**Lecture:13**

Arabic literature in the 'Abbasid period

Pre-Islamic poetry was the natural expression of nomad life. We might therefore have expected that the new conditions and ideas introduced by Islam would rapidly work a corresponding revolution in the poetical literature of the following century. Such, however, was far from being the case. The Umayyad poets clung tenaciously to the great models of the Heroic Age and even took credit for their skilful imitation of the antique odes. The early Muhammadan critics, who were philologists by profession, held fast to the principle that Poetry in Pre-Islamic times had reached a perfection which no modern bard could hope to emulate, and which only the lost ideals of chivalry could inspire.' To have been born after Islam was in itself a proof of poetical inferiority. Linguistic considerations, of course, entered largely into this prejudice. The old poems were studied as repositories of the pure classical tongue and were estimated mainly from a grammarian's standpoint. These ideas gained wide acceptance in literary circles and gradually biased the popular taste to such an extent that learned pedants could boast, like Khalil b. Ahmad, the inventor of Arabic prosody, that it lay in their power to make or mar the reputation of a rising poet as they deemed fit. Originality being condemned in advance, those who desired the approval of this self-constituted Academy were obliged to waste their time and talents upon elaborate reproduction of the ancient masterpieces, and to entertain courtiers and citizens with borrowed pictures of Bedouin life in which neither they nor their audience took the slightest interest. Some, it is true, recognized the absurdity of the thing.