some of which have been mentioned above. In this diwān the poet often follows the tripartite division of the classical qasīda into nasīb, rāhīl and mādīh, but occasionally he rejects the nasīb or eliminates it completely. In this respect, however, he cannot be compared with the poet Abū Nuwās, whose rejection of it is at the same time a turning towards the description of wine. In the case of the ascetic Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma’arrī, the drinking of wine and its description is disapproved of, water being preferred.

   When the poet does accept the nasīb, he often stresses its elegiac character by a description of cooing turtle doves. The murmuring note of these doves, which seem to regret a chick once lost long ago, is often compared with poet’s yearning after an unattainable and far-off loved one. In describing all these, the poet ruminates on the way in which the sound of cooing moves him to profound thoughts. In a few other nasībs, the poet (being blind) is seeking his travelling companions to trace a distant flash of lightning in the land of the beloved, but when sleeping he himself can discern her deceitful phantom visiting him. The rāhīl in his qaṣīdas is usually most elaborate: one may find all sorts of descriptions, like emaciated camels tired by long travelling, the mirage; among the animals found in the desert, are mentioned the antelope, sand-grouse, ostrich and chameleon. His preference for description of the night is so conspicuous that some commentaries try to connect this with the poet’s blindness. We
find some further thoughts on the *raḥil* and the development in his description of the journey in general. Regarding the independent form of the *ghazal* Abū’l-‘Alā’ had little interest in it. Further, whenever he does practice it, he appears to feel himself obliged to do so as technical exercise in a certain genre only. The *madiḥ* is final part of the *qasīda* often shows extravagant eulogy of the *mamdūḥ*, so that the poet later regretted this in the preface to his *diwān* “All sorts of hyperbolic description found with me as being related at first sight to a human being, while at the same time in accordance with the attributes of God, He is exalted, should essentially be applied to Him alone”. In *Saqt al-Zand* Abū’l-‘Alā’ collected together examples of what might also be conceived as another form of the *qasīda* i.e. the elegy composed in praise of a dead person as mentioned above. In certain very sententious lines in the elegy (*rithā*) of Abū’l-‘Alā’ we may discern the origins of that pessimistic tone later so often to be encountered in the *Luzūm*. In fact, the poetry in *Saqt al-zand* is characterized by its rich ornamentation, and many special figures of style can be discerned; besides quite frequent forms of paronomasia we find also the figure of “double entendre” (*tawriya*).

It is imperative to know that a group of 31 poems in *Saqt al-zand* has been put together under the collective title *Dir‘iyyāt* (“Armour poems”). These poems are marked by the description of one or more coats of mail, the usual themes in the *qasīda* like *raḥil* and *madiḥ* being eliminated, while only the *nasīb* may be found in a merely subordinate position in few cases.

Besides these, if we look into the next peculiarity of their content, these poems are also interesting for their form. A major part of
them has been composed in the form of a dialogue put in the mouth of somebody who is in some way related to a suit of armour. (6)

2. The Luzûm mâ lâ yâlzam:

It is a second collection of poetry composed in the period after poet’s stay at Baghdad. The collection was much less popular in the Muslim world than Saqt al-Zand, both because of its unconventional form and contents. The title means “Committing one’s self to what is not obligatory” or “The self imposed compulsion” relating to a peculiarity of rhyme. For his poetry in the Luzûm, Abû’l-‘Alâ’ was using a much more difficult form, double -rhyme instead of the normally prescribed mono-rhyme. The poet thus created an innovation in the existing rules of rhyme, and his method of rhyming was in later books of Arabic theorists to be treated under the generic name of iltizâm.

In fact, the contents of the Luzûm were described by the poet himself in his Preface as a glorification of God, an admonition for the forgetful and an awakening of the negligent, a warning against the world’s derision of God. The poet further declares that he does not want to follow the normally prescribed themes, stating that “poets aim at embellishing their words by means of lies”. In saying this, he has in view the poet’s descriptions of their beloved ones in the ghazal and nasîb, their horses and camels in the rahîl, and of wine, for instance in the khamriyya. He points out the utterly false pretensions of poets who, leading a quite comfortable life, none the less pretend to have to make exhausting expeditions through the desert. In contrast, Abû’l-‘Alâ’ states his poetry to be searching for veracity and piety, and he therefore thinks himself unable to comply with
the accepted conventions in the existing "normal" poetry. On these grounds he finally concludes his poetry in Luzūm to be weak. From Abū’l-‘Alā’’s words we may infer that he wishes to consider his work in Luzūm in the first instance as a collection of poetry, though it be "weak"; at any rate he does not explicitly state his poetry to be a more or less systematic arrangement of philosophical ideas, nor is it so. Notwithstanding the evident absence of such system, there can, in various places in the Luzūm certainly be found many opinions which do not always or do not at all fit into the orthodox Islamic system. We see the poet sometimes professing a certain dogma, then doubting it elsewhere in the Luzūm. Though he is a monotheist, he does not show a strong belief in God’s word as revealed through prophecy. About resurrection and retribution he seems full of doubts. At the same time, he often appears to attach great value to the use of reason as an unfailing guide in human life. In view of this, some Arabic historians have pronounced unfavorably on the poet’s orthodoxy. This says that the poet just after his death had been seen in a dream being tormented by two vipers, whilst the following interpretation was given: “This is al-Ma’arrī, the heretic”. On the other hand, some Arabic biographers and historians endeavored to clear him from charges of unorthodoxy, such as Ibn al-‘Adīm in his monograph on Abū’l-‘Alā’, al-Inṣāf wa ḱ-taḥarrī fi daf’ al-ẓūlīm wa ḱ-tajarrī ‘an Abī ḱ-‘Alā’ al-Ma’arrī (“Fair treatment and selection of the best in defending Abū’l-‘Alā’ against unjustified attacks”). Ibn al-‘Adīm, as a historian, is distinguished for his exactness in making inquiries about Abū’l-‘Alā’, which he did two centuries after the poet’s death by contacting descendants of those in Ma’arra who had been in touch with him, and also by availing himself of local historical sources, all this not without frequently giving isnāds and titles.
It is imperative to know that in the west the *Luzumiyyāt* became more widely known work. In the second half of the lifetime of Abū‘l-‘Alā’, the Fatimids had finally extended their authority over northern Syria. We find some discontent elements about their rule, however, would appear from certain lines in the *Luzumiyyāt*. A study published in the East is Taha Husayn, who did research on Dhikrā Abī ‘l-‘Alā and it held another interesting analysis of the poet’s philosophical ideas as reflected in the *Luzum*. In fact, many quotations from the *Luzum* have been made use of in a psychologically based biography, Abū-‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arřī written by ‘Ā‘isha ‘Abd al-Rahmān “Bint al-Shāṭī”’.

**His Prose Works (أعماله النثر):**

1. *Zadhr al-nābiḥ (Driving away the barker)*:

   It is found in the survey of Abū‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī’s works as given by various Arabic biographers. In this book the poet apparently defended himself against orthodox attacks on some lines in his *Luzum*. Extracts from this lost book have been published, in *Zadjr al-nābiḥ* (زجر النبیح), *muqṭatafat* (مقطعات), critically edited by Amjad al-Ţarāblusī at Damascus, 1965.

2. *Al-fuṣūl wa ‘l-ghāyāt fi tamjīd Allāh wa’l-mawā‘īţ*:

   In fact, this work entitled *الفصول و الغایات في تمجید الله والمواضع* “Chapters and endings about glorification of God, and admonitions” was begun to compose by Abū ‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī in rhymed prose before his journey to Baghdad, and it was completed in full after his return to
Ma'arra. This book contains a great number of short strophes, which the poet has in each case concluded with an ending or end-rhyme (غاية), so that the book in its totality is found to contain a number of chapters (فصل), every one of which contains strophes with their endings always in one particular letter.

