THESIS

ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis entitled, "Development of literary prose during early Abbasid period (132-300 A.H.)", is an attempt to bring to light various aspects of the Arabic Literary prose during the early Abbasid period. As a background of this study I started my investigation from the pre-Islamic period to find out the factors that were working in the gradual development of the Arabic prose literature. It is not always the political change that brings about a change in the literary trend. Other factors also work towards that end.

The first chapter of my work is devoted to the historical significance of the rise of the Arabs. I have given a brief account of the early history of the religion of Islam which the prophet of God ( ) preached for thirteen years in Mecca and for ten years in Madina. It was thus only within a period of twenty three years of his preaching that almost the whole Arabian peninsula was converted and ready to sacrifice their lives to protect their religion. When the mission of the prophet of God ( ) was accomplished he left this world. Now it was for his companions (may God be pleased with them) to carry his message to every corner of the world.

The picture on the other side around Arabic was that two powerful empires the Romans and the previous dominated the world well equipped with military forces and economic prosperity with their rich past. But the rules were corrupt and their people had lost moral values. Civil strife and struggle for personal power
was the order of the day. The religion of the Romans was Christianity. The style of these Christian rulers did not improve the condition of their subject. The serfs were tied to the land and they were sold with the land. They could not marry without the permission of their masters. The middle class had to bear the burden of taxes in a feudal system and consequently they were economically ruined. The agricultural land of the country was the property of a few powerful lords and was cultivated for them by their slaves. There was no hope of improvement in their conditions before death. The rich with their religious leaders were sunk in sins. The corrupt aristocracy had divided the land among themselves.

Under these social political religious and moral conditions in the land of the Christians and Zuhrastrians a new team of preachers appeared on the scene who preached the religion of Islam. The religion preached equality for all. They emerged from seclusion as soldiers of Islam under the Caliphs they occupied all the lands in Central Asia to the shores of Atlantic ocean. This was all done within thirty years after the death of the prophet of Islam ( ).

Then the Umayyad dynasty appeared on the scene who converted the caliphate into monarchy but ruled efficiently. They extended the boundaries of the Islamic Empire to Europe and conquered Spain. Their achievements are numerous. Their downfall came soon and the dynasty was annihilated completely except that Abd Al-Rahman succeeded in establishing his kingdom in Spain where the family ruled efficiently.
The Abbasids who captured power by force after organization a revolution shifted the centre of Islamic rule from Damascus to Baghdad. The conquests by Islamic forces during their rule had halted but their period is called the golden period of Islam since during this period the development of learning reached new heights. Al-Mansur who was the real founder of the Abbasid rule was the most enlightened ruler. The followed his son Al-Mahdi who promoted the work of his father in extending the boundaries of knowledge. He encouraged the expansion of knowledge by encouraging the scholars and men of letter. His son Harun Al-Rashid was himself a great scholar did not any stone unturned in promoting the cause of learning. His period of rule is the real golden period of Islam. During the reign of his son Al-Mamun scholars and writers dominated the court of the Abbasid Caliph whose generous encouragement to the Islamic and Sciences knew no bounds. It was during his reign that the art of Arabic Literary prose reached its new height. Here ends the first chapter of my work. The second chapter of the thesis is divided into several sections. It is wholly devoted to the history of the expansion of learning and writing beginning from the Islamic period to the end of the umayyad rule. Its first part is concerned with the pre-Islamic Arabic Literary prose. The second part is devoted the history of the development of the Arabic Literary prose after the revelation of the Quran which is the first prose. Book of Arabic Language and Literature. It contain an exhaustive discussion on the Quran throwing light on the literary beauties of the Holy Book. The comes the period of the first four caliphs of Islam. During this period the literary Arabic prose appeared in new colours and the art of oatory reached its new height. It was during this period that
the art of writing prose slowly praynessed in the form of Tawqiat. The remarks on the official paper and relevant orders passed by the rulers. It will the end of the Caliphate of Ali (may God be pleased with him) the art of writing and oratory had developed to a great extend. The umayyad period which form part of this chapter is favours for its all round developments. It was during this period that work of collection of Hadith started in right earnest under the instruction of the Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz. The movement in favour of translating books of foreign language had already started and several books were rendered into Arabic. It is during this period that translation activity had started which reached its new heights under the patronage of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mamun. The art of writing had also developed fully during this period only. The two great writers Ibnu Al-Maqaffa and Abdul Hamid are the products of the umayyad period only. In fact the umayyad played a key role in the process of the development of sciences and the art of the Arabic literary prose writing. Both these writers whop were the victims of the cruelty of the Abbasid ruler have no equal in the art of of writing Arabic Literary prose Abdul Hamid who was the prime minister of the last umayyad caliph was killed by the Abbasid forces after they occupied Damascus who Ibnu Al-Maqaffa was cut to pieces and bunt under the orders or knowledge of the Abbasid caliph Al-Mansur because he had earned his displeasure in drafting a letter for Al-Mansur's uncle Abdullah who had revolled against the Caliph. The remaining three chapters of the thesis are exclusively devoted to the history of the development of sciences and the Art of prose writing.
The first part of the third chapter gives an exhaustive account of translation activities mentioning the circumstances under which the Greek books were procured and talented translators were appointed for the purpose. The work of translation of books from foreign languages into Arabic is a great achievement of Al-Mamun. The translation period of the Abbasid regime is considered the golden period of the Islamic rule.

