CHAPTER - V

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After a thorough study of the previous chapters on the present work entitled A Study on Blind Poets in Arabic in Abbasid Period (750 to 1258 A.D) with special reference to Abū'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī, we are now to a stage to draw the conclusion by assessing all the aspects of the blind poets who flourished in the Abbasid period from 750 to 1258 A.D. The Abbasid period witnessed a huge numbers of poetical productions that gave a fillip to the development of Arabic literature. As Arab tradition goes, poets were the seers of the merits and short comings of the society which they used to give information through their verses which are full of philosophy and wisdom; their messages are also relevant to the activities of the human society as well. In the humble approach of this research work, an especial attempt has been made to visualize their importance and significance in the realm of Arabic literature.

The poets in Arabic literature have a brilliant history in the world literature, while their artistic poeticism appears from earlier period of Islam. Here it is imperative to know that the Arab Bedouin could produce excellent poetry in qasīda form; of course their poems were of the precursor to the prose art of Arabic literature. Accordingly their poets
championed throughout the ages past and present in eloquence and rhetorical aspects. In fact, their poetical tradition continued artistically in the subsequent periods, may specially be pointed to early Islamic and Islamic periods; both of which are historically determined as the Umayyad and Abbasid periods according to the specification of the modern historian thereof. During the early Islamic period, scholars wrote down this pre-Islamic poetry for preservation. The early Islamic and Islamic poets also imitated the works of their predecessors, and they began writing other types of poetry, such as love lyrics. These new poems at first described traditional Bedouin settings, but later they began to reflect the poets’ elegant new lives. Themes of the Islamic religion were sometimes borrowed, with love depicted as a holy war. In fact, during seventh to eighth centuries the Muslim Empire grew, new intellectual centres developed in Iraq and towards her cities poets flocked in large numbers, where they could find patrons and meet other writers. Finding there suitable situations of learning and patronizations, a good number of poets could expose their calibre in high order that gave a fillip to the development of Arabic literature. In this connection, our present research work has been undergone specially on the Blind Poets who flourished during the Abbasid Period (750 – 1258 A.D.), here we have made a threadbare study on the poet Abū’l-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī in view of bringing out the characteristics of his poetry in detail; which would help us to comprehend the whole picture of the blind poets and their importance as well.

In the first chapter, a discussion relating to Arabic Poetry over the preceding ages has been dealt with the account of Arabic poetry that flourished during the span of time right from Pre-Islamic to Abbasid periods. It is a matter of fact that Arabic poetry that flourished in the pagan
period, has diverse themes like *fakhr* (glorification), *hamasa* (bravery and fortitude), *ghazal* (amatory verse), *madih* (praise), *rithâ’* (elegy) and *hijâ’* (satire) and *wasf* (description). A good deal of poetry existed through oral transmission. Here it is imperative to know that such type of Arabic poems with diverse characteristics were preserved particularly by the works like *al-Aghanî* of Abu’l- Faraj (d. 356/966) and the *Jamharat Ash ūr al-‘Arab*, the Mufaddaliyat, the Hamâsa of Abu Tammâm (231/ 854) and that of al-Buhturi (d. 284/897).

In fact, this chapter is comprised of Pre-Islamic, Islamic and latter Abbasid periods’ poetical accounts in common so as to highlight the position of Arabic poetry that thrived in flowery language. The pre-Islamic odes of the Mu‘allaqât are counted seven to ten in number; their poets are namely Imru’l-Qais (d. 540 AD.), Zuhair b. Abi Sulma (d. 607 AD), Tarafa b. al-‘Abd (d. 564 AD) Labîd b. Rabi‘a (d. 661 AD.), ‘Antara b. Shaddâd (d. 615 AD.), ‘Amar b. Kulthûm (d. 600 AD.), al-Harith b. Hilliza, al-Nabigha of Dhubyan (d. 604 AD.), al-A‘shâ and ‘Abid b. al-Abras (d. 555 AD.). In fact, they were awarded with prizes at the fair of Ukaz and their poems were hanged on the wall of Ka‘ba written in golden letters. In addition to this, we find two to three brigand poets namely Shanfara, Ta‘abbata Sharr and Arwat ibn al-Warud; their poems are also considered as masterpiece of Arabic poetry.

