

Book: Comparative Religion in Medieval Muslim Literatur

by Hilman Latief

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Comparative Religion In Medieval Muslim Literature

Hilman Latief



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Comparative Religion in Medieval Muslim Literature

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System of Transliteration

THE following is the table of the system of transliteration of Arabic words and names used in this thesis

b = ب	z = ز	f = ف
t = ت	s = س	q = ق
th = ث	sh = ش	k = ك
j = ج	ṣ = ص	l = ل
ḥ = ح	ḍ = ض	m = م
kh = خ	ṭ = ط	n = ن
d = د	ẓ = ظ	h = ه
dh = ذ	‘ = ع	w = و
r = ر	gh = غ	y = ي

SHORT : a = اَ ; i = اِ ; u = اُ

LONG : ā = آ ; ī = إ ; ū = أ

DIPHTHONG : ay = آي ; aw = أَوْ

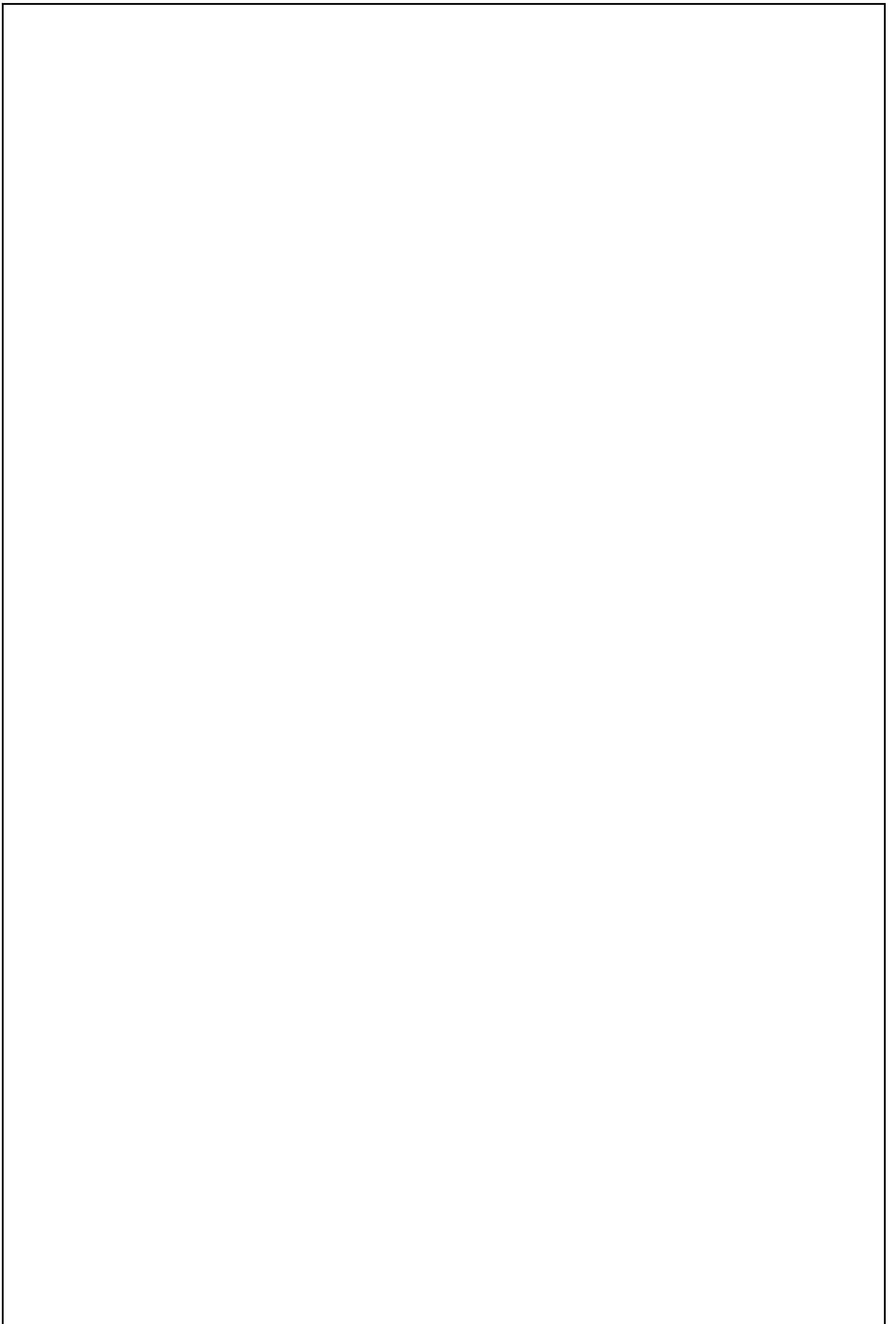




Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION	v
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of Problem.....	1
Medieval Muslims' Recognition of the <i>Hind</i>	5
Context of this Study	10
Chapter Outlines.....	13
II. INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHIES, SOURCES, AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE <i>HIND</i>	15
The Life and Works of al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani.....	15
Al-Biruni: A Scholar and Religious Historian	16
Al-Shahrastani: A Theologian and Heresiographer	22
Approaches to the Religious Traditions of the <i>Hind</i>	26
III THE <i>HIND</i> AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF WORLD RELIGIONS	33
Defining Traditions and the Divisions of World Religions...	33
Hinduism and Sabianism: Doctrinal and Historical Correspondences	42

IV.	DIVISIONS AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF THE	
	<i>HIND</i>	57
	Al-Biruni on the Types of the Hindu Adherents.....	57
	Classification-based Theological Thought	58
	Classification-based Caste in Society.....	66
	Al-Shahrastani on the Divisions of the Religions of the	
	<i>Hind</i>	69
	Brahmans/Barāhima.....	69
	The Followers of Spiritual Beings	72
	The Star Worshippers	73
	The Idol-Worshippers.....	74
	Indian Philosophers	75
	The Hindus: Between Monotheism and Polytheism.....	77
	Ritual, Festival and Pilgrimage.....	79
	Buddhism/Shamanians	82
V.	CONCLUSION	87
	Al-Biruni on Idolatry, the “Elites” and “Vulgar” of the	
	Hindus	88
	Al-Shahrastani on Idolatry and the Concept of	
	“Representation”	90
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	95
	INDEX	105



CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background of Problem

THIS RESEARCH examines medieval Muslim literature on the study of religions, with specific reference to the works of Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. 1048) and Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153). These scholars are comparable, since they discuss “major” and “minor” world religious traditions in general, and deal with the nomenclature of the religious traditions of Hind [India] in particular. Long known as important and admirable medieval Muslim scholars of comparative religion, they wrote distinctive works that became primary references for modern Muslim religious historians and heresiographers. Yet, medieval Islam was likely the key developing period of religious and crosscultural studies in Islamic intellectual history. As Franz Rosenthal points out, “the comparative study of religions has been rightly acclaimed as one of the great contributions of Muslim civilization to mankind’s [sic] intellectual progress.”¹ From the eight to tenth centuries, for example, Muslim historians, geographers, and travelers focused on seven great ancient civili-

1 Franz Rosenthal, “the preface” of Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shahrastani on the Indian Religions* (Moulton: Moulton & Co., 1976), 5.

zations: the Persians, Chaldeans, Greeks, Egyptians, Turks, Indians, and Chinese.²

Modern scholars have recognized the two men's scholarly contributions. Arthur Jeffery states that al-Biruni's contribution to the study of religion by establishing such scrupulous scientific principles as completeness, accuracy, and unbiased treatment is rare in his era and "unique in the history of his own faith."³ Eric J. Sharpe writes: "The honor of writing the first history of religion in world literature seems in fact to belong to the Muslim Shahrastani, whose *Religious Parties and Schools of Philosophy* describes and systematizes all religions of the then known world, as far as the boundaries of China."⁴

Several ideological, political, and intellectual factors might have caused medieval Muslim scholars to analyze religions and religious sects. As to the ideological or doctrinal factor, some Qur'anic verses highlighting other religious communities, especially the Sabians (*al-ṣabi'ūn*), Zoroastrians (*al-Majūsiyah*), and People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*), have led Muslim theologians and exegetes to elaborate on the existence, status, and position of religions according to Islamic perspectives.⁵

2 Tarif Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam: The Culture and Heritage of the Golden Age* (New Jersey, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1985), 62.

3 A. Jeffery, "Al-Biruni's Contribution to Comparative Religion," in *Al-Biruni: Commemoration Volume* (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1951), 125.

4 Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (Illinois: La Salle: Open Court, 1991) second edition, 11.