Thus one gets Faṣl ghayātuh hamza, faṣl ghayātuh bā' and so on, following the order of the Arabic alphabet. A major part of this work is lost, only its first part (جزء) having been discovered in 1918-19 in a not quite complete version, to be edited much later by Maḥmūd Ḥasan Zanāṭī, Cairo in 1938, in a critical edition. The book holds among various other subjects thoughts about God: His omnipotence, justice, goodness and eternity, in addition to and contrasting with a sharp observation of the inescapable changes of fate which dominate man in his ordinary daily life. The idea of God is frequently seen as connected with unavoidable predestination and eternal retribution, which in its turn exhorts man to practice asceticism. The use of rhymed prose, the warning against impending judgment and the oaths applied now and again by way of confirmation, may all be considered a reason why later historians supposed this book to be an emulation of the Qur'ān: the author allegedly aimed, in writing it, at excelling the Qur'ān in its i'jāz (إعجاز). In this context, some late historians who apparently never saw the fuṣūl with their own eyes are even found altering its title to al-fuṣūl wa 'l-ghāyāt fi muḥājāt al-suwar wa'l-āyāt (الفصول والغايات في محااجات السور و الآيات) “Chapters and endings about the emulation of sūras and verses”.
3. Rasā’il Abī al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (رسائل أبي العلاء المعري):

This book is comprised of the brief letters written by Abū ‘l-‘Alā’ on several occasions and addressed to various members of his family and acquaintances. In fact, the letters have been composed in a very flowery style, overdone with proverbs, rhymed prose and illustrative verses. There exist two editions of the Rasā’il, the first by Shāhīn ‘Atiya of Beirut in 1894, and a second one with English translation preceded by a Preface containing the biography and a discussion of part of the works by D.S. Margoliouth, entitled The Letters of Abū’l- ‘Alā’, Oxford 1898. Furthermore, a critical edition of the letter XXX (Margoliouth’s numbering) has been prepared by Iḥsān ‘Abbās under the title of Risāla fi ta ‘ziyat Abī ‘Alī b. Abī al-Rijāl fi waladih Abī al-Azhar, published in Cairo about after the year of 1915 A.D. (10)

4. Risālat al-Ṣāhil wa al-Shāhīj (رسالات الصاهل و الشاحج):

The title of the book means “Letters of the Horse and the Mule” which was composed by Abū ‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī. It was addressed to Abū Shujā‘ Fāṭik ‘Azīz al-Dawla, the governor of Aleppo, on behalf of the Fāṭimid Imāms. In fact, this work is reported to be lost. But in recent time, it has been discovered in Morocco and subsequently edited with a critical apparatus and introduction by ‘Ā‘isha ‘Abd al-Rahmān bint al-Shāṭṭ’, Cairo in 1975. It has been informed that Abū ‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī completed this voluminous Risāla in about 1021 A.D. In fact, with theme of the Risāla, a tension created among the people of Syria, for which Abū ‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī gradually introduces a number of animals who being gifted with speech, give among other things their opinion on the political situation in
Syria under 'Azîz al-Dawla’s reign. A direct reason for the composition of the *Risāla* was a problem of taxation. There was a question of land owned by members of Abû ‘l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî’s family, for the use of which they would owe a certain amount as taxation due to the *bayt al-mâl* (بيت المال) in Aleppo. At their request, Abû ‘l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî wrote his letters in order to ask for the annulment of the amount imposed, considering that the land concerned is a waterless tract, giving only a small yield. Then Abû ‘l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî describes a mule, al-Shâhî, which, blindfolded, is drawing water in order to continually fill a cistern, without, however, profiting from its own labour so as to quench its thirst. Such being its condition, the mule is described as grumbling at first, but then it starts talking. While thus introducing the first of his speaking animals, Abû ‘l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî explicitly bases himself on quotations from the Qur’ân (XXVII: 18, 23), where an ant in the valley of ants and a hoopoe are described as talking, with Sulaymân understanding their utterance. On the other hand, Abû ‘l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî elsewhere in his *Risâla* compares favourably ‘Azîz al-Dawla with Sulaymân, both of them adhering to the same qualities of wisdom and understanding. Next to the mule, a number of different animals appear on the scene of action, among these a horse, a camel and a fox. The mule wants the horse to convey a complaint to ‘Azîz al-Dawla about the mule’s hard life, but the horse, referring to its noble forefathers, haughtily refuses this mission. In the second instance, the camel declares himself prepared to convey the mule’s complaint. The mule being erudite, at first intended to cast its complaint in a poetical form, but with respect to the camel it drops its original plan for a reason which reflects Abû ‘l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî’s own attitude towards poetry, “*I do not like being described with the image of human beings bringing poetry with them, in order to aim at some profit ....*”. Instead of this, the mule then wants the camel to convey
strange tidings, which have one meaning directly evident in hearing them, although in reality they have a second esoteric meaning. The message appears to consists of sorts of ridings involving words with two different meanings. When finally the fox arrives on the scene, the situation alters; a vague clamour is suddenly heard from the nearby town, and at the mule’s request the fox undertakes to make a reconnaissance. Then the clamour heard is explained by a suddenly developing panic among the population of Syria in view of an impending Byzantine military expedition. Then Abû ‘l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî begins to make frequent allusions to various political developments of the contemporary period.

In fine, it has been noticed in the *Risâla* that someone remarks on Abû’l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî for his showing the exceptional dexterity of ‘Azîz al-Dawla, who is able, whilst horse ridding, to handle two swords at a time; but then it is remarked upon as much more wonderful that this prince was once seen reading in the *Kitâb al-‘Arûd* by Khalîl b. Aḥmad. (11)


It is one of the important works of Abû’l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî. It was composed about in 1033 A.D. during the reign of the second Mirdâsid princeNaṣr b. Šâliḥ Shibli al-Dawla. In fact, the Risâla is a reply to a much smaller Risâla addressed to Abû ‘l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî by a certain ‘Alî b. Maşûr ibn Ṭâlib al-Ḥalabî Dawkhala, also known as Ibn al-Qâriîh, who was a traditionist and grammarian. In his *Risâla*, Ibn al-Qâriîh is complaining of his old age and its concomitant infirmities, at the same time suggesting to Abû ‘l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî that some sort of support is always welcome. Apart from this, Ibn al-Qâriîh gives a show of his knowledge and
orthodoxy in mentioning a number of poets and scholars whom he accuses of being zindiqs. In his reply Abû 'l-'Alâ' al-Ma'arî ironically imagines his aged correspondent as having died in the meantime. Then he supposes him, after a rather uneasy reckoning at the Day of Resurrection, to have passed the entrance to the Gardens of Paradise. In those gardens Ibn al-Qâriḥ is described as meeting many a poet or scholar whose previous sins when list expected have been forgiven (the meaning of the Risâla's title "Letter of Forgiveness"). While travelling in the hereafter, Ibn al-Qâriḥ is able to pay a visit to hell, where he is described having discussions with the devil, Iblîs and the poet Bashshâr ibn Burd marked out as a heretic. Among the general aspects of the Risâlat al-ghufrân some may be mentioned here.

First, the delights of Paradise are based upon a realistic and literal interpretation of the pronouncements given in the Qur'ân and Tradition. In this connection, we find a reference in the Holy Qur'ân as it says: “We have made them grow up new and made those virgins, loving and of equal age, for those on the right ....” Abû 'l-'Alâ' al-Ma'arî is found having them grow like fruits of the trees in Paradise; in fact, this is referred to in this famous book Risâlat al-Ghufrân, composed by Abû 'l-'Alâ' al-Ma'arî.

In addition we find another remarkable aspect of the Risâlat al-Ghufrân that it bears the idea of compensation granted for a harm suffered previous in early earthly life, this compensation being extended to both human beings and animals. To the latter belongs for example a wild ass, killed and skinned by a hunter during its existence on earth. Thereafter its hide was used for the fabrication of a well-bucket, of which in their turn pious men took advantage for their sanctity. Thus there appear to exist in Paradise two completely different categories: first the material of Paradise, represented by the virgins promised in the Qur'ân, and by animals for the
purpose of hunting, both of these destined to increase the joys of the
blessed; and in the second place there exist human beings and animals
destined to enjoy themselves in all eternity on account of their earthly
sufferings. As it is concerned by Ibn al-Qârih, the ironical attitude of Abû
‘l-‘Alâ’ is very evident, where he is describing the formal act of Ibn al-
Qârih’s tawba being testified by official witness in a mosque at Aleppo and
the subsequent rejoicing in Heaven. To speak of the Risâlat al-Ghufrân,
some scholars are of the opinion that this very famous book can be
compared with the work of Dante’s La Divina Commedia (The Divine
Comedy). (12)