Arabic poetry also thrived during the forty years beginning with the Prophet’s flight to al-Madina and the assassination of Ali in 660 AD. In this connection, we find a few champion poets namely Hassan b. Thabit and Ka‘b b. Malik, Abdullah b. Rawâha, Ka‘b ibn. Zuhair, Abbâs ibn Mîrdâs and al-
Nabigha al-Ja' di; their poems were complemented for Islam in objective.

The poetry in the Umayyad period also flourished in the adverse situations of warfare and rivalries among the different tribes being stimulated by victory and spread of Islam. Historically famous two satirists were Farazdaq (d. 728 AD.) and his rival, Jarir; and third one was the Christian al-Akhtal (d. 710 AD), known as a panegyrist. The poet Dhu'r-Rumma captured Arab taste with his rich vocabulary and the fertility of his similes, and the poetess Layla al-Akhyaliya won the palm for her elegies. The familiarity of 'Umar Ibn 'Abi Rabi'a (d. 719 AD.) of Mecca was credited with that of ghazal (love lyric) poetry. The development of Arabic poetry in the Umayyad period has occupied a brilliant chapter in the domain of Arabic poetry literature.

In the second chapter of this research work, we have dealt with the development of Arabic poetry that flourished during the period A.D. 750 to A.D. 1258. It is worth-mentioning that the poets of the Abbasid period were credited with the lyrical form of poetry, as it was popular during that period. Bashshar ibn Burd wrote delicate love poems. Abu Nuwâs wrote brilliant lyrics of love, wine, and the hunt, and he showed great imagination in his use of Arabic language. Religious poems such as those of Abu'l-Atahiya were also popular during this period. Two centuries later, the blind Syrian poet Abu'l-‘Alâ al-Ma‘arrî took up similar solemn ideas and novel characteristics. Alongside, we find other poems of distinct quality, became more popular among the masses of that time, by which the powerful rulers or patrons were praised. Generally these poems were
expressed in stately language with a grand style to celebrate the subject’s virtues.

In the third chapter, we have discussed a few blind poets of the Abbasid period, especially who had good familiarity in the realm of Arabic literature. It is a matter of fact that the Arab poets were credited with their multifarious poetic talents, and as their poeticism culture continued, there was no exception even in the Abbasid period from 750 to 1258 A.D. In this connection, during the span of that period, a few blind poets are seen to do significant contributions in the field of Arabic poetry. They are namely Bashar bin Burd (693 – 783 AD), ‘Ali Ibn Jabala, surnamed al-‘Akawwak (776 – 828 A.D.), Ibn al-Ta‘awīdhī (Abū’l- Faṭḥ Muhammad, 1125 A.D. – 1188 A.D), Jamāl al-Dīn Yaḥyā Ibn Maṭruḥ who was born on June 8, 1196 and died on October 19, 1251 A.D., and Abū’l-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī (973 – 1057 A.D.). In fact, their contributions are remarkable in the development of Arabic poetry. Here it is important to note that the contributions of the poet, Abū’l-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī are considered more valuable and significant than other blind poets of his contemporaries, because his poetic merits diffuse high order of philosophy and enormous knowledge.