5 Jaques Waardenburg, *Muslim Perception of Other Religions: A Historical Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). For Muslim works see also for example, Mahmoud b. Sharīf *al-Adyān fī al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1970); 'Abbas b. Mansur al-Saksaki, *al-Burhān fī Ma'rifah 'Aqāid Ahl al-Adyān*, edited by Khalil Ahmad Ibrahim al-Haj (Dār al-Turāth al-'Arabi li al-Taba'i wa li al-Nashr, 1980); Sulayman b. Abd al-Qawī al-Tūfī, *al-Intiṣārāt al-Islāmiyah fī 'ilm Muqāranah al-adyān* (Cairo: Matba'ah Dār al-Bayān, 1983).

INTRODUCTION

There are some basic categories in the Islamic medieval era regarding non-Muslims. By referring to the Qur'an's general notions, Jacques Waardenburg divides these categories into three: (1) the Qur'an distinguishes between believers and unbelievers as well as Muslims and non-Muslims. The latter have three specific characteristics: they do not confess God's oneness, they deny Muhammad's prophetic attribute, and they do not accept the Qur'an as a definitive word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad; (2) The Qur'an also divides non-Muslims into two categories: such religious communities as Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Sabians are included in the first one, whereas the polytheists (*al-mushrikūn*) are in the second category; and (3) The dissimilarities between those who believe in God's oneness and those who believe in and worship something or somebody in addition to God.

Politically speaking, when Muslim power began to expand throughout South and Central Asia, North Africa, and Europe, the need to recognize other religions, either in terms of political conflict or polemical discourse, increased rapidly. In line with the nature of political motivation and under imperial protection, certain scholars undertook "regional studies" that covered the materials of religious communities in the given regions. Moreover, after the "wave of Hellenism,"⁶ interfaith discourse and the investigation of other religions became a main concern of medieval Muslim scholars. Translating Greek works on philosophy and logic into Arabic and Persian during the 'Abbasid period contributed tremendously to the development of theological and philosophical thought. Above all,

6 "The wave of Hellenism" is used by western scholars, especially William Montgomery Watt, to describe the great impact of the scientific and philosophical views of Greece and other countries in the eastern Mediterranean on the Arab intellectual tradition. W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1987); Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 1; The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 437.

this activity significantly enhanced the variety of scholarly works in the fields of mysticism, literature, intercultural studies, and religious studies. This period was also characterized by the emergence of prolific writers influenced by Greek thought, Arabic culture, and Persian intellectual environments, respectively. Bagdad's *Bayt al-ḥikmah* (House of Wisdom) is an appropriate example of how a fine research library existed during the 'Abbāsid period where Greek thought, Arabic cultures and Persian intellectual environments intermingled.⁷

Indeed, scholars prior to al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani had penned more than a few works related to religious and intercultural studies. However, while the majority of scholars focused on the "biblical religions" or "Muslim heresies,"⁸ al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani elaborated on Hind's religious traditions. The first group's works were mostly polemical and apologetic. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, for instance, some prominent scholars elaborated on *taḥrīf* (falsification of scripture)⁹ to criticize Jewish

7 See Seyyed Hossein Naṣr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, edited by: Mehdi Amin Razavi (Surrey [England]: Curzon Press, 1996), especially chapter I, "Islamic Thought and Persian Culture," 3-58.

8 See for example, Abu Mansūr al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bain al-Firaq wa Bayān al-Firqaq al-Nājiyah Minhum: 'Aqāid al-Firqaq al-Islāmiyyah wa Ārā Kibār A'lāmahā* (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Sīnā li al-Nashr wa al-Tauzī' wa al-Taḥdīr); also *Muslim Schisms and Sects*, translated by: Kate Chambers Seeley (New York: AMS Press, 1966); Abu al-Muzaffar ṭāhir ibn Muhammad al-Isfarāynī, *Tabsīr fī al-Dīn wa Tamyīz al-Firqaq al-Nājiyah 'an al-Firqaq al-Hālikīn* (al-Qahirah [Cairo]: Mat} baah al-Anwar, 1940); 'Āli ibn Ahmad Ibn Hazm, *al-Fasl fī al-Mīlal wa Ahwā wa al-Nihal*, Taḥqiq Muhammad Ibrahim Naṣr and Abudurrahman Umayrah (Jeddah: Shairkah Maktabah Ukad, 1982).

9 The word "*taḥrīf*" has been used by Muslim theologians against Jewish and Christians, of "having modified, falsified" and misinterpreted their scriptures "to suppress predictions of the prophet," See the EI, article "*Taḥrīf*", 445.

and Christian scriptures as well as to define Islam's superiority over other religions.¹⁰

Medieval Muslims' Recognition of the *Hind*

AS A RESULT of the close and intensive interaction between Islamic civilization and Hind in medieval times, a number of Arab-Muslim scholars wrote on aspects of Indian civilization. According to al-Baladhuri's reports, `Uthman ibn `Affan asked `Abd Allah ibn `Amir ibn Kurayz to send a knowledgeable person to Hind's harbor and report on what he saw. Other reports mention that the idea of reaching Hind existed during `Umar ibn al-Khattab's reign.¹¹ *Al-Hind* was the Arabic term for India. Medieval Muslim writers might have used this word to mean "India" in proportion to the Arab-Persian conception. André Wink points out that this term was taken from "a pre-existing Persian term, not a Sanskrit term."¹² In the Umayyad and Abbasid times, it referred to some areas in South Asia.¹³ The geographical term *al-Sind* was also used.

In his *Historical Encyclopedia*, al-Mas`udi (d. 957) says: "The Hindu nations extend from the mountains of Kurasan and of es-

10 For the variety of Muslims interpretation of Tahrif and their perception to Hebrew Bible, see Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and The Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden, New York, Koln: E.J. Brill, 1996).

11 Abu al-Futūh Muhammad al-Tawanisi. *Abu Rayhan Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Biruni: al-`Ālim al-Falakī, al-Jiyālūjī, wa al-Riyādī al-Mu`arrikh Mutarajim Thaqāfah al-Hind* (Muassasah Dār al-Tahrīr li T}ab'I wa al-Nashr, 1968), 15.

12 Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World: Volume I: Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam 7-11 Centuries* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997), 190.

13 See Mubārakpūri, K.A. *al-'Arab wa al-Hind*, 13; in another treatise, al-Mubārakpūri briefly describes the political, cultural and intellectual policies in regards to the *Hind* issued by the Abbasid Empire since it was led by Abu al-Abbas al-Saffāh (750-754) until al-Mu'tadid (892-902). See *al-Hind fī 'Ahd al-'Abbāsīyyīn* (al-Qahirah: Dār al-Ansar, 1980).

Sind as far as et-Tubbet.”¹⁴ Maqbul Ahmad notes that while *al-Hind* encompasses certain areas from the Indus river up to border of Burma/Myanmar, *al-Sind* includes some areas from Makran up to the lower course of the Indus.¹⁵ The Arabs later modified its scope by including the Bay of Bengal archipelagos as well as the areas of mainland Southeast Asia and the nearby islands of Southeast Asia that had been culturally Indianized since the seventh century. Some Buddhist areas, such as Central Asia, China, Japan, and Korea, were included in the term *al-Sin* (China), while Tibet and Mongolia were, for the most part, classified as *al-Hind*.¹⁶

Even though Arab-Indian interactions were probably deep rooted before Islamic civilization, especially through commercial contacts (*al-'alāqah al-tijāriyah*),¹⁷ the Muslims' knowledge of Indian culture developed rapidly around the ninth and tenth centuries due to their military expeditions and considerable influence on the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean trade routes. Their recognition of Indian culture was engendered not merely by the resulting interaction between Arabian and Indian traders, but, more importantly, grew after the Arab-Muslims conquered the Persian

14 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jauhar* (Beirut: Makshūrāt al-Jāmi'ah al-Libāniyah, 1966), I, 91; see also *Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*, translated from Arabic by Aloys Springer (London: Printed by the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1841), I, 177.

15 For a further discussion of the early Muslim geographical accounts of the *Hind* see Maqbul Ahmad, *Indo-Arab Relations: An Account of India's Relations with the Arab World from Ancient up to Modern Times* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations; Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1969), 95-106.

16 Wink, *Al-Hind, Volume I*, 191-92; Karl Jahn, *Rashīd al-Dīn's History of India: Collected Essays with Facsimiles and Indices* (London & Paris: The Hague, Mouton & CO., 1965) Rashīd al-Dīn in his book *Jāmi' a-Tavārikh* is more concerned with “Buddhism” rather than “Hinduism.”

17 Mubārakpūri, K.A. *al-'Arab wa al-Hind fī 'ahd al-Risālah* [translated by Abd al-Aziz 'Izzat 'Abd al-Jalil] (al-Qahirah: al-Haiah al-Mishriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1973), 10.