6. Risâlat al-Malâ’ika (رسالة الملائكة):

In fact, this work keeps relation with the linguistic study as
because it is especially concerned with the questions on the morphology
and etymology of certain Arabic words. In the introduction of this work a
reply is indirectly given to questions regarding the morphological reduction
of certain words and names found in the Qur’ân and hadîth. In such a way,
Abû ‘l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî, who is himself the protagonist in this Risâla, is
heard propounding several questions to the Angel of death relating to all
possible morphological schemes to which can be reduced words like malak
and ‘Azrâ’il. By this method Abû ‘l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî describes himself as
successful in his attempt at postponing the moment of his own death for
one hour, the angel being bewildered by such complicated problems.
Further questions are concerned with the reduction of words relating to the
grave and the hereafter: its recompense and retribution and the pleasures of
Paradise, the latter inducing the protagonist to deal with words like
kummathrâ’, sundus and istabraq thereby following the same playful
method. The succeeding part has only partially been edited by Salîm al-Jundî, Risâlat al-Malâ‘ika, Damascus, the reminder of this manuscript being lost. In this additional part, as far as it is at present known from the edition, thirteen more problems are dealt with in a more serious and direct way. In general, the Risâla’s Muqaddima reminds one of the Risâlat al-Ghufrân, though the latter is much more extensive. It should further be noticed that Paradise in the Risâlat al-Malâ‘ika appears to be very quiet and in conformity with the rules of orthodoxy, while in the Risâlat al-Ghufrân it is less orthodox, with ironical passages and the tranquility of Paradise distributed by reveling, discussing and even violently quarrelling poets and scholars. (13)

7. Mulqâ al-sabil (What is scattered on the road):

It is a very short work which was always to remain well-known after Abû ‘l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arî’s poetry. It is reported that this work has received warm acceptance in the Muslim West; and it has frequently been the object of attempts at emulation (mu‘araḍa). The titles of, and some short quotations from, such emulations are given in Ḥasan Ḥusnî ‘Abd al-Wahhâb, mu‘araḍât al-maghâriba li-mulqâ al-sabil, (معرضات المغارية لملقي السبيل) in Ta‘rîf (تعريف). It has been observed that the work Mulqâ al-sabil consists of tiny paragraphs containing rhymed prose, which alternate with other paragraphs containing some poetical lines, with, however, the restriction that each paragraph of rhymed prose is more or less identical with the subsequent paragraph of poetry as far as its contents are concerned. These contents are of a very orthodox nature and no break can as yet be discerned with traditional morality and literary tradition. In this connection, the editor Ḥasan Ḥusnî ‘Abd al-Wahhâb, Mulqâ al-sabil,
Damascus observes some similarity to the pre-Islamic orators like Quss ibn Șâ‘ida. In addition, regarding this work, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb is of the opinion that it may be a work of the poet’s old age, in which he is shown to revert to the original religious principles.\(^{14}\)

Apart from the above mentioned works, we have noticed that the poet had other works which were written basically as commentaries about various works of other poets and writers. Here an attempt has been made to bring the commentaries to the notice of people as follows:

1. \textit{Mu‘jiz ʿAlmad} (معجز أحمد):

   It is a commentary on the complete \textit{Diwan} of al-Mutanabbi, which Abū ‘l-ʿAlā’ al-Maʿarrī probably wrote in the prime of his life. This rather simple commentary, of which so far no edition is available, has been discussed by Krackovskiy, who also gives some examples from the Arabic text of this commentary, in \textit{Al-Mutanabbi i Abū ‘l-ʿAlā’}.

2. \textit{Al-Lāmiʿ al-ʿAzīzī} (اللاملع العزيزي):

   This is also known as \textit{al-Thābitī al-ʿAzīzī} (الثابتي العزيزي). It is a very extensive and as yet unedited commentary on a great number of verses selected from al-Mutanabbi’s \textit{Dīwān}, and therefore quite different from the one mentioned above. It was written by Abū ‘l-ʿAlā’ in his old age, for on the basis of its title it was dedicated to the one who had commissioned it, the Mirdāsid 
\textit{amir} ‘Azīz al-Dawla Abū’l-Dawām Thābit b. Thimāl b. Șālih b. Mirdās. The name of this
*amir* is further explicitly mentioned in the short Preface of the manuscript of this work and in a passage of the monograph on Abu’l-‘Alâ by Ibn al-‘Adîm.

3. *‘Abath al-walîd* (عبيث الوليد):

It is a commentary on verses selected from the *Dîwân* of the poet al-Buḥtûrî owes its existence to the fact that a manuscript containing al-Buḥtûrî’s poetry was sent from Aleppo to Abû ʿl-ʿAlâ in Maʿarra, in order that he should correct and criticize its text if necessary. It is available in the critical edition of Muḥammad ‘Abd Allâh al-Madânî of Medina. However, a far better edition is the one recently prepared by Nâdiyâ ʿAlî al-Dawla, *‘Abath al-walîd fi al-kalâm ʿalâ shiʿr Abî ʿUbâda al-Walîd b. ʿUbayd al-Buḥtûrî*, Damascus 1978.

4. *Dhikrâ Ḥâbîb* (ذكري حبيب):

It was a commentary prepared by Abû ʿl-ʿAlâ on verses selected from the *Dîwân* of Ḥâbîb b. Aws Abû Tammâm. Though it is lost as an independent work, it has in essence survived because Tibrîzî incorporated it in his own commentary on Abû Tammâm’s poetry.

Abû ʿl-ʿAlâ made a commentary on the poetry of a commentary of his, the *amîr* and eulogist of the Mirdâsids, Ibn Abî Ḥuṣayna, who also changed to be an inhabitant of Maʿarra. This commentary was to remain partial only, for the *amîr* survived Abu al-ʿAlâ and only died in 1065. The commentary of Abû ʿl-ʿAlâ is incorporated in the *Dîwân Ibn Abî Ḥuṣayna*, while it consists of elegy of Ibn Abî
His Type of Poetry:

Abu'l-'Ala' al-Ma'arrî led a life like a common man, and achieved experience due to passing through different abnormal situations; despite all, he earned excellent lessons that made his learning scintillated in the domain of Arab world, for which he left for different cities, and remained in various atmospheres. In fact, his influential activities of life led him to write about the social heritage in the form of literary prose and poetry. He believed in himself to be the poet; and his poems lost more than that of the preservation in the domain of Arabic literature. Although he lost his eye-sight at the age of four years old; his meritorious works continued. He started composing poetry since the eleventh year of his age. Even after eighty years of age, he did not leave to compose poems. As a result, he wrote many poems during the course of his long life. Here it may be noted that his book known as *istagfir wa istagfiri* (استغفر واستغفرى) comprises of ten thousand couplets; but presently the book is not available except knowing its name. About his poetical composition, Nasirî Khasru informs in his journey that Abu'l-'Alâ' al-Ma'arî composed one lac couplets and this position was before ten years of his death. His mission to compose poems continued till his death.\(^{(16)}\)

In fact, he had strong memory and could get by heart everything that he understood or unperceived. He had strong witticism with fun and humor. The overall peculiarity of his poetry made People to say as follows:
Certainly his poetry is like that of Sufism having concealment and clarity together.

As per the themes of his poetry are concerned, he composed poems on wine (الخمر), humour (الجون), hunting (الصيد), and satire (الهجاء). In fact, all these themes were centrally expressed in the mode of selective odes relating to elegy (النثاء), eulogy (المدح) and pride (الفخر). Here it may be noted that the poetry, whatever he composed in the adolescent period, bears exaggeration at large scale, clarity in between imitation and unnatural manner in which the poet Mutanabbi finds more relevance from whom Abûl-'Ala' al-Ma'arî sorted many ideas. He took little care to the grammatical aspects of language. His participation in the poetical competition brought literary beauty to his composition. In spite of that, he used unusual words and scientific terminologies in his poetry as well. On the other hand, his poetry composed in the adulthood period appears to contain less exaggeration and constraint. Thereby he made contradiction with the predecessors of the Arab, as he was influenced by the Bedouin style with pure words; he followed hard metres as to the context unparallel and extraordinary in the analogical imitation. The beauty and assonance of his poetry increased to lay down his philosophy and views at par excellence. As and when he attained a distinct position in the domain of Arabic poetry and philosophy, people gave recognition to him for obtaining the status just after the famous poet al-Mutanabbi. (17)
It needs to mention that the three diwāns of Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī are preserved in the realm of Arabic literature. Of which the first one is known as *Siqt al-zand* (سُقْطُ الزَّنْد) and it is famous for his poems composed during the three phases of his life at the time that he remained at Baghdad; but the collection of his poems was done after his coming back from Baghdad to al-Ma‘arra, of course, there may be increased with that of his excellent poems in the contents of the same.