Bashshār ibn Burd was a poet of the late Umayyad and the early Abbasid periods; he was one of the pioneers of science of metaphors in Arabic literature. He belonged to Persian origin, while his father was a freedman of the Uqayl tribe. The poet Bashshār was born in Basra and brought up in the tribe of ‘Uqayl. There he became youth and learnt eloquent language and correct speech. Attaining the maturity of age, he inclined to the caliphs and commanders to praise them. In fact, he was living under the shadow of poetry; but his soul was put down due to his
Bashshār was a blind from his birth and said to have been ugly. As he grew up in the rich cultural environment of Basra, he could show his poetic talents at an early age. Bashshār fell foul of some religious figures, such as Malik ibn Dinar and al-Hasan al-Basri, while he condemned his poetry for its licentiousness. He exchanged satires (hijā') with several poets. Being anti-Mu‘tazili, he criticized Wasil ibn ‘Atā’.

Bashshār was charged with heresy, for which he was imprisoned and beaten to his death and his body was thrown into the Tigris River.

It is imperative to know that Bashshār ibn Burd composed poems mostly in praise (madih), satire (hijā'), glorification (fakhr) and amatory verse (ghazal). Most of his satires was in traditional style, while his glorification spoke of Shu‘ubi sentiments. In fact, he achieved the poetic talent only at the age of his ten years old, as he grew youth his name and fame spread far and wide. It is reported that as and when Bashshār ibn Burd came to meet Jarîr, did not care to satirize him; but Jarîr considered him insignificant and turned his face from his end. In this connection, the poet made a comment that if Jarîr would reply to his satire, he would have been the champion. In some of verses he addressed to ‘Abda and other
female personalities of the city, lyric pieces where, in fact, his love is from the first known to be hopeless and draws its lasting character from this certainty. In fact, his work is unique in the history of Arabic poetry, which is extensively a song of courtly love.

‘Ali ibn Jabala was one of distinguished poets in the Abbasid period and as a blind poet, he could earn good name and fame in the domain of Arabic literature. In fact, he was excellent in recitation of poems. He was born in the class of freed slaves of Khurasan origin. He suffered from an attack of small pox, and due to the prolong infliction became blind. During his study period, he used to listen to the lecture given by scholars for the lessons of poetry, language and grammar. He had sharp intelligence and capability of expression in smooth deliberation; he used to sing noble eulogy with excellent description. As such, he praised the caliph al-Māmūn, Hamīd bin Abdu’l-Hamīd al-Ṭūsī, Abū Dalīf al-‘Ajali and al-Hasan bin Sahl. It is imperative to know that ‘Ali ibn Jabala exerted influence on the mind of people with his sweet words of pure style, delicate meaning, and eulogy of discretion.

He not only composed poems with the features of *al-rithā’* (elegy), *al-hijā’* (satire), *al-ghazal* (love lyric), *al-i’tidhar* (plea), *al-‘itāb* (censure) and *al-wasf* (description), but also acquired the poetical capability in eulogy (*madih*). Especially he uttered the eulogy for pleasing the caliphs and thereby he managed friendship with the leaders or Sultans. As a result of which, he received prizes from their end. In this connection, he was assisted by Abū Dalīf al-Qāsim ibn ‘Isā al-‘Ajali and Abū Ghānim Hamīd ibn ‘Abd al-Hamīd al-Ṭūsī al-Ṭā’ī and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir al-Khuza‘i,
they were the officials of the caliph al-Māmūn and his commanders; and al-
Hasan bin Sahl was the minister of al-Māmūn.

Ibn al-Ta‘āwīdhī was born at Baghdad in 1125 A.D and he was brought up in the family of his maternal grandfather. He was educated at his native place and later on, he became a secretary in the office of the administration of Fiefs. The poet lost his eyesight in 1183 A.D. and in this connection; he expressed regret for the days of his active youth. He collected his verses into a diwān before having been affected with blindness; again in later days he completed collection of his verse by an addition which he entitled Ziyādāt. As a poet, he earned good name and fame in the realm of Arabic poetry. His easy and graceful style was much admired. It appears from the criticism of his poem that his poems were of correct language and sweet expression having full of philosophy and thought. In fact, his each and every poem was considered to possess extraordinary beauty.

