



INTERPRETATION OF RELIGIOUS- PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS AND TRADITIONS IN THE WORKS OF ABU RAYHAN AL-BIRUNI

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Abstract

This article analyzes Abu Rayhan al-Biruni's views on the customs, culture, history, holidays, rituals, and diverse philosophical perspectives of Hinduism and Christianity, based on his works "India" (Kitab al-Hind), "The Remaining Signs of Past Centuries" (Athar al-Baqiya), "Al-Qanun al-Mas'udi", and "Kitab al-Tafhim li-Awa'il Sina'at al-Tanjim". Furthermore, it outlines how the author presents the dogmatic foundations, internal sects, and historical interpretations of these religions through an objective and systematic approach.

Keywords: Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, God, worship, the Gospel, Jesus son of Mary, cathedral, history of religions.

Introduction

Uzbekistan is truly a land of great scholars. Today, the truthful and objective study of Uzbekistan's past has been elevated to the level of state policy. Abu Rayhan al-Biruni is considered one of such great scholars and a world-renowned encyclopedic scientist. The original name of Abu Rayhan al-Biruni is Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni al-Khwarazmi. Al-Biruni was born on September 4, 973, in Kath, the ancient capital of Khwarazm. He passed away in December 1048 in Ghazna [17:180-190]. The last quarter of the 10th century and the first half of the 11th century, during which the scholar lived, was an important period in the cultural and political life of the peoples of the Near and Middle East. Adam Mez, a 19th-century Swiss Orientalist and historian, analyzed this period



thoroughly and called it the Muslim Renaissance. Al-Biruni was one of the active participants in and shapers of this Muslim Renaissance.

In al-Biruni's works written about the religion, customs, culture, and history of ancient peoples, such as "India", "The Remaining Signs of Past Centuries", and "Al-Qanun al-Mas'udi", valuable information is provided about holidays, customs, and rituals related to Sogdians, Khwarazmians, as well as Hinduism, Christianity, and Judaism, alongside dynasties of kings and emperors who ruled in various countries. The most important aspect in this regard is that the scholar approached the coverage of other religions in his works with objectivity.

Literature Review

Research on Abu Rayhan al-Biruni and his works has been conducted primarily in the fields of history, astronomy, geodesy, mineralogy, geography, and political science. In this research, the scholar's analysis of religious studies, history of religions, traditions, and the religious-philosophical views within them was examined. Works such as "Mu'jam al-Udaba" by Yaqut al-Hamawi and "The Great Thinker Biruni" by A. Sharipov provide information about the life of Abu Rayhan al-Biruni and his activities in various cities and lands. At the same time, using editions of "India" published in Cairo in 1964 and Istanbul in 1958, Volumes 1-2 of "Abu Rayhan Biruni Selected Works" published in Tashkent in 1965–1968, as well as the works "Kitab al-Tafhim li-Awa'il Sina'at al-Tanjim", "Al-Athar al-Baqiyah 'an al-Qurun al-Khaliyah", and "Al-Qanun al-Mas'udi", the scholar's objective and scientific approach to describing various religious-philosophical views and traditions was studied and compared with the views of modern scholars of religious studies. In analyzing the scholar's views on Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity, "Translation and Commentary of the Meanings of the Holy Quran" published by Sheikh Abdulaziz Mansur in 2018 and the "Holy Bible" published by the Institute for Bible Translation in 2016 were utilized. In expounding the doctrines, traditions, and philosophical views of Islamic, Hindu, and Christian faiths, Ekrem Sarıkçıoğlu's "History of Religions from Beginning to Present" published in 2002, Aşırov Tahir's "Russian Orthodox Church in History and Today" published in 2002, and Şinasi Gündüz and Mahmut Aydın's



"Missionary Work, Christian Missionaries, Their Methods, and Activities Directed at Turkey" published in 2002 were researched.

Research Methodology

In preparing this article, a comparative-analytical method was applied, and Abu Rayhan al-Biruni's descriptions of Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and other religions were compared with data recorded in modern literature on religious studies. In addition, using the content-analysis method, the essence of key concepts used by the author regarding Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism was highlighted.

Analysis and Results

In his fundamental work titled "India", Abu Rayhan al-Biruni provided detailed information on the culture, philosophy, and religious views of India. Al-Biruni created this work through long-term scientific research in India and direct interaction with Indian philosophers and priests.