His second compilation of poems is known as the *al-Dir‘iyyat* (الدرِعِيَّات); it is a small diwan of poetry that describes about the plate armor in particular. It was published in Egypt along with the book *Siqt al-zand*. All his poems of *al-Dir‘iyyat* relate to arms and war in particular. Here it is necessary to mention that the poems preserved in this book were composed in the third phase of his life.

His third compilation of poems is known as *al-luzūmiyyat* (اللُزُوْمِيَّات). In fact, it was the greatest diwan among all that of the three diwāns of his poetry; and all the poems of this diwan were composed in the third phase of his life. Here it is imperative to know that all the poems of *al-luzūmiyyat* appear to represent the life of his intelligence, passion and behavior in tact. (18)

Furthermore, it has been revealed from the account of Ahmad Husain al-Zayyāt that the poetry of Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī is of two types that the first type of his poetry was composed at the age of his adolescent period; and mostly such type of poems were preserved in *Siqt al-zand* (سُقْطُ الزَّنْد) “Sparks from the Tinder”, and (2) the second type of poems composed at the age of his maturity of life; they are entitled *Luzūm mā lam yalzam* (لا يَلْزُمُ ما).
(لزوم ما لم يلزم) “Obligation which is not Indispensable”, an allusion to his conquest of the difficulty of a double or triple rhyme, which is not indispensable in prosody. In fact, this work of Abû’l-‘Alâ’ is also known as al-Luzûmiyyât (اللزوميات). (19)

Prof. R.A. Nicholson is of the opinion that the poems of Abû’l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma’arî which are similar to the nature of odes and found in the Siqt al-Zand; they are mostly written before the age of thirty five of his life, which show the influence of his admiration for Mutanabbi. In fact, they include some fine panegyrics and elegies. In the East, however, the Siqt al-Zand has always been more popular than the book known as al-Luzûmiyyât, which the Muslim people usually dislike on account of the opinions put forth in it, while neither its form nor its character accords with their notion of what poetry ought to be. It has been noticed that the regular type of Arabic poetry is the ode; in this connection, the poet Abû al-‘Alâ’ al-Ma’arî says as follows:

“I have not sought to embellish my verse by means of fiction or fill my pages with love idylls, battle-scenes, descriptions of wine parties and the like. My aim is to speak the truth. Now, the proper end of poetry is not truth, but falsehood, and in proportion as it is diverted from its proper ends its perfection is impaired. Therefore I must crave the indulgence of my readers for this book of moral poetry.” (20)

It reveals from the views of poet, Abû al-‘Alâ’ al-Ma’arî that the truth in his poetry means moral and philosophical truth; and thereby he does not imply that the best poetry is untrue to life, but rather that it is false because it follows human life and nature, which belong to the vanities of
this world and are themselves radically false. Furthermore, he wants to speak that the faulty false lies in the subject, not in the poet. (21)

An Analysis and the style of his Poetry:

Here an attempt has been made to analyze the poetry of Abū al-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî, who composed various type of poems and they are treasured in the three anthologies. In this context, we find the three anthologies namely Siqt al-Zand (سقط الزند), al-Dir‘iyati (الدرعيات) and al-Luzumiyyat (اللزوميات) as important and their poems may be brought to discussion in view of sorting out their style in fact.

Every scholar is bound to admit Abû’l-‘Alâ al-Ma‘arrî as an original poet, thinker and philosopher as well. He was a pioneer of thinking anything with an open mind and independent way for leading himself to conclusion which often agree with those of modern thought. His philosophy and ethics are only a background for his poetry. His work is artistic in treatment and execution. In fact, he contemplates life with profound feeling of Lucretius, he handles his subject with a literary skill as fine as that of Horace. His Luzumiyyat bears the testimony of his mastery to have in the Arabic language and it is such a mastery which frequently displays itself in juggling with words – the aptness of his diction, the force and opulence of his imagery, the surprising turns of his fancy, and the charm of a style unmistakably his own, whose melancholy dirge -like cadences blend with sharper notes of wit, satire, and epigram. In fact, the matter is almost as remarkable as the style. (22)
In our first attempt, we shall go through the diwān Siqṭ al-Zand (سِقْط الزنْد) of the poet Abū‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arri for bringing an analogical discussion. In fact, this diwān was composed without a distinct system irrespective of history and art, because it consists of verses related to panegyric (مدح), glorification (الوصف), love prelude (النسبة) and elegy (الرثاء). It neither singles out any distant history nor its period; but it has been diversified into two different divisions, the first division is related to history and the other division pertains to object.

The First Division (القسم الأول) of Siqṭ al-Zand (سِقْط الزنْد):

It is indicated earlier that the poet Abū‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arri started composing poetry from his age of thirteen years old and continued to his last breath. In this connection, his life may be divided into three phases; the first one is the phase of childhood that continued to twenty years of his age (383 A.H.), the second phase is spanned over his adolescence till to the year 400 A.H., and he came back from Baghdad. At this point of life he admitted his adolescence to be ended with a letter that was sent to the people of Ma‘arra. The third phase was deemed to be the maturity and old age of his life that continued to his death. In fact, his composition of poetry flourished during these three phases of his life.

It appears from a general survey over his composition of poetry that Abū‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arri wrote elegy for his father especially during the first phase of his literary life. The poetry of the second phase of his life was written about Abū Ḥāmić al-Isfarāyini, and whatever he desired for al-Ma‘arra having remained at a‘-Karkh; and he elegized the father of the two noble men namely al-Raḍī and al-Murtaḍā together, and said
farewell for Baghdad, and whatever he wept for his mother. The poetry of
the third phase of his life was written about the people of Baghdad after his
return from Iraq. In this context, we find his Qasîda composed in 414 A.H.
having the metre of ĥâ ʾiya and it was sent to the librarian of Baghdad.

As for the poetry of his youthfulness is concerned, there finds
exaggeration, constrain, and lack of using strong word and perfect style and
meaning, where there is the simplicity like a child. In this context, an ample
testimony may be noticed in the following verse:

\[
\text{فلأ جادين إلا عبوس من الدجن}
\text{وددبة في مسمى كل قيمة}
\text{تغرد باللحن البريء من اللحن}
\]

In the above mentioned verses, there is the proof of imitation
of the earlier Arab poets; while such type of poetical endeavour belongs to
the poet’s early part of life. Alongside, we find in them the beauty of
expression with artificial assonance. On the other hand, after attaining the
age of perfectness of his wisdom, he could express poetry with sweet words
in a nice manner and purest style; of which proof may be conspicuous in
the following verse:

\[
\text{أ بكت تلكلم الحمامة أم غذّ}
\text{ت على فرع غصنها الملياد}
\]

(Whether the parrot, which follows you, weeps or sings on a piece of its
supported branch.)
If we look into the above mentioned verse, it appears that how the poet declares doubt, and conceals the confidence as well. The poet finds to describe a normal course of life. He represents power over the amazing portrayal with a doubt on the parrot that sings. In fact, such a narration signifies his perfectness in ripe versification. (23)

**His Poetry in the Second Phase (شعره في الطور الثاني):**

In this phase of poetry, Abū’l-'Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī used hyperbolism (المبالغة); but his share of constraint (التكلف) decreased and the style of conciseness (الإيجاز) increased; his passion became correct in its presentation. When he attained the age of middle forty, he remained at Baghdad and used hyperbolism in his poetry. Then he started using metaphorical terminologies in the writing whatever he composed and expressed in poetical genre. In this connection, here we may exemplify his verses which he expressed in his address delivered for the legist Imam Shāfi‘i as follows:

وربّ ظهر وصلناها على عجل
بضريتين لظهر الوجه واحدة
بإسراع
في مهمه كصلاة الكشف شعشعاء
وما جهرنا و لم يصحّ مؤذّتنا
من خوف كلّ طويل الرمح خداع

In fact, we find the literary beauty and appropriate metaphor that he used in his poetry; alongside he dared to express his nostalgia for his mother land. In this connection, it is deemed that the poet Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī learnt from the pagan literature and Islamic sciences as well.
Here an attempt has been made to shed light there upon as referred to in the following verse:

\[
\text{فيا برق ليس الكرخ} \quad \text{فإذا سألت} \\
\text{داي و إما} \quad \text{بغداد عن} \quad \text{أهلها}
\]

Here it needs mention that such type of versification was made by Abū‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī in the second phase of his life, of which example is noticed in the dīwān entitled Siqt al-Zand (سيق الزند). Synthetically it reveals from the nature and type of his poems that they are characterized with the poetical genre like praise (محم), glorification (وصف), amatory verse (افخار) and his lineage (نسب).