INTRODUCTION

regions where Persians were intermingled (*imtizāj*) with Indian culture (*al-thaqāfah al-hindiyah*).¹⁸

In addition to trade contacts, medieval Muslim scholars obtained information through largely regional and cross-cultural studies that occasionally covered discussions of religious ideas or religious communities. In line with Muslim political and cultural expansion, the observations of Muslim travelers and writers were not restricted to the societies, religions, and cultures of the Arab peninsula and Persia, but extended to Hind¹⁹ and even China.²⁰ Even prior to the “Wave of Hellenism” in the eighth and ninth centuries, Arab-Persian Muslim scholars had interacted with the Indian scientific materials in field of astronomy, astrology, mathematics, and medicine that had been translated from Sanskrit into Arabic or Persian. As for Hind’s religious traditions, at least three categories of information can be seen in their works: cultural studies, eyewitness accounts of a certain region and its geographical information, and encyclopedic works and digests.²¹

18 Abu al-Futuḥ Muhammad al-Tawanisi. *Abu Rayhan Muḥammad b. Ahmad al-Biruni: al-‘Ālim al-Falakī, al-Jiyālūjī, wa al-Riyādī al-Mu’arrikh Mutarajim Thaqāfah al-Hind* (Muassasah Dār al-Tahrīr li T}ab’i wa al-Nashr, 1968), 19-20; Wink, *Al-Hind: Volume I*, 7-9. 1

19 See Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsīd Society [2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries]* (London: Routledge, 1998), 24.

20 Sulayman al-Tajir and Abi Zayd Hasan al-Sirafi, *Akhbār al-Sīn wa al-Hind, tahqīq Yusuf al-Sharuni* (al-Qāhirah: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah al-Banāniyah, 1999).

21 Bruce B. Lawrence presents some important works written by Muslim travelers, geographers, and writers concerning Indian civilization. Among them were such ninth-tenth century scholars as Suhrāb (*Kitāb ‘ajā’ib al-Aqālīm as-Sab’a*), Ibrahim ibn Wasif Shah (*Mukhtasar al-‘Ajā’ib*), and Buzurg ibn Shahrīyar (*Kitāb al-‘Ajā’ib al-Hind*); Abu Zayd Hasan al-Sirafi (*Silsilah al-Tawārikh*) al-Mas’udi’s (*Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma’ādin al-Jawāhir*), and Ibn al-Nadim (*Fihrist*). In addition, al-Maqdisi (d. 985) wrote *Kitāb al-Bad’ wa al-Tarīkh* that contains a discussion about Brahmans. Maqdisi also mentioned some Indian religious sects in one of his chapters. According to Lawrence, most of the materials of Indian religion in Maqdisi’s book are similar to the al-Nadim’s

For instance, in his *Ta'riḫ al-Rusul wa al-Muluk* (The History of Prophets and Kings), al-Tabari (d. 923) incorporates material on Hind's regions and religious traditions in connection with early human history. He presents various reports indicating that Adam was cast down from Heaven to the land of Hind, especially at a mountain called *Budh*. Adam left Hind after God told him to perform a pilgrimage to Mecca.²² Accordingly, idolatry began when his descendants, the sons of Seth and Cain, worshiped their ancestors' bodies. During Noah's time, the flood carried the objects of worship from Hind to Arab territory. By citing al-Tabari's account, I point out that the narrative of Hind was included in early Muslim literature. Yet this narrative also shows the longstanding interaction between Arabia and India, for Adam went to Makkah for pilgrimage and to find Eve, who, according to some accounts in al-Tabari, settled in Muzdalifah. The idea of idol worship in Arabia, based on al-Tabari's description, actually originated in Hind.²³

Other medieval Muslim travelers and geographers, in part, discuss Hind's religious traditions. The geographer Ibn Khurdadhbih (d. 912) briefly reports the types of Indian castes (*ajnās al-hind*) and their forty-two religious sects (*milal ahl al-hind*). Without presenting his supportive information, in his *Al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik* (The Book of Roads and Kingdoms) he classifies those sects into three main groups: Those who believe in the Creator, the Glorious and Powerful (*man yuthbitu al-khāliq 'azza wa jalla*); those who reject the Prophet

report of the *Fihrist*, even though it also provides some new information. For further discussion see Lawrence, *Shahrastani on the Indian Religions*, 18-25; Jaques Waardenburg, *Muslim Perception of Other Religions*, especially Chapter II, "The Medieval Period (650-1500)."

22 Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari. *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Ta'riḫ al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* [translated and annotated by Franz Rosenthal] (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989) Volume I, 291-292, 308.

23 See Yohanan Freidmann, "Medieval Muslim views of Indian Religions," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95 (1975), 214.

INTRODUCTION

(*man yanfa al-rusul*); and those who do not believe in all the above (*wa minhum al-nāfi li kulli dhālik*).²⁴

In his commentary on Ibn Khurdadhbih's book, S. Maqbul Ahmad explains that Ibn Khurdadhbih's perception of these sects probably refers to Gardizi's *Akhbar al-Sin wa al-Hind* (Accounts of China and India). Gardizi classifies the Indian religious philosophies and beliefs into ninety-nine divisions that can be simplified into forty-two sects. Based on this work, what Ibn Khurdadhbih means by the first type of sects can possibly be associated with the Brahmans, the second sects with Sramanas, and the last sects can be connected to the Hinayana Buddhists.²⁵

Another account of Hind appears in the traveler Sulayman al-Tajir's *Akhbar al-Sin wa al-Hind*, which presents a broad comparison between the geography, culture, and society of Hind and China. However, his attention to Hind's religion is not quite as deep as Gardizi's.²⁶ He highlights the two lands' cultural and religious connection by asserting that China's religious traditions, especially Buddhism, originated in Hind (*wa innama aslu dayanatihim min al-hind*). Then, the Indians moved their idols to China. Furthermore, he notes that both the Chinese (*ahl al-sin*) and the Indians (*ahl al-hind*) have similar belief systems, since they affirm that they communicate with their idols (*yaz'amūna anna al-bidādah takallamahum*). He also draws attention to the mystical dimensions of their religious

24 See Abu al-Qasim b. 'Ubaydillah 'Abdullah b. Khurdādhbih, *Al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik* (Damascus: Manshūrāt wa Zārat al-Thaqāfah, 1999), 105. See also S. Maqbul Ahmad, *Arabic Classical Accounts of India and China* (Calcutta: Indian Institute of Advance Studies 1989) Book I, 7.

25 Maqbul Ahmad, *Arabic Classical Accounts*, 29

26 Since Sulayman al-Tajir and Hasan al-Sirafi wrote the same title for their treatises, the book version that I use, edited by Yusuf al-Shārūnī, is divided into two parts, the first part belongs to Sulayman al-Tajir, while the second one belongs to Abi Zayd Hasan al-Sirafi see *Akhbār al-Sin wa al-Hind*, taḥqiq Yusuf al-Sharuni (al-Qāhirah: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah al-Banāniyah, 1999).

systems. Although they practice their beliefs in their own ways, both peoples believe in metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls (*tanāsukh*).²⁷

A brief presentation of Muslim works on Hind may reveal some profound descriptions and frameworks that will enrich our investigation of al-Biruni's and al-Shahrastani's opinions of its religious traditions. Their insights may have been influenced by their contemporaries' intellectual inclinations: either ideological-polemical discourse or historical-cross-cultural trends. Both scholars' investigations of this subject have contributed greatly to the Islamic intellectual traditions' theoretical framework of the study of religions.

Context of this Study

ALTHOUGH many scholars have studied al-Biruni's and al-Shahrastani's treatises, among them Edward Sachau, Arthur Jeffery, Kamar Oniah Kamaruzzaman, Franz Rosenthal, Bruce Lawrence, and Jaques Waardenburg, a specific comparison of their works remains rare. Therefore, to contribute to the above larger framework of the Muslims' erudition of Hind, a comparative study should focus on a special theme. I have chosen the models of classifying Hind's religious divisions and their theological thought in al-Biruni's and al-Shahrastani's works. How do these scholars portray the divisions of Hind's religious communities, what approach do they use, and how do they perceive the doctrines of Hind's religious traditions?

Al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani have different approaches, perspectives, styles and techniques in discussing other religions, which represents variants of the study of religions in medieval Islam.

²⁷ Al-Tajir, *Akhbār al-Sīn wa al-Hind*, 56; Maqbul Ahmad, *Arabic Classical Accounts*, 55-56 and 79; see also al-Mas'udi, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, 91.