Below, al-Biruni's reflections on Indian philosophy and religious views are analyzed, attempting to interpret his teachings based on an objective approach. Furthermore, his evaluations of the Vedanta, Samkhya, and Yoga philosophical schools are analyzed and re-examined from the perspective of contemporary religious studies.

Abu Rayhan al-Biruni approached Indian philosophy scientifically. In his works, he paid special attention to maintaining scientific objectivity. He deeply analyzed various directions of Indian philosophy, including the Vedanta, Samkhya, and Nyaya streams. Al-Biruni studied Indian philosophy not merely to convey information, but also to compare it with Greek philosophy and Islamic thought. In this regard, he expresses the following thought in his work:

إن الفلاسفة الهنود قد تكلموا في ماهية الكون وأصله ومصيره، وهم في ذلك يشتركون مع
"Indian philosophers discussed the nature, origin, and destiny of the universe, and in this regard, they share commonalities with Greek philosophers on certain essential issues."

While expounding the views of Indian philosophers on matter, spirit, and divinity, he also compared the place of these concepts in Greek philosophy and Islamic



theology. For instance, al-Biruni compares the principles of cognition through reason and evidence proposed in Nyaya philosophy with Aristotelian logic, highlighting the similarities between the two:

"إن مبدأ الاستدلال في النيايا الهندية يقارب مناهج الاستدلال عند أرسطو" [1:122] "The methods of deduction (logical reasoning) in the Indian Nyaya school are close to Aristotle's methods of deduction."

Describing Indian religious traditions, al-Biruni also analyzes their metaphysical and ethical foundations. Interpreting divine concepts worshipped by Hindus such as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, he reveals their fundamental religious-philosophical significance.

In his view, the concept of divinity is interpreted differently in Indian philosophy. For example, Vedanta philosophy recognizes a single ultimate reality (Brahman), whereas Samkhya posits the existence of material and spiritual principles. Analyzing Upanishadic texts, al-Biruni expounded their monotheistic teachings. Furthermore, interpreting the ideas of karma and samsara (rebirth) in Indian philosophy, he analyzes the ethical and cosmological foundations of these concepts. According to him, these ideas constitute one of the core principles of Indian philosophy, directly influencing an individual's moral choices and lifestyle.

In the process of comparing Indian philosophy, al-Biruni explores not only Greek and Islamic thought, but also Zoroastrian and Buddhist teachings. He pays particular attention to Hindu views on karma and reincarnation (rebirth), emphasizing the connection of this idea to the meanings found in the philosophies of Plato and Pythagoras.

Moreover, al-Biruni compares the main ideas of Buddhism and Zoroastrianism with Indian philosophy. Comparing the Buddhist concept of nirvana (نيرفانا) with the concept of moksha (मोक्ष) in Indian philosophy, he analyzes their mutual interconnection. Similarly, he compares the idea of the struggle between good and evil in Zoroastrianism with the dualistic principles in Vedanta philosophy.

Al-Biruni's research on Indian philosophy was studied by many scholars in subsequent periods. Western scholars such as Max Müller, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and Joseph Needham highly rated al-Biruni's scientific



approach. Likewise, modern Orientalists and Indologists, including scholars such as Richard Garbe, Gavin Flood, and Wilhelm Halbfass, thoroughly analyzed his reflections on Indian philosophy.

In addition, in Abu Rayhan al-Biruni's work "India", the religious views of Hindus are widely covered, and their conceptions of God are analyzed in detail. Comparing the ways Hindus conceive God and their philosophical views in this regard, he highlights various aspects of their ideas about divinity.

According to al-Biruni, Hindus hold diverse views regarding understanding the essence of God, most of which are based on a metaphysical and philosophical approach. In their belief, God is depicted as an eternal, absolute, and unperceivable being. Some Indian thinkers, however, attempted to explain God through various names and forms.

Al-Biruni writes in this regard: "Hindus have different approaches to describing God; some express Him as the absolute truth, while others express Him through various symbols".

The views of Hindus regarding God, according to al-Biruni's description, are divided into the following main directions: Monotheistic view: According to this approach, there is a single divine being who is the primary source of all existence. Polytheistic concepts: Some streams of Hinduism accept the manifestation of God in various forms, honoring different gods and divine symbols. Pantheistic (harmony of nature and God) approach: According to this concept, God is embodied within nature itself and exists in connection with the entire universe.