**His Poetry in the Third Phase (شعره في الطور الثالث):**

It is imperative to know that after coming back from Baghdad, Abū‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī became a staunch follower of the strict law as he was influenced thereby in every aspect of his life. In fact, he committed to some obligations which are not necessary for his intellectual activities and mundane affairs as well. Due to taking such initiative, his poetry was also influenced thereby in practical, and he left the technique of exaggeration which he used in his poems earlier. Then he considered hyperbolism as unnecessary. It has been observed that he was greedy of truthfulness, for which he was bound to leave his unnecessary necessities. Being a staunch follower of strictness, he wanted to make his life better in all around of intellectual activities. As such, we have noticed him to be a strict one akin to the earlier Arabs; as a result of which, he practically started using the
pure Bedouin words having meaningful sense in his poetry. In fact, he wrote a *qasida* for sending it to the treasurer of the Academy of Baghdad in the following manner of Bedouin tradition:

\[
\text{لمن جبيرة سيموا النوال فلم ينطوا}
\]
\[
\text{وحلا يضطوا في المزار فقد شطوا}
\]
\[
\text{يمانون أحيانا شآمون تارة}
\]
\[
\text{دعا أدمع الكنديي الدمن السقط}
\]

It is aware of the fact that the poet Abû’l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma’arrî did not accept only the mode of language of his contemporary, but also used some odd words of language along with the assonance in the couplet. In fact, his poetry consists of the glorification of Syria and the Arab peninsula to some extent, while it was executed by the Bedouin Arab for creation of beauty and colourful language in their poetry. In this connection, we find two aspects in the expression of the poet: firstly, the influence of his strict law in his poetry and secondly, the influence of the linguistic lessons to which he adhered after his coming back to al-Ma’arra. In this connection, we may bring the example thereof to the notice as follows:

\[
\text{سألته قبل يوم السير ميعته} \\
\text{أثربي عنكم أمراً والدة} \\
\text{لم ألقها و ثراء عاد مسفوتنا}
\]

In the above mentioned verses, we find three kinds of passions of the Abû’l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma’arrî; firstly his thought over Baghdad, secondly his thought over his mother’s death, and thirdly his pain over the poverty
and possessing a little amount of wealth. It is a matter of fact that at this stage of his life, Abūl'-'Alā’ al-Ma'arrī ascended to the position of a notable philosopher. (24)

The Second Part of Siqt al-Zand (سقط الزند):

The second part of Siqt al-Zand is made of the poetical characteristics with eulogy (المدح), pride (الفخر), glorification (الوصف), elegy (الرثاء), and the romantic prelude (النسب). But here it is note worthy that this part does not have the satire of any kind, nor does it contradict for glorifying the wine, nor hunting, nor sensuous desire. It is clear that the life of Abūl'-'Alā’ al-Ma'arrī was not a life of play and fun, though his loss of eye-sight became a barrier of hunting and fighting in his life. So it has been an unintelligible matter for him to compose about these afore-said arts of qasīda in particular. It is a matter of fact that his writing pertains to philosophy as he had temperaments and attitudes, they are brought to notice according to the literary specification of poetical arts as follows:

Al-Madaḥ (المداح):

It has been observed that the work Siqt al-Zand (سقط الزند) comprises of eulogies, and their bases are noticed to be comprises of two types of praises, one is without any relation or means of earning as Abūl-'Alā’ al-Ma'arrī indicated in the introduction of Siqt al-Zand; and another one is in response to his friends. In fact, there lies an evident difference between these two types of eulogies.
It is imperative to know that the eulogy without any nepotism consists of hyperbolism and influence of imagination along with the pure art of poetry that finds no fear of exaggeration and brevity for any person, who is praised, nor any criticism and ignoring factors. On the other hand, the eulogy having relations with any friends, consists of less number of exaggerations; as and when such type of eulogy was composed due to response of friend’s letter at Baghdad. As a whole, the former does not represent any special passions, and the latter represents whatever the poet finds excellence of the passions of brotherhood and sincerity out of desire and yearning, thought and depression.\(^{(25)}\) As such, we find clear difference between these two types of his eulogies. To scintillate the difference between these two types of eulogies, an attempt has been made to portray the former type of eulogy as follows:

\begin{align*}
\text{أعَن وَحَدِ القَلاصُ كَشْفت حَالَٰٰلا} & \\
\text{وَدَرَّا خَلَت أَحَمْـه عَلِـٰٰه} & \\
\text{فَهَلَآ خَلَتْهـٰن بَـٰـٰه ذِبَالا} & \\
\text{وَمَثْلِكَ مِن عُبْـيْـٰٰلٰ ثُمَّ حَالَٰلا} & \\
\text{وَقَلَت الْشَمْسِ بِالْبِيْـٰدَاء تَبَر} & \\
\text{رَأـيِت سْرَابٴهَا يُغْـشِـي الرَبَّـٰلُ} & \end{align*}

It appears from the \textit{diwān siqṭ al-zand} (دیوان سقط الزند) that the poet Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrî said the above mentioned verses in praise of Saif al-Dawla; and this piece of verse has been extracted from the first poetry preserved in the said \textit{diwān}. 

Al-Fakhar (الفخر):

It has been observed that the work *Siqt al-Zand* (سقط الزند) does not consist of larger quantity of pride verses; their numbers in qasîda form are less. Even then we find two couplets – excellent in their nature, of which testimony may be noticed in the following verse of *al-hamziyya* (الهمزية):

ءرائي أمام والأمام وراء
إذا أنا لم تكبرني الكبراء

On the other hand, another couplet lies in the mode of *al-lâmiyyah* (اللامية) as found in the consistence of *Siqt al-Zand* (سقط الزند); which is mentioned below:

ألا في سبيل المجد ما أنا فاعل
عاف وإقدام و حزم و نائل

As for the second couplet is concerned, it consists of philosophy and example at a point of view; hyperbolism lies in the book to a great extent. In fact, the mind of Abûl-‛Alâ’ al-Ma’arrî was not alike the haughty people. In addition, the poet did not express verses of pride except in the second and the first phases of his life. As for the third phase of his life is concerned, he produced philosophical verses, in which we find him to express about pride as well. (28)

Al-Wasf (الوصف):

In matters of describing anything whatever around the poet, he could portray the picture with a clear specification as need of hour. He could touch the passion and imagination with his tongue in accordance with
the same picture that passes over his heart. It is evident that a blind like of Abu'l-'Ala' al-Ma'arri has no alternative except that very path, which finds an excellence in glorification for the things indicated like that of the taste, pain, thought and merriment. Some scholars are of the opinion that they find excellence in the poetry of Abu'l-'Ala' al-Ma'arri, who glorifies stars, and their places and movement as well. As his intuition goes, he describes the elegance of sword. It was also comfortable for the poet Abu'l-'Ala' al-Ma'arri to have study on literature and achieve knowledge thereof; he easily could return of description for its appropriate sources. The poet felt in the core of his heart a kind of deception for entrusting his poetry to the authority who could reach to its preservation. In this connection, there was none to see the teacher of such objectives. Here attempt has been made to show the mode of his al-wasf(الوصف) in the following couplet.

فيت والظلام ليس بفاني

It has been observed that he described his hopes of life with the white colour, although he could perceive only the red colour. Thereby he meant his hope to be good; again he made indication with darkness to the disappointment of life. This feature represents the poet's sentiment for the passion of disappointment in future, and sorrowfulness in the past. This has been referred to in the following couplet:

ربت ليل كأنه الصبح في الحمـ ن وإن كان أسود الطيلسان
وقف النجم وقفة الخيران قد ركضنا فيه إلى اللهـوـ لما

Apart from this, we find many of his verses to have a description with a means of using metaphors, in which he referred to many
historical incidents like the legends of the pagan period, group of the pagan people, his Hāshimī friends, the martyrs of ‘Ali and his son etc. In fact, the word of his poetry finds pure delicate, sweet style, and attractive meaning for the reader’s heart of his poetry. (29)

Al-Rithā’ (الرثاء):

Here it is imperative to know that the work Siqūṭ al-Zand (سقط الزند) does not consist of elegies except only seven in number; among them two odes were elegized for his mother, one for his father, another one for his father and mother. In such a way he also shed tears for Abū Ḫamzah al-Faqīh with his fifth number of elegy, the sixth for Ja‘far ibn ‘Alī ibn al-Muhadhdhab and the seventh for his friend Abū Ibrāhīm al-‘Alawī.