INTRODUCTION

However, similarities can be found in their works. In regard to the religious divisions of the *Hind*, for instance, al-Biruni distinguishes them into “the elites” or “High Religion” (*al-khawāṣṣ*) and “the popular” or “Low Religion” (*al-āmmah*), while al-Shahrastani classifies them based particularly on their doctrines (*ra’y*) and religio-philosophical schools (*madhhab*). The study of al-Biruni’s and al-Shahrastani’s works is interesting to pursue because these scholars discuss religions unknown by the Qur’an.

To derive a more elaborate assessment, this book analyzes the foremost writings of both scholars. For al-Biruni, I use his *Taḥqīq Mā li al-Hind min Maqūlah Maqbūlah fī al-‘Aql al-Mardhūlah*²⁸ and *Kitāb al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah ‘an al-Qurūn al-Khāliyah*.²⁹ The former discusses India’s religious belief systems, metaphysical views, cosmological doctrines, literary traditions, mythical heritages, and artistic inheritances; the latter elucidates the history and tradition of former nations and generations (*akhbār al-umam al-salīfah wa anba’ al-qurūn al-mādiyah*) in dealing with the eras with which cultural and religious events were associated.

For al-Shahrastani, I choose his *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Nihal*,³⁰ which establishes him as an outstanding Muslim historian of religions.

28 Edward Sachau, *Alberuni’s India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws, and Astrology of India about AD 1030* (Delhi: Low Price Publication, 2003), two volumes; Abu Rayhan Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Biruni, *Taḥqīq Mā li al-Hind min Maqūlah Maqbūlah fī al-‘Aql al-Mardhūlah*, edited by Edward C. Sachau (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1925).

29 Edward C. Sachau, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations: An English Version of the Arabic Text of the Āthār al-Bāqiyah of Al-Biruni or Vestiges of the Past*, (London: Published for the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland by W.H. Allen & Co., 1879); another version published in (Frankfurt: Unveränderter Nachdruck, 1969); Abu Rayhan Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Biruni, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah ‘an al-Qurūn al-Khāliyah*, taḥqīq P. Azkāei (Tihiran: Mirās al-Maktūb, 2001)

30 The translation of Islamic section of *al-Milal*, see Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Karim Ibn Ahmad al-Shahrasthānī, *Muslim Sects and Divisions: the section on*

For the Arabic version, I will use Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Karim b. Ahmad al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* [taḥqīq Abd. Lat}if Muhammad al-‘Abd] (al-Qāhirah: Maktabah al-Anjilū al-Miṣriyyah, 1977), two volumes. Bruce Lawrence’s *Shahrastani on the Indian Religions*, which focused mainly on *Milal wa al-Niḥal*’s chapter on Hind’ religions, is a valuable case study in how modern scholarship acquires and evaluates medieval Muslim sources in the study of religion. Lawrence has done work with the observation of Muslim literatures on Hinduism prior to Shahrastani. He translates part II, book III, and section B of Shahrastani, which is *Ārā al-Hind*. More importantly, in the last part of his book, Lawrence offers detailed commentaries and comparisons of various aspects of Indian religion reflected in Shahrastani’s book with other Muslim literatures, such as Ibn al-Nadim’s *al-Fihrist*; Gardizī’s *Zayn al-Akḥbār*; Marvazi’s *Ṭaba’i al-Ḥayawān*; and Maqdisi’s *Kitāb wa al-Bad’ wa al-Tarikh*. Al-Shahrastani’s *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* primarily elaborates the range of religious sects, cults, and philosophical schools in Islam and other religious traditions. To complement his normative insight, philosophical exploration, and, perhaps, theological discourse toward other religious traditions, I also discuss his *Kitāb Nihāyat al-Iqdām fi ‘Ilm Kalām*,³¹ in which he assesses foundations (*qawā’id*) of theological science.

This research aims to depict the variety of religious traditions the *Hind* examined by both scholars in each book; to classify the similarities and differences of religious traditions of the *Hind* discovered in each book, as well as to analyze the way al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani study religion. Finally, it also compares the

Muslim sects in Kitāb al-milāl wa al-Niḥāl, translated by A.K. Kazi and J.G. Flynn (London; Boston: Kegan Paul International, 1984).

31 *Kitāb Nihāyah al-Iqdām fi ‘Ilm al-Kalām and The Summa Philosophiae of al-Shahrastani*, (bilingual) edited and translated by Alfred Guillaume (London: Humprey Milford, 1934).

INTRODUCTION

perspective used by al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani in presenting and classifying the religions of the *Hind*.

Chapter Outlines

THE FIRST CHAPTER presents a general idea of medieval Muslims understanding of the Indian civilization and how the term of *al-Hind* is conceptualized and understood economically, politically, and religiously at that time. To provide a context in which this study gets its significance, this chapter will examine early Muslim literature on the religious traditions of the *Hind*, and the way medieval Muslim scholars defined, perceived, and categorized Indian religious sects.

The second chapter examines the biographies of al-Biruni as a leading religious Muslim historian and al-Shahrastani as a famous heresiographer. Also, the religious affiliations and the relationship of al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani to their religio-political patrons will be examined. This chapter will also provide a brief discussion about their works, especially those closely related to the study of religion, culture, and civilization, as well as the correspondence between their works and their predecessors in acquiring information on the religious traditions of the *Hind*.

The third chapter will observe al-Biruni's and al-Shahrastani's general classification of the *Hind* with regard to other world religions. It also will discuss their interpretation of Sabianism that is mentioned in the Qur'ān and its connection to the religious traditions of the *Hind*. This elaboration certainly will be very considerable for both al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani in defining and classifying the religious outlooks of the Hindus.

The fourth chapter investigates al-Biruni's and al-Shahrastani's method of classifying the theological claims of the Hindus. It will

begin with al-Biruni's method of classification based on both the types of theological thought and castes on society of the *Hind*, and then it will elaborate on al-Shahrastani's types of Hindu adherents and classification of the *Hind* based on the types of Idol worshippers. This chapter will be ended with a discussion of al-Biruni's and al-Shahrastani's views of the monotheistic tendencies of Hinduism and their rituals.

The last chapter will draw attention to the contribution of al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani for the study of religion, and especially regarding their studies of the *Hind*. It will reiterate and evaluate the consistency or deviation of al-Biruni's and al-Shahrastani's examinations in the study of religious traditions of the *Hind*, as well as the resemblance, differences, and convergences between al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani. It will also show what the key elements in the study of religion among medieval Islamic thinkers are and what relevance that study has for contemporary study of religions by Muslim scholars.[]



CHAPTER II

Intellectual Biographies, Sources, and Perspectives of *The Hind*

The Life and Works of al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani

AL-BIRUNI and al-Shahrastani lived when medieval Islamic civilization had just passed its “golden age.”¹ This period was delineated intellectually by the appearance of abundant scientific literature and characterized socio-politically by intensive encounters with other civilizations. Al-Biruni’s and al-Shahrastani’s investigation of Hind’s religious traditions have variations and resemblances, depending upon their intellectual and sociocultural backgrounds, as well as, perhaps, the political situation in the regions of their era. This chapter provides intellectual sketches of these two scholars, explains why they decided to study this particular field and the significance of

1 See Lombard, Maurice, *The Golden Age of Islam* [translated by Joan Spenser] (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, and New York: Oxford American Elsevier Publishing Company, 1975).

their intellectual contribution to their fellow Muslims and political patrons.

Al-Biruni: A Scholar and Religious Historian

AL-BIRUNI² is the popular name of Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Khwarizm, who was born in 362/973 in Khwarizm, located in present-day Uzbekistan. According to a Persian lexicographer, the root *b-r-n* means “the outside” (noun) and “outside” (preposition), indicating that al-Biruni came from a suburb of Khawarizm. Muslim genealogists offer no further information about his ancestors,³ religious life, or childhood. His first teacher was an anonymous Greek scholar. Afterward, he studied with `Abd al-Samad ibn `Abd al-Samad, who introduced him to scientific knowledge. At the age of twenty, he traveled to Jurjan (Hyrkania) and met Abu Sahl `Isa al-Masih, an astronomer and physician. In addition, he was trained by Abu al-Wafa' (a.k.a. Nasr ibn `Ali ibn `Iraq al-Jabali), an astronomer and mathematician.⁴ Al-Biruni lived in Jurjan for many years and enjoyed the protection of Kabus ibn Washmgir Shams al-Ma'ali, a prince who ruled this city from 366-71 AH and 388-403 AH and to whom he dedicated his *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah `an al-Qurūn al-Khāliyah*. Concerning this book (*Al-Āthār*) and his relationship to the political patron, al-Biruni writes:

....from the majesty of our master, the prince, the glorious and victorious, the benefactor, Shams-alma'ali—may God make his

2 While the majority of historians and biographers agree with this date, some sources mention that al-Biruni was born in 364 H. In addition to this, some pronounce 'al-Bīraunī' or 'al-Bayrūnī' for his name instead of 'al-Biruni.'