Analyzing various Indian philosophical movements, al-Biruni writes: "Indian sages use various methods to explain God, yet most of them acknowledge that God is one and infinite" [4:156].

Comparing Islamic and Hindu concepts of God also holds an important place in al-Biruni's work. According to him, Islam advances the idea of absolute monotheism, defining Allah as an absolute, single, and peerless being. In Hindu beliefs, however, this view is interpreted in various ways.

While analyzing the philosophical approaches of Hindus, al-Biruni demonstrates that monotheistic elements also exist in their belief. For example, although ideas regarding God being one and infinite are put forward in the Upanishads, in practical terms, polytheistic elements are also preserved in Hindu religion.



Al-Biruni emphasizes: "Among Indian sages, there are those who recognize that God is one; however, their teachings manifest as polytheism among the general public" [4:245].

Al-Biruni's work "India" serves as an important source for comparing Eastern and Western cultures, philosophies, and religious beliefs. Deeply analyzing Hindu conceptions of God, he shows the similarities and differences compared to the Islamic approach. This analysis also holds relevant significance in the processes of interreligious dialogue and intercultural understanding.

In his work "India", al-Biruni comprehensively analyzed major directions of Indian philosophy. His approach is relevant not only for that era, but also remains significant today. His works serve as a valuable scientific source in strengthening intercultural dialogue and developing religious-philosophical thought. Therefore, al-Biruni's research on Indian philosophy holds important value in modern religious studies and cultural research. In addition, the scholar expounds the history and traditions of other religions in his works.

Although al-Biruni did not write a separate book dedicated solely to Christianity, he provided sufficient information about this religion in his works. For instance, in "Al-Athar al-Baqiyah 'an al-Qurun al-Khaliyah" ("The Remaining Signs of Past Centuries") and "Al-Qanun al-Mas'udi", he dedicated specific chapters to Christianity and provided extensive information. In "Kitab al-Tafhim li-Awa'il Sina'at al-Tanjim", however, only Christian rituals are included.

The word Christianity is derived from the Greek word "christos". "Christos" is synonymous with the Hebrew word "meshiah", expressing the epithet "Messiah" ("Anointed One") applied to Jesus. Therefore, followers of this religion are called Christians, and the religion itself is named Christianity.

According to al-Biruni, prior to the word Christian, the word "Nasora" (Nazarenes) was applied to the followers of Jesus. The word "Nasora" is a name used in reference to the village of Nazareth (Nosiro) near Jerusalem, where Jesus was born. For this reason, throughout his life, Jesus was referred to as "Jesus of Nazareth" [11:1577].

The word "Nasrani" is also used in the sense of Nasora or Nazarene. In this respect, a person or community following the path of Jesus is called Nasrani. Al-Biruni explains this as follows: "He (Jesus) came into the world in a village



named Nazareth near Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem). People always addressed him as Jesus of Nazareth. Due to this attribution, his people are famous by the name Nasrani" [7:179].

In the Holy Quran, the words "Nasora" or "Nasrani" are used to express the concept of Christian (Messianic). "And they say, 'None will enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian (Nasora)...'; "They say, 'Be Jews or Christians (Nasora), then you will be guided..." [13:8]; "And from those who say, 'We are Christians (Nasora)', We took their covenant..." [13:110].

According to al-Biruni, the word "Nasora", referring to Christianity or Christians, is a general name applied to all who followed Jesus [7:179]. In the New Testament (Gospel), the holy book of today's Christians, the Greek word "christianos" ("Messianic") appears in three places. In the Acts of the Apostles section of the Gospel: "And in Antioch the disciples were first called 'Christians'" [11:1793]; 'Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"' [11:1823]. And in the First Epistle of Peter, it is stated: "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed..." [11:1981]. It is evident from this that the term Christian was not formed during the time of Jesus, but rather subsequently developed by Saint Paul. In fact, people following Jesus were first given the name Christian (Messianic) by local pagans in Antioch between 40–44 AD [11:1793] and began to be widely used after the 60s AD [8:3].