In fact, the life of Abū‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī is full of pang and sorrowfulness; his philosophy is replete with displeasure for the things in existence; he made elegy for his father while his wisdom was not ripen, nor his philosophy came to shape in fact. His elegy for his mother was done in the last part of the second phase of his life and the first part of the third phase of his life; while life was taking the course of change from one stage to another stage, being affected with restlessness of the past painful period and the time of darken future. In fact, it was the time of before attaining his perfect philosophy. Here an attempt has been made to visualize the style of his elegy as follows:

ف سرور في ساعة الميلاد

إن حزنا في ساعة الموت أضعا

قبح بنـا وإن قدم العه

d هواواه الآباء و الأجداد

(30)
(Certainly the thought at the time of death increased double to the
delightfulness of birth.
It becomes ugly for us if the disgrace comes to the fathers and
grandfathers.)

**Al-Nasib (النسب):**

It reveals from the theme of the poetry of Abūl-‘Alā’ al-
Ma‘arrī that he does not have the objective of *nasīb* and *ghazal* in true
sense of the term concerned; because he was a distressed blind man. He
owned the asceticism in life, while his heart was free from any dance to
have the time of communion in love. He did not respond to any swift
journey nor heard the talk of the nice tenderness. He did not drink with the
secured earthen jar, which about his tongue applies to the odd love prelude
or the delicate ghazal. Whatever he composed about this type of verse, was
only of the poetic art, where there was no any path of passion. \(^{(31)}\)

**Al-Dirʿīyyāt (الدرعيات):**

Here it may be noted that the *diwan siqt al-zand* (ديوان سقط
الزند), published in 1901 in Egypt comprises of *al-Dirʿīyyāt* (الدرعيات). In
this portion, we find poetry relating to arms and war with an especial
manner. It is indicated above that the poems preserved in this part were
composed in the third phase of the poet Abūl-‘Alā’ al-Maʿarrī who
expressed his version by the tongue of another man. As a blind poet, he had
no role in about battle; he philosophically tries to perceive the portrayal of
any war. Here in the following verses, he asks his mother about armor of
war. In this connection, an attempt has been made here to bring the style of
the same to the notice as follows:

What did the armor of my father do, whether it went away in the water of
river or walked on foot?
Or it was borrowed from the poisonous snake, and then the warriors put on
the dresses whatever they had.
Or they are sold to seek a requirement in a year, while the sky was not
composed with cloud.
There are no Pleiades of their best kinds that the earth does not become
wealthy, nor the void i.e. sky is moistener increasingly.)

Al-Luzūmiyyāt (اللزوميات):

The work al-Luzūmiyyāt contains 1592 poems amounting to
between twelve and thirteen thousand verses altogether. The verses signify
the glorification of God, exhort the heedless, and warn against the vanity
and wickedness of the world, the poet does not indicate either the range of
their topics or the variety of their style. The poet shows that he is interested
in many things besides asceticism. It appears that he professed to know his
contemporaries by heart. (33)
In reference to *al-Luzūmiyyāt*, Dr. Tāhā Husain considers it as a *diwān* of philosophy; of which similar works are seen in little number as to the literary characters designed by the poet Abūʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī. In fact, the term *al-Luzūmiyyāt* is of the token of the sense finds in *luzūm mā lā yulzimu* (ละวอม มล ไม่ ปะวอม) which Abūʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī compels for his life after coming back from Baghdad.

As a *diwān* the poet designed it with four chapters for every letter except the letter *alif* (الإيف) which remains under silence of other letters. In such a way it consists of 113 (one hundred and thirteen) chapters (قصوؤ). In fact, the scholars consider *al-Luzūmiyyāt* as one of philosophical works, while the poet believes himself to be true remaining aloof from any kind of falsehood. (34)

We find the portrayal of political and social phenomena in his verses, in which he avowed intention to tell the truth. He accepted the hard living thinking to strive to lift that veil, and the labored utterance, the dark hints and metaphors, which are expressed in the oracular quality of his verse. The poet Abūʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī had good reason to cloak some of his opinions, and being a sensible as well as a cautious man, he did not court persecution, though in fact the most heretical passage of his work are by no means the most obscure. Apart from his special causes his style is the expression of a strange untendered personality, while in the second place it is the product of a poet who seldom allows us to forget that he was also a very learned scholar. His love of grammar, prosody, rhetoric, and belles-lettres asserts itself extravagantly; some poems are mere strings of word-plays. This feature spoils many pages for us, but it is not invariable. These
are comparatively plain in style and include no example of what he could do when he ran to the opposite extreme.

R.A. Nicholson is of the opinion that "It is not possible to reproduce the movement and cadence of the Luzūmiyyât except in the same way as the movement and cadence of the Iliad are reproduced, .......... we dare not hope for: even when transplanted by skilful hands they lose the best of their beauty and never become quite acclimatized." (35)

It is imperative to know that Arabic has a peculiar sonority which Latin does not possess in the same degree and which greatly increased by the recurring mono-rhyme. As such, here an attempt has been made to bring out the metres (قوافي والبحور) used in the poetry of Luzūmiyyât with the names and schemes of the four principal metres for the sake of those who do not know them already; they are as follows:

1. **Bahr al-Ṭawil** (The Long Metre):

   ارحتة جسمَ أنَّ مسلكِه صعب
   يدلَّ على فضل المماتي وكونه
   لم ترى أنَّ المجد تلقاك دونه
   شدادَت من أمثالا وجب الروع (36)

   *(That Death is a good supreme and gives to the body peace
From all sorrow – prove it thus: the way thereunto is hard.
For seest thou not, before success in a high emprise,
What sore straits encounter thee, what perils thou needs must fear?)*
Here it may be noted that the Arabic classical verse generally remains in the form of bayt (بيت) which consists of two hemistiches. In the above mentioned two verses, we find the ending with the rhyme-words sa' b (صعب) means hard and ru' b (روع) means fear.

2. **Baḥr al-Basīṭ (The Wide Metre):**

(If men but knew what their sons bring with them – were there to sell
A thousand such for copper piece, no mortal would buy.
Woe, woe to them! For within their arms they foster and rear
An evil brood, which is guile, envy, and cankerering hate.)

3. **Baḥr al-Wāfīr (The Ample Metre):**

(A man drew neigh a wife for a fated purpose,
To bring by his act a third life into being.
Without rest she the sore load bears, and only
It is laid down when tale of her montās is reckoned;
And she to her source returns – ay, all things living
Trace back to the ancient Four their common lineage.)

4. **Bahr al-Kāmil** (The Perfect Metre):

(O shapes of men dark-loom in g the battle dust,
Dyeing red the sword and spurring horses lithe and lean,
And plunging into the deeps of pitchiest dead of night,
And ever cleaving through the measureless waste of sand –
Their hope a little water, that they may lick it up –
What bitterness do they drain, and all for a boon so cheap!)

Apart from the above mentioned style poetry of the poet Abū'1-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī, we find various themes in his poetry, of which the poems in the first three sections offer a wide survey of his theory, practice, and experience of life. In fact, the poet expressed in the contents of his poems as he conceived of God, fate, time, space, spirit, and matter; there exerted the influence of the stars, the immorality of the soul, the doctrine of transmigration, the nature of religion, etc. – particularly excites our curiosity, while there is the quintessence of his poetry. Here an attempt has been made to categorize his poems in the following manner:

1. Life and Death (الحياة والموت)
2. Human Society (المجتمع البشري)
3. Asceticism (الزهد)

4. Philosophy and Religion (الفلسفة والديانة)

Life and Death (الحياة والموت):

Would that a lad had died in the very hour of birth
And never sucked, as she lay in childbed, his mother’s breast!
Her babe, it says to her or ever its tongue can speak,
Nothing thou gett’st of me but sorrow and bitter pain.)