3 Amin Sulayman Sidu, *Abu Rayhān al-Biruni: Dirāsah `an Hayātihī wa Nitājih al-Fikrī* (Riyadh: Markaz al-Malik Fa'al lil-Bu', 1999) al-tab'ah 1, 15.

4 Sidū, *Abu Rayhān al-Biruni: Dirāsah*, 16-19; Ahmad Said Dimirdash, *Abu Rayhan Ahmad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni*, (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1980), 18.

INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHIES, SOURCES,
AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE *HIND*

power to endure!—I derive strength in exerting my capabilities, and trying to do my utmost in order to explain the whole subject on the basis of that information which I have gathered either as an ear-or eye-witness, or by cogitation and study. Besides, I was encouraged by that robe of blessed service, in which I have dressed myself, to compose such an explanation for him, who occupies a high throne, that he may see herein a new sign of my service, and that thereby I may obtain the garments of such a glory, the memory and splendor of which will last as my heirloom in posterity through the flood of ages and generations.⁵

AL-BIRUNI later returned to Khawarizm and stayed there until Mahmud of Ghazna conquered it and established his political authority throughout South and Central Asia in 1022. Mahmud carried off scholars and respected people from Khawarizm, including al-Biruni, to India/Afghanistan. Among the savants were the physician Abu al-Khayr ibn Khammar and Abu Nasr ibn `Iraq. Mahmud also attempted to bring Abu Sahl `Isa al-Masih and Abu `Ali ibn Sina; however, they had already fled Jurjan and Khwarizm.⁶

Although al-Biruni's knowledge of Hind's civilization grew rapidly while he served Mahmud in northern India, he had already acquired some knowledge of it by the time he learned astrology and astronomy in Khawarizm or Jurjan. For instance, his concise scrutiny in his *Kitāb al-Āthār* regarding the Indians' lunar system (*sami`tu anna al-hind, yasta'milūna ru'yat al-ahillah fi shuhūrihim*) indicates that he

5 Al-Biruni, *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah*, 3; Sachau, *The Chronology*, 2-3.

6 Ibn Sina (Avicenna) is one of the leading philosophers in the Islamic tradition's Golden Age. The young Ibn Sina corresponded with al-Biruni. See Ramsay Right, "Preface," in Abu Rayhan Muhammad al-Biruni, *The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology*, translated by R. Ramsay Right (London: Luzac & C.O., 1934), iv-v. Seyyed Hossein Nasr briefly discusses the debate between Ibn Sina and al-Biruni on cosmology in his *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition*, especially sub-chapter II, "Biruni versus Ibn Sina on the Nature of the Universe."

was acquainted with aspects of Indian civilization.⁷ His duties at that time were to explore Hind's sciences and geography, observe the people's customs and religious traditions, and discover their literature and philosophical thought.⁸

Historians differ over al-Biruni's religious affiliation, since he does not say whether he was a Sunnī or Shī'ī. His identity as a Muslim can be traced to his claims of Islam's superiority over Brahmanic India. His ancestors were considered Persian, and al-Biruni is critical of the Arabs. Even so, this does not automatically mean he was a Shī'ī. Concerning al-Biruni's examination in *Kitāb al-Āthār*, Sachau notes in his introduction to al-Biruni's works that "he reproaches the ancient Muslims with having destroyed the civilization of Eran, and gives us to understand that the ancient Arabs were certainly nothing better than the Zoroastrian Eranian."⁹

Abdus Salam Nadvi, without providing any adequate evidence or supporting argument, claims that al-Biruni was inclined to be Shī'ī, while E.S. Kennedy, in line with Sachau's investigation, asserts that nothing indicates that al-Biruni was affiliated to any particular Islamic sect.¹⁰ The latter argument has been supported by Seyyed Hossein Nasr who underlines the difficulties in determining al-Biruni's religious sincerity. Nasr reasonably notes: "the writings of Abu Rayhan do not specify in a clear manner whether he was a Sunnī or a Shī'ī. He writes of both parties with

7 Al-Biruni, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah*, 16; Shacau, *The Chronology*, 15.

8 Badr `Abd al-Rahmān Muhammad, *al-Mujtama` al-Hindī fī al-Qarnayn al-Rābi` wa-al-Khāmis al-Hijriyayn: Ka-mā Sawwarahu al-Biruni fī Kitābihi "Tahqīq mā lil-Hind min Maqūlah Maqbūlah fī al-'Aql aw Mardhūlah" al-Ma`rūf fi-'Tārīkh [a] l-Hind"* (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat al-Anjilū al-Misriyah, 1990), 8-9.

9 Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, xix; see also M.A. Saleem Khan, *Al-Biruni's Discovery of India: an Interpretative Study* (Denver, Colorado: Jamia Hamdard and iAcademicBooks, 2001), 12.

10 Khan, *Al-Biruni's Discovery*, 12-13.

INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHIES, SOURCES,
AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE *HIND*

much knowledge and insight but rarely gives any indication that of his own preference.”¹¹

As a versatile scientist, prolific writer, and enthusiastic traveler, al-Biruni made extensive contributions to various branches of knowledge¹² and enlightened his intellectual contemporaries as regards inter-cultural studies. Most of his scholarly works were written in Arabic; a few were in Persian. For him, Arabic was superior because it was the scriptural language, the *lingua franca* of the Muslim world, and the language of science (*lughat al-`ilm wa al-fikr wa al-hadārah*).¹³ Since his mother tongue was neither Arabic and nor Persian, Al-Biruni said, “writing in Arabic is more preferable for me, even though I found a better way in Persian” (*wa al-hajwu bi al-‘arabiyyat ahabba ilayya min al-madh̄ bi al-fārisiyyat*).

During the tenth and eleventh centuries, Persian was also commonly used as “a vehicle of literary expression and satisfied Persian national aspirations,”¹⁴ given that the `Abbasid cultural and intellectual movements employed and recruited countless Persian intellectuals. Nevertheless, the scientific and Islamic literature constantly developed in Arabic. In addition, the ongoing inter-cultural dialogues and intellectual encounters helped Muslim

11 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used for Its Study* by Ikhwan al-Safa, al-Biruni, and Ibn Sina (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 114.

12 For further elaboration about the scope of al-Biruni’s works see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Al-Biruni: An Annotated Bibliography* (Teheran, Iran: High Council of Culture and Art, 1973).

13 See Muhammad Yusuf Zaid, “Ba’dha Jawānib min al-Thaqāfat al-Biruni,” in Said (ed.), *Al-Biruni: Commemorative Volume*, 791-92; see also: Shalahuddin al-Munjid, “Al-Biruni wa al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah,” *Al-Biruni: Commemorative Volume*, 784-86; Dimirdash, *Abu Rayhan*, 18-19.

14 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (New York, Chicago and San Fransisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 4; see also Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, especially chapter 5, “The Life, Works, and Significance of al-Biruni.”

scholars master various languages. Therefore, al-Biruni, as his scholarly works show, was well versed in several languages, primarily Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, and probably Greek.¹⁵

Al-Biruni wrote numerous natural and social science books. He wrote *Kitāb al-Āthār* (390/999) mainly to satisfy his curiosity as to why different people used different calendrical systems and to clarify why certain nations preferred certain times and events for their festivals and commemoration days.¹⁶ In addition, this book pays great attention to various civilizations' festivals. On the other hand, *Kitāb al-Hind* (1030) is based on his journey to Hind while Mahmud (998-1030) was setting up his political institutions in northern India.¹⁷ Although al-Biruni was a part of Mahmud's mission, as a

15 Arvind Sharma elaborates on al-Biruni's technique and method in working on Hindu texts, especially the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. In his analysis about the correspondences between the *Bhagavad-Gītā* quoted by al-Biruni in the eleventh century and the *Bhagavad-Gītā*'s present text, Sharma discovers four types of correspondences: (1) Cases of both literal and ideological correspondence; (2) Cases of ideological rather than literal correspondence; (3) Cases of literal rather than ideological correspondence; and (4) Cases of neither literal nor ideological correspondence. Arvind Sharma, *Studies in Alberuni's India, Series: Studies in oriental religions; vol.9* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), 4-74. Although Sharma gives a detailed analysis of how al-Biruni employed and quoted the *Bhagavad-Gītā* and has raised some critiques for al-Biruni's accuracy in doing so, Kamar Kamaruzzaman does not fully accept Sharma's critiques. Kamaruzzaman argues that Sharma's critiques are not based on the original works of al-Biruni, thus lacking an explanation about what he means by "the *Bhagavad-Gītā* as we know today," and out of context in reading al-Biruni's comment on Hindu socio-cultural aspects during the eleventh century. Kamar Oniah Kamaruzzaman, *Early Muslim Scholarship in Religionswissenschaft: Work and Contribution of Abu Rayhan Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Biruni* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC IIUM, 2003), 72; In addition to this, Gonda in his article "Remarks on al-Biruni Quotation from Sanskrit Text," discovers that al-Biruni's quotation from Purānas is more accurate than al-Biruni's quotation on Sanskrit astronomical texts. see also See David Pingree, "Brahmagupta, Balabhadra, Prthūdaka, and al-Biruni," *Journal of American Oriental Society*, vol. 103, No. 2 (Apr-Jun., 1983), 353.