Thus, the term Christian entered widespread usage by the second half of the 1st century AD. Hence, although the terms Christian and Nasora differ fundamentally, they express different facets of the same religion. According to information from Epiphanius, one of the earliest Christian historians, Jews later called the community following Jesus "Yeshuans" (followers), meaning "Nazarenes".

Al-Biruni was also among the first Muslim scholars to emphasize that gatherings where high-ranking Christian clergy make decisions are called synods (i.e., councils). He provides information regarding the time and place of these councils convened to resolve disputes between Christian sects and to determine the canonical scriptures [3:348]. "Its (synod's) meaning is a gathering of priests, bishops, and other high-ranking scholars due to important matters associated with



newly emerged events" [5:294]. It can be said that al-Biruni's description above matches the general concept of Christian councils.

There were eight such councils prior to al-Biruni. "Such gatherings took place only at specific times. The times they took place were recorded. Sometimes these gatherings were held to venerate Jesus and to demonstrate obedience to him." The councils prior to al-Biruni's time were as follows: First Council of Nicaea (325), First Council of Constantinople (381), Council of Ephesus (431), Council of Chalcedon (451), Second Council of Constantinople (553), Third Council of Constantinople (680), Second Council of Nicaea (787), and Fourth Council of Constantinople (869).

Al-Biruni also expounds the hierarchy of Christian clergy. He states that their number from the lowest rank to the highest rank comprises nine levels, but notes that the first three ranks are at risk of disappearing. "The first of the high priestly ranks of Christians is tasulta, the second is qaruna, the third is hiyvufdiyoqta (subdeacon), the fourth is shammas (deacon), the fifth is qiss (priest), the sixth is usquf (bishop), the seventh is mitron (metropolitan), the eighth is jasliq (catholicos), and the ninth is bitriq (patriarch). I learned that their own people rarely remember the first three of these" [6:250]. Today, clerical ranks differ across each Christian denomination.

Regarding the Gospel, al-Biruni also researched the canonical Gospels of Christians. In his book "Al-Athar al-Baqiyah 'an al-Qurun al-Khaliyah", he presents his views on the New Testament part of the Holy Scriptures and the Four Canonical Gospels. Regarding the Four Gospels, al-Biruni states: "Undoubtedly, the Gospel in the view of Christians is a scripture consisting of four manuscripts. The first belongs to Matthew, the second to Mark, the third to Luke, and the fourth to John. In fact, these four authors wrote the Gospel at the request of the inhabitants of their respective cities. Each of them includes the virtues, calls, and prophetic works of the Messiah". According to al-Biruni, the Gospel is a text containing reports from the birth of Jesus until his death.

Muslims understand the Gospel in two aspects. According to the first, the Gospel is the holy book described in the Quran, brought down to Jesus by the angel Gabriel. There are several verses regarding the Gospel in the Holy Quran. In verse 46 of Surah Al-Ma'idah, it is stated: "And We sent, following in their footsteps,



Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming that which came before him in the Torah; and We gave him the Gospel, in which was guidance and light and confirming that which preceded it of the Torah as guidance and instruction for the righteous" [13:116]. In addition, there are verses about the Gospel in Surahs Ali 'Imran, Al-A'raf, At-Tawbah, Al-Fath, and Al-Hadid of the Holy Quran. The second aspect, in accordance with al-Biruni's views, is the book composed of the four Gospels. Summarizing these two views, it can be said that initially the Gospel was a holy book revealed to Jesus through Gabriel. However, over time, major alterations were made to this book. The original was completely changed or lost entirely. Following that, the authors of today's canonical Gospels wrote Gospels recounting the life of Jesus. As a scholar of religious studies, al-Biruni emphasizes the second view, namely that the New Testament is primarily a collection of four Gospels (because at that time the original Gospel was not present, and virtually no believers in it remained).

Al-Biruni mentions that these four Gospels together are named the Gospel, providing the following information regarding its formation and the authors of the Gospels: "Four people whose places of residence and languages were different wrote it (the Gospel): Matthew in Hebrew in Palestine, Mark in Rumi (Latin) in Rum (Anatolia), Luke in Greek in Alexandria, and John in Greek in Ephesus. Later, these four Gospels, which differed in terms of words and meanings, were combined under two covers, and all of them were named by a single name as the Gospel".

Today as well, when speaking about the Gospel, al-Biruni's information is accepted. However, it is worth noting that modern Christians also include another 23 books in the New Testament in addition to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Following this information, based on sources, we examine al-Biruni's views regarding the authors of the four Gospels.