Human Society (المجتمع البشري):

It is indicated earlier that the poet Abū’l-'Alā’ al-Ma'arrī became blind at the age of four years old; since then he was disappointed in his hopes and affected with pessimism to the great extent. In fact, as a man he had a mind similar to other men, but due to the disability of eye-sight he felt need not depend at all on the circumstances in which he lived. In one hand, the poet Abū’l-'Alā’ al-Ma'arrī’s private misfortunes and his consciousness of public ills had nothing to do with his philosophy of life. His former life caused him to feel that solitude was the only tolerable alternative to non-existence; while the latter confirmed him in the belief that all mankind are fool, knaves, liars, and hypocrites, or vented itself in denunciation of particular classes and professions. His contemporaries were not so black as he painted them through his poems that related to the human society in the world. In this connection, an attempt has been made to show
the philosophy pertaining to society in the consistence of his poetry as follows:

(O children of Earth, there's not a man blest with righteousness
Neither below ground nor any save a rascal above it.
Was Adam, your ancestor, so noble in what he wrought,
Yet look you for nobleness amongst his descendants?
The grave-dwellers, send they not a message to us, although
The words of the messengers ye hear not, unheeding?)

It is imperative to know that the poet Abû’l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî not only regarded human nature as evil but mankind in the mass as incorrigible and incapable of practicing the virtues on which the utility of social intercourse depends. He himself fell far short of the complete seclusion advertised in his letter to the people of Ma‘arra, and it is interesting to come across poems which tell us what his neighbours thought of him and he of them, how he disliked mutual compliments, how he talked to his visitors from Persia and Arabia, and so forth. He confesses that the truth cannot be spoken in society without giving offence and that he felt obliged to behave as every one else did. In fact, with this temperament, the poet composed many verses which are full of the philosophy related to the human society.
Asceticism (الزهد):

The poet Abū‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī was seen to confine himself to his house, and away from the game to be played in the earth being an adherent to a spontaneous act of virtue. As such, people deemed him to be the ascetic personage. But, in this connection, the poet honestly rejected the assumption of people that they termed him as an ascetic one, with the following quotation as referred to by the Professor R.A. Nicholson:

"Men of acute mind call me an ascetic, but they are wrong in their diagnosis. Although I disciplined my desires, I only abandoned worldly pleasure because the best of these withdrew themselves from me." (42)

It is imperative to know that his asceticism is really the negative and individualistic side of his ethics. The poet abandoned the means of evil world and thereby he sought virtue and inward peace of mind. In this connection, we find various pieces of verses, of which testimony may be mentioned as follows:

إن مازت الناس أخلاق يعاش بها
فأحكم عند سوء الطبع أسواء

لو كان كل بني حواس او يشبه
فبمس ما ولدت في الخلق حواه

وفقكم للحج والدين إدواء
وبعدي من الناس برء من سقائهم

فالبيت أفرد لا إبطاء بذكاء
ولا سناد ولا في اللغة إقواء." (43)
(If humankind are distinguished by moral dispositions with which they live, yet in badness of nature all are alike. 'Twere well if every son of Eve resembled me, for what a wicked brood did Eve bring into the world!

My separation from men is convalescence from their malady, inasmuch as association with them is a disease which infects conscience and religion. So a verse, when it is single, cannot suffer from any fault of rhyme.)

Philosophy and Religion (الفلسفة والديانة):

It has been observed that the poet Abûl-'Alâ' al-Ma‘arrî stands for the largest humanistic culture of his time. His mission of life and spreading his message through his poems may properly be called a philosopher in so far as he sought after a reasoned view of life and the world. His speculations are capricious and incoherent. His theory on life concludes that nothing is certain except death. In fact, the poet is not primarily concerned with abstract truth. He seeks the True for the sake of the God, and seldom loses sight of the practical end. His philosophical and theological ideas are expressed in the poems arranged as jumbled fragments of truth. In fact, there is importance of Abûl-'Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî in the history of Islamic thought, his assertion of the rights of reason against the claims of custom, tradition and authority, and his appeal from the code of religion to the unwritten law of justice and conscience: in a word, his rationalism. He is a free thinker at heart. Without openly denying Revelation or defying the authority of the Qur’ân, he uses his own judgment in matters which Islamic creed regards as indisputable. It appears from the verses of Abûl-'Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî that reason is the most precious gift; it is the source of right knowledge and right action. Infallible it is not—
many questions it must leave in suspense; yet wise men trust and obey it, convinced that nowhere will they meet with a surer guide to point the morning and the evening ways. In the moral domain he reaches a positive goal: virtue is not in doubt, whatever else may be. In matters of his philosophy, he applies the principle to metaphysical investigation; it does not take him very far, though his thoughts are sometimes suggestive. He appears to have had but a slight acquaintance with Greek and Muslim philosophy, but he could boast of an acute mind well stored with curious information about every age.

Here an attempt has been made to show the philosophy of Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī that appeared in the consistence of his poetry as follows:

إِنَّا مَخْطَطُونِينَ فِي الْخَيْرَةِ وَالْبُطُورِ

انتساب الفتى إلى أمهاته

وَحَبَّ الصَّحِيحُ أَثْرَتُ الرُّومِ

جَهَلَوا مِن أَبَوِيْنِ أَيُّهَا الْقَلَّادُونَا

(We are in error and delusion. If thou hast a certainty, produce it!

Love truth caused the people of Rūm to prefer that a man should trace his descent to his maternal ancestry in the female line.

Who his father was they knew not save by supposition — and the young antelope follows its dam.)
(Reason forbade me many things whereto
Instinctively my nature's bias drew;
And it is perpetual loss if, knowing, I
Believe a falsehood or give Truth the lie.)

God fashioned me – the why of it I know not;
To him omnipotent and One the glory!
Let all mine hours and moments bear me witness
That I abjure the miscreants who deny Him.
God, He is God sans peer. Deceived
Are they that scoffed and disbelieved.
When thy soul mounts, in Him have faith
Even to thy last remaining breath;
So mayst thou hope forgiveness on a day
When, thy grave dug, the digger goes his way.
If thou art atheist from excess of folly,
Bear witness, O denier, I am none.
I dread the chastisement from God hereafter
And own the power supreme in hands of One.

It has been observed that the poet Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī believes in a Creator, whom he identifies with Allah. He emphatically repudiates atheism. God is a reality, one, eternal, omnipotent, and wise: His wisdom is demonstrated by His works. It appears from the above mentioned verses that Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī was a monotheist. But was he a monotheist in the same sense as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was, or as the Muslim scholastic theologians were? For him, Time and Space are infinite: therefore the Creator cannot be outside of them. In the context of philosophy, the poet Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī is seen as a free-thinker who speaks of mystics with admiration and respect will not surprise those who remember how often extremes meet.

Again it reveals from the theme of his verses that the poet keeps his views on the religion as evident over the pages of al-Luzūmiyyāt. His whole creed might be expressed in some such formula as “God, the Creator, is one: fear and obey Him. In fact, his own religion is founded on the authority of reason and fulfilled by the practice of virtue. According to him, the true religion consists in righteousness together with justice and charity to all men.
Opinion of the Critics in regard to Abū’l-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī:

In the domain of Arabic literature, Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī has occupied an important position for his poems and prose together; in fact, his poems are full of information for the human society and philosophy as well. It was he, who could overcome his disability of eye-sight, because his erudition led him to attain the apex position of life. His knowledge diffused for mankind and spread far and wide through his poetry. In this connection, Mr. Baerlein happens to remark that: “he (Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī) would have been as much bewildered as Herodotus if he had known that Lycians took their mother’s, not their father’s, name.” (47)

It has been admitted that the poet Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī has proved his mastery as appeared in the pages of al-Luzūmiyyāt which frequently displays the aptness of his diction, the imagery force, surprising turns of fancy, and the charms of the poetical style. Dr. Tāhā Husain dares to comment on the verses of al-Luzūmiyyāt as follows:

(The most part of the al-Luzūmiyyāt is full of strong word and excellent style; there is a little number of easy delicate style, scientific terminologies are scattered in it at large scale, even they may be found in one ode, and
Besides the above mentioned remark, Tāhā Husain is of the opinion that the poet Abūʾl-ʿAlâ al-Maʿarrî had a dynamic personalities in matters of spirituality, nova-tine, socio-religious aspects, economic and political life. As Tāhā Husain went through the activities of the poet al-Maʿarrî, he divided his life into three stages relating to his childhood, youth and old ages. It was Dr. Tāhā Husain who became conversant with the merits and demerits of the whole literary traces of al-Maʿarrî. It is aware of the fact that the poetry of his childhood age consisted of artificiality, tradition, beauty and exaggeration. The poetry of his youth age is marked to have been mixed with exaggeration, extreme rhyming, unfamiliarity and scientific improvement. But the poetry of his old age is represented with less exaggeration and style and in the same manner his prose exhibited the personality of his friend in clinging to the philosophy, knowledge and depth of mind. His al-Luzûmiyyat is also based on rhyming and refined works to the book of philosophy rather than poetry, since it finds a lack of imagination. (49)