16 Sachau, *The Chronology*, 2; Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 58-59.

17 Sultan Maḥmūd, under the superiority and hegemony of the Turko-Persian Empire, invaded many strategic places in Northern India. See Khalid Ahmad

INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHIES, SOURCES,
AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE *HIND*

scientist he had his own view of Hind. For Mahmud, as Sachau notes, “the Hindus were infidels, to be dispatched to hell as soon as they refused to be plundered,” while for al-Biruni, “the Hindus were excellent philosophers, good mathematicians and astronomers.”¹⁸ His interest in studying their religious traditions apparently could not be separated from his role as a geographer, astronomer, astrologer, and historian who sought to grasp Hind’s natural/physical geography and cultural and historical dimensions.¹⁹ Thus, *Kitāb al-Hind* presents extensive descriptions of Indian culture, including its scholars’ scientific knowledge of cosmology and astronomy.

Both *Kitāb al-Hind* and *Kitāb al-Āthār* have different emphases: the former offers a precise analysis of Hind’s religious traditions, and the latter includes material on other religious communities, primarily the Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians. In addition, although both books deal with different subjects, they are, in light of the methodology used, complementary. During his journey in Hind, al-Biruni wrote *Kitāb al-Tafhim li Awā’il Sina`at al-Tanjīm* (The Principle of the Art of Astrology). Astrology (*‘ilm al-tanjīm*, *‘ilm aḥkam al-nujūm*) was among the basic works of eleventh-century

Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century* (London, New York, etc.: Asia Publishing House, 1961), 75-76; see also André Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World. Volume II: The Slave Kings and the Islamic Conquest 11th-13th Centuries* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997), especially chapter II: “the Coming of the Turks,” 43-78; and Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 5-7; also Muhammad, *al-Mujtama` al-Hindī*, 8.

18 Sachau, “preface” in *Alberuni’s India*, xvii.

19 In describing the sources and characteristics of the rivers and mountains, for instance, al-Biruni gives information of each place’s mythological background and explains how they become sacred places for the local people. See for example Nafis Ahmad, “Some Glimpses of al-Biruni as a Geographer,” in *Al-Biruni: Commemorative Volume*, 143; Ahmad Hasan Dani, *Alberuni’s Indica: A Record of the Cultural History of South Asia about 1030* (Islamabad: University of Islamabad Press, 1973), Chapter II and III.

science, in addition to geometry (*'ilm al-handasah*) and astronomy (*'ilm al-falak*).²⁰ This material also can be found in his *Kitāb al-Qanūn al-Mas'ūdi*, an encyclopaedic treatise of astronomical sciences.²¹ Several of his other books focus on the natural sciences.²²

Al-Shahrastani: A Theologian and Heresiographer

AL-SHAHRASTANI (b. 479/1086) was born in Shahrstan, located in northern Khurasan,²³ and lived in Persia about a century after al-Biruni's death. He was also known as *al-Imam*, *al-'Allamah* (the Knowledgeable), *al-Afdal*, (the Best), and *Taj al-Millah wa al-Din* (the Crown of the Islamic Community and the Religion), reflecting his expertise in religious knowledge. Unlike al-Biruni, whose educational background was largely in the natural and pure sciences, his was influenced by honored religious scholars. The formative period of his intellectual development began when his parents taught him Qur'anic recitation and exegesis (*tafsīr*). After memorizing the Qur'an before his tenth birthday, his father sent him to study with some shaykhs in Khurasan who had a better collection of religious books for studying Qur'anic exegesis.

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- 20 Al-Biruni, *The Book of Instruction*, vii; concerning the important position of astrology in medieval Islam see George Saliba, "The Role of the Astrologer in Medieval Islamic Society," in Emilie Savage-Smith, *Magic and Divination in Early Islam* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, Variorum, 2004), 341-363.
- 21 *Kitāb al-Qānūn al-Masūdi* (Haydar Abad al-Dakan: Mat}ba'at Majilis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyah, 1954-1956).
- 22 Al-Biruni on transits; a study of an Arabic treatise entitled *Tamhīd al-Mustaqarr li-Taḥqīq ma'nā al-Mamar*, transl: Mohammad Saffouri & Adnan Ifram. With a commentary by E. S. Kennedy (Beirut American University of Beirut 1959); *ṣaydanah fī al-ṭibb (āl-Birunī's Book on Pharmacy and Materia Medica)*, ed.: Hakim Mohammed Said. [Karachi, Hamdard Academy] c1973; *al-Jamāhir fī al-Jawāhir*, edited by Yusuf al-Hādī. [Iran: Sharikat al-Nashr al-'Ilmī wa-al-Thaqāfī, 1995) al-Thab'ah 1; etc.
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- 23 Guy Monnot, "Sa Vie, Ses Euvres, Son Secret," in Shahrastani, *Livre Des Religions et Des Sectes*. Traduction avec Introduction et notes par Daniel GIMARET et Guy MONNOT (Paris: Peeters/Unesco, 1984), 3.

INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHIES, SOURCES,
AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE *HIND*

His enthusiastic quest for knowledge led him to travel to Naisapur, Khawarizm, and Makkah. In Naisapur, al-Shahrastani studied hadith and *'ulūm al-hadith* with `Ali ibn Ahmad al-Madani (d. 494/1100); Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) with Ahmad al-Khuwafi (d. 500/1106); and theology (*'ilm al-kalam*), exegesis, and the foundations of Islamic jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*) with Imam Abu Nasr al-Qusayri (d. 514/1120). He also met Abu al-Qasim Sulayman ibn Nasr al-Ansari, who taught him theology, Islamic mysticism (*tasawwuf*), and all about the history of the House of the Prophet's (Ahl al-Bayt) nobility and graciousness.²⁴

Al-Shahrastani continued his intellectual wandering, moving from Naisapur to Khawarizm, where he studied with As'ad ibn Abi Nasr al-Mayhani (d. 527/1129) and Muhammad ibn Mahmud al-Khawarizm (d. 568/1172). At this time, his intellectual maturity encouraged him to study and criticize philosophy and philosophical schools. (Philosophy was to become one of the main concerns.) He stayed there for ten years and then made hajj in 510/1116. After that, he went to Baghdad, where he stayed for three years,²⁵ and where Ash`arite theology was predominant. Ibn Khallikan (d. 681/1282), as cited by Diane Steigerwald, ranks al-Shahrastani as an Ash`arite theologian (*al-mutakallim 'ala madhhab al-Ash`ari*).²⁶ Finally, he returned to his hometown in Persia around 514/1117 and stayed there until his death in 548/1153.

Al-Shahrastani's intellectual adventure indicates that he learned the religious science from teachers whose religious backgrounds were quite varied. As for his religious affiliation, Wilfred Madelung writes:

24 Muhammad Husayni Abu Sa'dah, *al-Shahrastani wa Manhajuhu al-Naqd: Dirāsah Muqāranah ma'a Ārā al-Falāsifah wa al-Mutakallimīn* (Beirut: al-Muassasah al-Jāmiyyah li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr wa al-Tauzi', 2002) al-Tab'ah al-Ūlā, 21-22.

25 Abu Sa'dah, *al-Shahrastani wa Manhajuhu al-Naqd*, 23.

26 Diane Steigerwald, *La Pensée Philosophique et Théologique de Shahrastani* (Le Presses de l'Université Laval, 1997), 53.