The reign of Al-Mansur, Al-Madi, Harun Al-Rashid and Al-Mamun will always be remembered as the revolutionary period of the development of culture and civilization. They were the people who involved different cultures to be united into one bringing the non Arabs also in the fold of the Arabian people justice Amir has paid rich tribute to this dynasty for their broad mindedness in advancing the cause of public interest. All of them combined war like qualities with high intellectual attainments. This period is no doubt the real golden period of the Muslim rule in which the Muslim empire reached its height of glory in respect of its wealth, political power civilization and culture.

The second part of the third chapter is in fact the history of the development of numerous science during the Abbasid period which is in a way the expansion of knowledge through the prose writings of eminent scholars who were experts in their own field of study. We have included in our survey a number of subjects such as Grammar and Lexicography Islamic Science, called Al-Tafseer, Al-Hadith, Al-Fiqh, Geography, Scholastic Theology, Philosophy, Logic and others.
As regards studies in Grammar the process started during the Umayyad period and culminated in full perfection during the Abbasid period and credit for this goes to the Kufa and schools of Grammarians. Among the prominent grammarians of that period are Abul Aswad, Ibn Abi Ishaq, Isa bin Umar, Harun bin Musa and Sibwai. Necessary information about the grammarians has been given

Among the scholars who combined in them the knowledge of various field of Arabic language and literature Al-Khalil bin Ahmad is the most prominent. Who is mentioned by Ibnu Al-Nadeem also in his Al-Fihrist. About him Jurji Zaidan writes that he is first to write on the subject of Arabic grammar and also on the science of Aruz ( ). He worked out the minute details of various forms of metres many of which he invented. His most famous work is Kilabu Al-Aain unfortunately reached us only in parts which were preserved. He died in 180 A.H. The other most prominent grammarian who followed his is Abu Uthman Al-Mazani but unfortunately all his works could not be preserved. Another most prominent scholar of this period in this science is Abul Abbas Al-Mubassad who died 285 A.H. His contribution to different sciences are very valuable. Ibn Al-Nadeem the author of Al-Fihrist has given a long list of his works. His book Al-Kamil is considered has a great value as a book of linguistic literature. His contribution to the Quranic studies is in fact an addition to our knowledge on the subject. The knowledge about the science of geography was the need of those days because muslims from all over the world were required to visit Mecca for pilgrimage and for performing Hajj and they had to be familiar with the routs roads ways and places. They
had also to travel to seek knowledge and to establish trade relations with other countries. Among the geographers of that period Ibn-Khardadhaha is most famous whose book Kitabu Al-Masalik wa Al-Mamalik is the most valuable in this field of study. Other prominent geographers of that period are Qaddama bin Jafar and Al-Yaqubi.

Regarding the science of scholastic philosophy prominent scholars like Abul Hasan Ali Al-Ashare, Abu Hudhaifa, Abu Ali Muhammad and Abul Hasan have contributed to this science in a big way.

This is in fact one of the great achievements of the Abbasid period that scholastic philosophy emerged as the most important Islamic Science which established supremacy of reason over the blind faith.

The science of history was also not neglected during this period and many prominent historians rose to fame. Ibnu Sad is the most prominent biographer of this period whose book Tabaqat is the most valuable addition to our knowledge on the subject. Muhammad bin Jarir Tabari Ibnu Ishaq, Waqidi and Kalbi are other famous scholars of history who advanced the science of history by their valuable contributions.

In fact the prose books that have reached us in the form of translations and other works of science and literature are the result of the active support of the Caliphs of the early Abbasid period. The policies of these caliphs also have much to do with the expansion of learning during their rule. Al-Masur had adopted the
policy of reconciliation which was to be followed at the political and ideological level. At the same time it was necessary to satisfy the main groups that were instrumental in bringing the dynasty to power. They tried to satisfy all sections of the society in one way or the other so much so that they incorporated sasanian culture by bringing this culture into main stream. This policy had its far reaching results which were political as well as cultural. Till the prose writings in Arabic appeared in the form of original works the translation works served as substitute for widening the scope of knowledge. The translation work which was initiated by the Abbasid rulers lasted for over two centuries and such topics as physics mathematics astrology, medicine, philosophy and logic were all translated into Arabic side by side the original prose works were also developing.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the general survey of the progress made exclusively in the Arabic literary prose writings. The umayyad period had produced Abdul Hamid as a great prose writer with his friend Ibnu Al-Muqaffa. The trend had started in earnest and there was a set of movement to achieve new heights of excellence in this particular art. This was all done under the patronage of the ruling class whose administrative needs and also their love for the Arabic language were instrumental in encouraging the intellectuals to move in this direction. The family of Barmak and others rose to power on account of their extraordinary ability in the power of expression as an art. This chapter is a survey of the progress made during these days of the Abbasid period. The following are the writers who flourished during the Abbasid period.
1. Abdullah bin Al-Muqaffah
2. Abu uthman Amar Al-Jahiz
3. Ibnu Qutaibah
4. Sahl bin Harun
5. Al-Fadl bin Sahl
6. Amar bin Masada
7. Ahmad bin Yusuf and others.

The house of Barmak produced very good literary prose writers. The sul family also rose to power only because they had acquired the highest proficiency in this art.

The fifth chapter gives a detailed account of the life and works of the most prominent prose who writers which the Abbasid regime produced. The theme of the both the chapters is the same. The difference is that of general survey and a detailed account of a few most prominent literary Arabic writers of the Abbasid period. It is here that our journey which had started from the pre-Islamic ends. We have tried to establish a link between the past and the early period of the Abbasid dynasty in respect of the development of the literary Arabic prose till the end of the third century of Hijrah - the period of our study being 132 to 300 A.H. A select bibliography follows this last chapter.

At this stage I may submit that I have tried to bring to light all important aspects of my topic of study. It is for the critics to judge how far I have succeeded in my attempt.