It is worthy of mention that Ameen Raihani says about the linguistic style of Abūʾl-ʿAlâʾ al-Maʿarrî as follows:

"Abūʾl-ʿAlâʾ al-Maʿarrî s style of versification differs, for example, from that of his predecessors like those of the Muʿallaqat, and that of his successors like those of the Muwashšahs. Moreover, the method of al-Bahaʾ (Zuhayr) is not the same as that of (Zuhayr) Ibn Abi Sulma, just as in
some of his terms and figures of speech, al-Mutanabbi differs from Ibn Zaydūn". (50)

In addition to the above accounts, here mention may be made that Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt is a famous historian of Arabic literature, who dares to comment on the poetry of Abū'l-'Alā’ al-Ma’arrī who composed poems in his adolescent and adult period, in fact, their nature is not akin to the poems composed in the old age. In this connection, the historian Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt says about al-Ma’arrī as follows:

(As for his poetry of the adolescent period is concerned, it has hyperbolism to the great extent, evident imitation between constraints, about which he gave principal honour to al-Mutanabbi and he drew many ideas from him, he gave a light importance to the Arabic grammar, he used to participate in the poetical competition with his contemporary poets in matters of beauty, in spite of that he used odd words, at best time he used scientific terminologies; as for his poetry of adult period is concerned, it has less
number of hyperbolism and constraint, about which the Arab predecessors made contradiction; in fact, there finds influence of pure word and Bedouin style, he got into the hard metres, he made necessary for himself, which are not compulsory in tradition, he took the severe course of analogy, more related to beauty and word assonance, the style of his poem showed reception for his philosophy and views in this phase of his life, but he concealed them with odd words and secret compositions, as if the bad people were frightened for those ideological consequences.

The poet Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī considers his *al-Luzūmiyyāt* as “diction devoid of falsehood” (قول عربي من المين). In this connection, al-Ma‘arrī adds that: “I have not sought to embellish my verse by means of fiction or fill my pages with love idylls, battle-scenes, descriptions of wine-parties and the like. My aim is to speak the truth.” On the reverse, it is known that “the most agreeable poetry is the most false (أعنف الشعر أكذبه). The poet al-Ma‘arrī quotes from al-Asma‘ī “Poetry is one of the gates of vanity,” and he might have added that poets were called liars by Muhammad (*al-Qur‘ān* 26: 226). In this connection, Şuyūṭī has shown in his *al-Muzhir* (المزهر) the view of many good Muslims on this subject: “There are certain conditions which must be fulfilled before any one is called a poet. If his object were to speak the truth without exaggerating or going beyond the mark or lying or relating things absolutely impossible, although his work might be faultless in metre, it would have no value (as poetry), and the name of the poet would not be given to him.”

In respect of philosophical verse, Professor D. S. Margoliouth made a comparison between Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī and the poet Abū’l-‘Atahiyya with the following quotation:
(Abū’l-‘Atahīyya was drawing from the religion and keeping faith in it, while Abū’l-‘Alā’ was taking from the philosophy, but he did not believe in religion. This is the difference that appeared with exertion of influence in the poetry of these two poets.)

Here mention may be made that Von Kremer gave an opinion about the renowned poet Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, although it may seem to be an exaggeration, the critic says: “Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī is a poet many centuries ahead of his time.”

The historian, Ibn-Khallīkān says about the poet Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī in such a way: “His asceticism, his deep sense of right and wrong, his powerful intellect, his prodigious memory, and his wide range of learning, are alike acknowledged by both friend and foe.”

As pessimism goes with the poet Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, some of the scholars are of the opinion that partly it was of his hereditary temperament. In fact, the poet Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī was concerned with genuine and sincere character in life. He advocated that whatever he thought good and felt nice, spoke thereof. He had no secrets to hide from the world, no thoughts which he dared not express. His soul was as open as Nature; his mind was the polished mīrōr of his age.
Here it may be mentioned that had he not been blind-stricken and had not small-pox disfigured his features, he might have found a palliative in human society. His pessimism might not have been cured, but it might have been rendered at least enticing. Good-fellowship might have robbed it of its sting. Nor is his strong aversion to marriage, in view of these facts, surprising.

As a poet and litterateur, he was well confirmed about his position in the realm of Arabic literature that “his fame spread from the sequestered village of Ma‘arra to the utmost confines of the Arabic speaking world.” In the spring of 1055 A.D. he took his last breath, and was buried in a garden surrounding his home. In this connection, the historian al-Dhahabi states that there were present at his grave yard about eighty poets, and that the Qur’ān was read there two hundred times in a fortnight. In fact, eighty poets in the small town of Ma‘arra were sound incredible; but we must bear in mind that almost every one who studies the Arabic grammar has also to study prosody and versification and thus become at least a rhymester. Even to-day, the death of a noted person among the Arabs, is always an occasion for the display of much eloquence and tears, both in prose and verse. (54)

Here it is imperative to know that about ten years before the death of Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, the Persian poet and traveler, Nāṣir-I Khusraw passed through Ma‘arra on his way to Egypt; thereby he came to know about Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī as he described that there lies the credit of “Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī as the chief man in the town, very rich, revered by the inhabitants, and surrounded by more than two hundred students who came from all parts to attend his lectures on literature and poetry.” (55)
Here it will be better to note that the modern historian like R.A. Nicholson made a significant comment on Abu’l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma’arrî in such a way: “It is astonishing to reflect that a spirit so unconventional, so free from dogmatic prejudice, so rational in spite of his pessimism and deeply religious notwithstanding his attacks on revealed religion, ...; his poems leave no aspect of the age untouched, and present a vivid picture of degeneracy and corruption.” (56)

Dr. Hasan Ibrâhim Hasan has quoted a reference to the poet, Abu’l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma’arrî from the book Dhikrâ Abî al-‘Alâ’ written by Dr. Tâhâ Husain as follows:

(Certainly Abû’l-‘Alâ’ is a unique philosopher who made (some ethics) compulsory for himself in matters of his character and speech that which are not necessary for the Muslim people, and he took away from eating animal and became a vegetarian, made rejection of marriage including his offspring along with a desire of separation from people. In spite of having
an urge of pleasure, he accepted severely a strange manner to reject wine
that which he made prohibition from three angles, namely wisdom, health,
and religion; on the demerit of wine he wrote a book entitled Ḥanāsa al-
Rāḥ. Abū’l-‘Alā’, a unique philosopher denied the prophecies, but
acknowledged God, intimated with the divine commandment, made
opposition to the Qur’ān, had an irrational talk of its obligations; and then
he remained with that very safety position, so that no hardship can affect
him till death.)

It is worthy of mention that the work al-Luzūmiyyāt was
published first in India, and reputation of the poet Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma’arrī
spread far and wide. But an Indian lore Siddiq Hasan Khan mentioned
about Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma’arrī in his book Abzad al-‘Ulūm (أبجد العلوم) as
follows:

(The diwān of Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma’arrī was accused in the point of religion
which is full of opinions of the Brahmins, he finds not to eat meat, nor he
believed in the resurrection, and Day of Judgment and send-forth of the
prophets and his poetry bears heterodoxy at many points; Ibnal-’Amil said
about his book that made investigation on Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma’arrī giving
blame on him of hatred with an suspension doing over his tongue of poetry or getting protection for heterodoxy speeches with an intention of his death. From him poetry was transformed for bearing safety of his faith and made rejection of that things related to the chain of his heterodoxy. Al-Dhahabî said: "he is a renegade and declared as a freethinker. Al-Salfî said: "I think that he repented and turned to God.")

As a poet Abû’l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî earned a good name and fame in the Arab world; but his philosophy became more popular in the western countries. His versatile features of Arabic poetry got a distinct position in the realm of Arabic literature. It was he who could bring the modern approach to Arabic poetry during the later Abbasid period. As a philosopher and free thinker he was seen to cross some of the limits of Islam. But it can not be said that he was a monotheist. It appears from the criticism of his varied forms of poems that his earlier poems consist of exaggerations, but his poems of later period visualize his ripeness in versification. His overall experience drew attentions of scholars irrespective of caste and creed and country as well. In fact, his poems and prose works have been the treasury of knowledge and matter of research works.

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