“Born and educated as a Shafi’ite Sunnite, he continued to identify with the Sunnite community and followed the Shafi’ite ritual and legal practice to the end of his life. Yet his concept of Sunnism evidently moved far away from the contemporaneous orthodox understanding of it and expanded to allow Shi’ite veneration of the Family of the Prophet and recognition of the religious authority of the Shi’ite Imams.”²⁷ He was appointed a chancellor of the chancellery (*dīwān al-rasā’il*) when Sanjar, the Saljuq sovereign, ruled Khurasan in 511/1118. The *Kitāb al-Milal*, considered al-Shahrastani’s most influential work on Muslim heresiography, was dedicated to his two patrons: Nasr al-Din Mahmud ibn Abi Tawba al-Marwazi and, upon his imprisonment in 529/1132, to Sayyid Majd al-Din Abu al-Qasim `Ali ibn Ja`far al-Musawi (his new patron).²⁸

According to Bruce Lawrence, *Kitāb al-Milal* “surpasses its predecessor in objectivity and insight as well as detail and scope.”²⁹ Similarly, George C. Anawati explains: “In contrast to Ibn Hazm, the author (Shahrastani) does not aim at refuting errors, but merely strives to state the doctrines as objectively as possible.”³⁰

27 Al-Shahrasthānī, *Struggling with the Philosopher: A Refutation of Avicenna’s Metaphysics: A New Arabic Edition and English Translation of Muhammad b. Abd al-Kar-im b. Ahmad al-Shahrast-an-i’s Kitāb al-Musāra’a*, transl.: Wilferd Madelung and Toby Mayer (London: I.B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001), 3-4. Especially the translator’s “Introduction: Al-Shahrastani, Ismailism and Philosophy.”

28 Al-Shahrasthānī, *Struggling with the Philosopher*, 7; Guy Monnot, “Sa Vie, Ses Euvres, Son Secret,” 4.

29 Article “Al-Shahrastani (1086-1153)” by Bruce C. Lawrence, in Eliade, Mircea (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Volume 13, 199-200; *Shahrastani on the Indian Religion*, 15; see also Steigerwald, *La Pensée Philosophique*, 59-60; Alfred Guillaume, “Introduction,” in al-Shahrasthānī, *The Summa Philosophiae*, xi.

30 Georges C. Anawati, “Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism,” in *the Legacy of Islam*, edited by Joseph Schacht with C.E. Bosworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 362; Ahmad Khalifah, “Medieval Jewish-Muslim Contribution,” 278.

INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHIES, SOURCES,
AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE *HIND*

Even though the book describes Islamic theology's divisions and subdivisions, the discussion is more concerned with each division's uniqueness. He presented several Islamic theological divisions, based upon his system of categorization, but failed to elaborate upon the main theological and philosophical theme in a comprehensive manner.

Specific themes with which Muslim theologians and philosophers primarily dealt, such as the assertion of divine unity (*tawhīd*), the problem of divine predestination, free will, the issues of prophecy and the concept of imamate, were elaborated upon in his *Kitāb Nihāyat al-Iqdām fi 'Ilm Kalām*. As Guillaume states, it "was clearly designated by al-Shahrastani as a complementary sequel to his *Kitāb al-Milal*." Guillaume opines that al-Shahrastani was "a deeply religious man." Anyone who reads this work, which in itself is a sufficient refutation of the calumnies of his detractors, cannot doubt the intensity of his devotion to Islam: "It would not be germane to this presentation of the author's book to discuss the gulf between the learned and uneducated Muslim which may well account for the suspicion which gathered round his memory."³¹

Although *Kitāb Nihāyat al-Iqdām* covers a vast scope of Islamic theological and philosophical discourse, al-Shahrastani expanded his concern with "theological philosophy" by presenting a special analysis of Ibn Sina's (Avicenna) works and thought in his *Kitāb al-Musāra'ah*, which he dedicated to Majd al-Din al-Musawi.

While al-Biruni spotlighted and criticized Ibn Sina's concept of the nature of the universe, al-Shahrastani tried to refute Ibn Sina's concept of metaphysics.³² In this refutation, however, he did not

31 Guillaume, *The Summa Philosophiae*, xi.

32 Wilfred Madelung & Toby Mayer, "Introduction: Al-Shahrastani, Ismailism and Philosophy," 8; Steigerwald, *La Pensée Philosophique*, 66-67; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, 100-102.

include al-Ghazali, even though al-Ghazali was among the foremost medieval Muslim scholars to criticize philosophers and his *Al-Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, as Wilfred Madelung and Toby Mayer have noted, “provided the most persuasive answer to Ibn Sina’s philosophy from the Sunni point of view.”³³

The impact of Isma’ili teachings on al-Shahrastani can be observed in *Al-Majlis*, in which he discusses the theory of creation (*khalq*) in the context of God’s divine order (*al-amr*). Al-Shahrastani wrote most of his works in Arabic; however, *Al-Majlis*, compiled by Muhammad Rida Jalali Na’ini and based on al-Shahrastani’s speech delivered in Khwarizm, is in Persian.³⁴ Al-Shahrastani also wrote a commentary on the Qur’an, *Mafātih al-Asrār wa Masābih al-Abrār*,³⁵ and other works mentioned by al-Bayhaqi, which are apparently lost, such as *Al-Manāhij wa al-Ayat* and *Qiṣṣat Mūsa wa al-Khaydir*.

Approaches to the Religious Traditions of the *Hind*

SOME information on Hind had circulated among Muslim scholars during and prior to al-Biruni’s time. However, in his *Kitāb al-Hind*, al-Biruni does not mention the works of al-Mas’udi, al-Tabari, Ibn Khurdadhbih, and Sulayman al-Tajir as his sources, perhaps because he was able to conduct actual field research. We do not have much information about why he did not refer to these earlier works.

33 Wilfred Madelung & Toby Mayer, “Introduction: Al-Shahrastani, Isma’ilism and Philosophy,” 14.¹

34 See al-Shahrastani, *Majlis: Discours sur l’Ordre et la Création* [traduction avec introduction et notes de la dernière édition de Jalālī Nā’ini par Diane Steigerwald] (Canada: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1998); Steigerwald, *La Pensée Philosophique*, 68-69.

35 Al-Shahrastani *Mafātih al-Asrār wa Masābih al-Abrār* (Tehran: Center for the Publication of Manuscripts, 1989). This thesis uses the Facsimile edition of the Unique Manuscript at the Library of the Islamic consultative Assembly, edited by Parviz Adhkākī and introduction by ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Hā’irī.

INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHIES, SOURCES,
AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE *HIND*

He probably, borrowing Ainslie T. Embree, “mistrusted them” and preferred “to work from the Sanskrit original.”³⁶ Yet, this does not seem to be a sufficient answer. Perhaps his decision was also a geographical matter. Overall, it is worth noting that in his *Kitāb al-Hind*, al-Biruni mentions Abu Sahl `Abd al-Mun`im ibn `Ali ibn Nuh al-Tiflisi, Zurqan, and Abu al-`Abbas al-Iranshahri.³⁷ It seems that he could access and interact with the works of earlier Muslim writers, given that he does offer some comments, appreciations, and critiques of them.³⁸

Al-Biruni analyzed Hind’s religious traditions closely, conducted field observation in certain Indian regions, and referred to Zurqan and Iranshahri, both of whom provided a lot of data about Buddhist cosmology. However, he dealt mainly with Hinduism. This is quite strange, considering that he did not give enough space to Buddhism in both *Kitāb al-Hind* and *Kitāb al-Āthār* and yet discussed at least twelve religions and religious communities. The majority of scholars, among them Sachau, Jeffery, Lawrence, Kamaruzzaman, and Waardenburg, speculate that he did this because Buddhism probably had largely disappeared from northern India by that time (the end of the eleventh century).³⁹ This speculation is quite acceptable, especially if we consider that al-Biruni sought to be consistent with his methodology by conducting field research and that he did not find enough Buddhist informants.⁴⁰ Yet this leaves a room for a further question: Did al-Biruni, as a historian or historiographer, only focus on existing religions in composing his *Kitāb al-Āthār*? Unlike such earlier Muslim scholars as Zurqan and

36 Ainslie T. Embree, “Introduction,” in Sachau, *Alberuni’s India*, x-xi.

37 Jeffery, “Al-Biruni’s Contribution,” 126.

38 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 3-4; Sachau, *Alberuni’s India*, I, 5-7.

39 Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslim Perception*, 33.

40 See Bruce B. Lawrence, “Shahrastani on Indian Idol Worship,” *Studia Islamica*, No.3, (1973), 63-64.

Iranshahri or such later ones as Rashid al-Din, was al-Biruni not interested in Buddhism, given that he discusses other major and minor religious traditions?