The Gospel of Matthew. The Holy Scripture of Christianity consists of the Old and New Testaments. The New Testament is composed of four Gospels. "The first of them was written by Matthew, and relative to his name it is called the 'Gospel of Matthew'. Matthew wrote this Gospel in Palestine. The Gospel of



Matthew was written in the Hebrew language, as it is known to have been written in Hebrew from the place where it was written" [6:252].

Although the oldest existing Gospel today is in Greek, some of the Gospels were written in Hebrew. Muhammad Abu Zahra, approving al-Biruni's opinion in his book "Muhadarat fi an-Nasraniyyah", states: "The Gospel of Matthew was written in the Hebrew language in Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem)." Likewise, al-Hindi in his work "Izhar ul-Haqq" provides information stating: "The original text of Matthew's good news was written in Hebrew. However, it was lost. It is not clear when and by whom the current Greek translation was performed".

Although al-Biruni states that the place where Matthew's Gospel was written was Palestine, there are also researchers who claim that the Gospel of Matthew was written in Greece or Syria.

The Gospel of Mark. Al-Biruni emphasizes that Mark is the second of the Gospel authors. However, the Turkish researcher, Dr. Ekrem Sarıkçıoğlu, in his work "History of Religions from the Beginning to the Present Day", states: "The Gospel of Mark was written before the Gospel of Matthew; it is the first Gospel" [9:313]. Al-Biruni, in his work "Al-Qanun al-Mas'udi", emphasizes that the Gospel of Mark was written in Rum in the Rumi (Latin) language [6:252]. However, Muhammad Abu Zahra stated: "Mark's Gospel was written in Greek. We have not witnessed opposing views of Christian scholars regarding this. Mark wrote the Gospel in the Greek language at the request of the believers of Rum. However, there are also opinions stating that it was written in Latin".

To synthesize these two views, during al-Biruni's era, the Greek language was divided into two dialects. The first was the dialect in circulation in Palestinian lands called Greek, and the second was the dialect in circulation in Rum (Asia Minor or Anatolia) called Rumi.

The Gospel of Luke. Al-Biruni emphasizes that the third of the New Testament Gospels is the Gospel of Luke. The third of today's Canonical Gospels is also the Gospel of Luke. Luke wrote his Gospel in Alexandria. Saint Paul named him a physician. Al-Biruni states that Luke wrote his Gospel in Greek [6:252]. Today as well, Christian scholars emphasize that the Gospel of Luke was written in Greek [9:314]. However, there are also conjectures that the Gospel of Luke was written in Latin.



The Gospel of John. The author of the final Gospel of the New Testament is John. According to al-Biruni's writing, John wrote his Gospel in Ephesus [6:264]. Muhammad Abu Zahra, on the other hand, emphasizes that the Gospel of John was written in Rum. According to historical sources, when the Romans seized Jerusalem, John left Palestinian lands and headed to Ephesus. During this period, he wrote his Gospel [9:314]. That the Gospel of John was written in the Greek language is unanimously accepted. This is because its style of writing, unlike the previous three Gospels, was written in the style of Hellenistic philosophy [15:178]. The dispute regarding the Gospel of John lies not in its language, but rather in its authorship. The reason for this is that there are two Johns in the New Testament. The first John was an apostle who spoke Hebrew. The second John, however, lived nearly two centuries after John the Apostle and wrote the Gospel in Greek. To this day, many believe that the Gospel of John belongs to John the Apostle [9:314]. This is considered an erroneous view.

In conclusion, al-Biruni's works are considered important regarding the emergence of Christianity, its traditions, clerical ranks, and major councils. In Christianity, the activities of clergy who conduct worship and rituals are significant. Al-Biruni provided extensive information in "Al-Athar al-Baqiyah 'an al-Qurun al-Khaliyah", "Al-Qanun al-Mas'udi", and "Kitab al-Tafhim li-Awa'il Sina'at al-Tanjim" regarding the historical and regional description of the origin of Christian worship, as well as the chronology of Christian rituals. Furthermore, his methodology describing the language of the Holy Scripture of Christianity, the regions where it was written, and the conflicts within the Gospels—as highlighted in the three aforementioned works—continues to be widely utilized by the Christian world today.

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