In fact, Jamāl al-Dīn Yaḥyā Ibn Maṭrūḥ was a friend of Ibn Khallikān, for which other people took relation with him at various level of correspondence and when they found leisure time, were engaged in the literary discussions and humorous witticism. Ibn Maṭrūḥ used to recite his verses to his friend and other people who kept interest in his recitations. As a poet, he possessed inborn character of poeticism. He was affected with a disease of the eye, which caused him blindness. In such a way, his name came in the category of blind poets. Ibn Maṭrūḥ’s diwān was published in Constantinople in 1881 A.D. In fact, his diwān contains a poem on the battle of Maṇṣūra, which was won by Malik Mu‘azzam, and in which St. Louis was taken prisoner.
In the fourth chapter, we have dealt with the specialty of the poet Abū’l-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrî and his poetical works. In fact, the poet was a celebrated Arab poet who lived in Ma‘rra which is located today in Syria and Iraq. He is a writer of poems, commentaries, elegies, and religious tracts, who showed himself as a sceptic and cynic one. His merits go to overcome his blindness with his intellectual works in the field of Arabic poetry. In leading his life, he adopted vegetarian foods and advocated a philosophy that no living creature should be injured or killed in any way of food or sports. Although Abū’l-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrî was charged with heresy, but he was not prosecuted, nor suffered any punishment for reasons. He is popularly known throughout the Arabic speaking world.

Abū al-‘Alâ’ al-Ma‘arrî speaks of the truth of the moral philosophy in the consistence of his poetry. His poems are treasured in three anthologies Siqt al-Zand (سُقْطُ الزَّنْدَ), al-Dir‘iyyât (الدِّرِيَّاتِ) and al-Luzûmiyyât (اللُّزُومِيّاتِ). In fact, his dîwân Siqt al-Zand (سُقْطُ الزَّنْدَ) was composed without a distinct system and it consists of verses related to panegyric (الْمُدْحَ), glorification (الَّالْصِبْرِ), love prelude (الْيَلِيْدُ), and elegy (الْرَّثَاءِ). In matters of his versification, his life may be divided into three phases; the first one is the phase of childhood that continued to twenty years of his age, 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.
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 (النسيب). Here it may be noted that the *diwan siqt al-zand* comprises of *al-Dir'iyyât* (الدرعيات), which relates to arms and war with an especial manner. As a blind poet, he had no role in about battle; he philosophically tries to perceive the portrayal of any war.

The work *al-Luzûmiyyât* 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. In reference to *al-Luzûmiyyât*, Dr. Tâhâ Husain considers it as a *diwân* of philosophy; of which similar works are seen in little number as to the literary characters designed by the poet Abû’l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma’arri. In fact, the term *al-Luzûmiyyât* is of the token of the sense finds in *luzûm mā lâ yulzimu* (نزوم مل لا يلزم) which Abû’l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma’arri compels for his life after coming back from Baghdad.

In fact, there is the portrayal of political and social phenomena in his verses, in which he accepted intention to tell the truth and the hard way of living that he thought 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. Von K-emer critically regards Abû’l-‘Alâ’ al-Ma’arri as one of the greatest moralists of all time and Ibn Khallikân says that 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. Besides, his life and his outstanding
works are highlighted in this chapter; his different types of poetry; analysis of his poetry and style of his poetry are elaborated with proper discussion. As his merits go, different critics dared to comment on his poetry; their views are presented in the way of criticism.

As a poet Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī 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 appears 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.

In fine, it may be said that Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī was given the nickname philosopher-poet not because he said a good philosophic and well organized poetry but from the point of view of his basis in self realization and the assurance on highlighting the distinguished and innovative personality. His poetry reveals his vision to show the defects of community and criticizing it in order to reach a more idealistic community. He was always against the religious leaders’ taking advantage of their unsuspecting followers for their own personal benefit; and therefore he believed in a religion of active piety and righteousness.