Similarly, in his *Kitāb al-Milal* al-Shahrastani did not explicitly mention his sources. This occurrence is slightly unusual, because he said in this book: “These are what I can achieve from the sayings of the experts, and I have quoted [such information] as they are” (*Hādhā mā wajadtū min maqālat ahl al-`ālim, wa nuqiltuhu `alā mā wajadtuhu*).⁴¹ This signifies that he used other sources, although he did not present them explicitly in his work. For the same reason, Lawrence notes:

Whatever Shahrastani’s sources may have contained about India was derivative, and Shahrastani himself did not supplement its data through conversation with Hindus or Buddhists nor did he consult with Muslim travelers who had gone to India and been exposed to the beliefs and practices of Indians. Though he wrote in the first half of the twelfth century A.D., Shahrastani obtained the bulk of his information on Indian sects from a report compiled at the beginning of the ninth century.⁴²

IN regards to this case, Lawrence shares two themes that illustrate al-Shahrastani’s connection to his predecessors based on the similar types of works that they wrote. Minorski, as cited by Lawrence, writes that al-Shahrastani, similar to al-Biruni, might refer to Zurqan, who paid attention specifically to Hind’s religious tradition, rather than to other such Muslim geographers as Ibn Khurradadhbih, Jayhani, Gardizi, or Marvazi. However, according

41 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 613. In another sentence, as cited by al-Shaybānī, “we mention these writings as we have achieved from their famous works (*wa nahnu nadhkuru maqālātī hāulāi kamā qad wajadnā fī kutubihim al-masyhūrah*). Muhammad b. Nasr b. Shālih al-Suhaibānī, *Manhaj al-Shahrastani fī Kitābihi al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (Riyadh: Dār al-Wathan, 1417 H), 647.

42 Lawrence, “Shahrastani on Indian Idol Worship,” 29.

INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHIES, SOURCES,
AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE *HIND*

to Lawrence, the connection between Zurqan and al-Shahrastani is difficult to establish.

But in a certain manuscript version of the *Kitāb al-Milal* (ed. Muhammad Badran), al-Shahrastani refers to Jayhani while discussing Zoroastrianism. Thus, he could have been in touch with Jayhani, even though he does not explicitly mention this scholar when exploring Hind's religious tradition.⁴³ However, the resemblances between al-Shahrastani's "*Ārā al-Hind*" and other sources do not automatically signify that he really referred to them, since the *Kitāb al-Milal's* chapter on Indian religious divisions covers various aspects that are not discussed in his predecessors' works. Thus, it is probable that al-Shahrastani selected some material from several available sources of information on Hind.

In contrast, al-Biruni offers a more detailed explanation about his methodological approach. He suggests five crucial elements of Indian culture that must be considered by observers in general, and Muslim readers in particular, to understand its people's religious life: the characteristics of the main Indian language (Sanskrit) and the land's major religious treatises, the Indian religious attitudes, their customs, the religious types, and the Hindus' attitudes toward others.⁴⁴

Moreover, in *Kitāb al-Hind* al-Biruni reveals himself as a dispassionate scholar who seeks to study other religions as they are. In his introductory remarks, he says: "This book is not a polemical one (*laysa al-Kitāb, Kitāb hujjaj wa jidal*) ... My book is nothing but a simple historic record of fact (*wa innama huwa Kitāb hikāyat*)."⁴⁵ This dispassionate demeanor is a major reason why he is considered a

43 For further investigation see Lawrence, *Shahrastani on the Indian Religions*, 29; see also al-Suhaibānī, *Manhaj al-Shahrastani*, 647-648.

44 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 9; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 17-19.

45 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 4; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 7.

distinguished scholar and religious historian of his time. Regarding his intention as a Muslim to study the Hindu belief system, he justly remarks:

I have done and written this book on the doctrines of the Hindus, never making any unfounded imputations against those, our religious antagonists, and at the same time not considering it inconsistent with my duties as a Muslim to quote their own word at full length when I thought they would contribute to elucidate a subject. If the contents of these quotations happen to be utterly heathenish, and the followers of the truth, i.e. the Muslims, find them objectionable, we can only say that such is the belief of the Hindus, and that they themselves are the best qualified to defend it.⁴⁶

COMPARED to al-Biruni's model of investigation, which tends to be anthropological, al-Shahrastani's description of Hind is more theological. Al-Shahrastani consistently employs his heresiographical approach in categorizing and classifying that land's religious belief systems. Accordingly, there are at least two modes of categorization: a division of regions or a division of people. The former principle divides regions into four main classes: the East, West, South, and North, and includes the characteristic of each one's natures (*al-taba'i*) and laws (*al-shara'i*); the latter principle divides the world into four major nations (*kibar al-umam*): "the Arabs, `Ajam (Persians), Romans, and Indians."⁴⁷

46 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 4; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 7.

47 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, I, 12; Muhammad Khalifah Ahmad Khalifah, "Medieval Jewish-Muslim Contribution to the Academic Study of Religion: A Study in the Methodology of Saadia al-Fayyumi and Muhammad al-Shahrastani," *Ph.D. Dissertation*, Temple University, 1976 (An Arbor & London: Microfilm Xerography, University Microfilm International, 1981), 278; also A. K. Kazi and J.G. Flynn, trans., *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, 9.

INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHIES, SOURCES,
AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE *HIND*

Therefore, al-Shahrastani analyzes and categorizes Hind's religious tradition in a slightly different way than al-Biruni does, although they might have a similar theological outlook as regards its religious tradition. While al-Shahrastani tries to show his neutrality as a scholar, his bias is evident when he discusses the various Islamic sects:

I impose upon myself the obligation of giving the views of each sect as I find them in their works without favour or prejudice, without declaring which are correct and which are incorrect, which are true and which are false; although, indeed, the glimpses of the truth and the odour of lies will not remain undetected by minds versed in intellectual matters. And God will be our help.

WE cannot generalize this view as being entirely applicable to non-Islamic religious traditions, since al-Shahrastani uses certain terms and methods to classify other religions and philosophies. Nevertheless, he says: "The Indian people constitute a large nation (*ummah kabīrah*) and a great religious community (*millah al-`ādimah*), and they vary in their views (*wa ārāhum mukhtalifah*)."⁴⁸ Similar to al-Biruni, whose views are considered relatively moderate, al-Shahrastani approaches the Indian religions "sympathetically" and, as Lawrence points out, "employs a unique analytical model (Sabianism) to portray Indian idol worship."⁴⁹

In summary, al-Biruni's and al-Shahrastani's interests in the study of religions, in general, and the religious traditions of the *Hind*, in particular, were influenced by different factors. The scholars are correct to label al-Biruni as a "scientist-religionist" and to identify al-Shahrastani as a "heresiographer-religionist". In fact, al-Biruni begins his intellectual experience in the field of

48 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, II, 593.

49 Lawrence, "Shahrastani on Indian Idol Worship," 65.

natural sciences and then extends his knowledge by acquiring social-humanities such as history and religious studies. In his work on the history of nations and India, al-Biruni has shown his capacity as a scientist by presenting several issues related to astronomy, astrology, and mathematics. On the other hand, al-Shahrastani, from the beginning, starts his intellectual skill on the subjects of Islam and religious studies by acquiring knowledge on the Qurānic exegesis, Islamic tradition, theology, and philosophy, which have made him to be a great theologian and philosopher.

In view of the fact that they dedicate their works to their political patrons, one may argue that al-Biruni's and al-Shahrastani's academic and intellectual efforts cannot be disconnected from the political setting at that time. Al-Biruni was sent to the region of the *Hind* as a fruit of Mahmūd Ghaznavi's political expansion in Northern India. Likewise, al-Shahrastani presents his works to two different patrons. Given that al-Biruni's works rarely discuss theological discourse, his religious affiliation is not so obvious. In contrast, the theological views of al-Shahrastani reflect that he was an Ash'arite theologian who, at the same time, was favoring the Ismā'ilī thought.

The intellectual, social and political setting in medieval era has shaped al-Biruni's and al-Shahrastani's attitudes and approaches in studying and in accessing the materials of the religious tradition of the *Hind*. It appears that al-Shahrastani who lived a century latter than al-Biruni, when composing the *Kitāb al-Milal*'s chapter of the *Hind*, did not use al-Biruni's *Kitāb al-Hind*. Therefore, the information presented by al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani on the issue of the thought and religious divisions of the *Hind* are different, but complement each other. []



CHAPTER III

The *Hind* and The Nomenclature of World Religions

Defining Traditions and the Divisions of World Religions

THE treatises that belong to al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani encompass a number of world religious traditions. This chapter will observe how al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani classify world religions and place the religious traditions of the *Hind* in their writings. For religious historians and heresiographers, presenting the taxonomy of the divisions of religion, with the purpose of presenting each religion and its sects in a systematic way, is extraordinarily important.¹ The result of this investigation

1 Modern scholars have used different nomenclatures of world religions. Fred Louis Parrish identifies some types of such classification that can be based on language (Max Muller), race or ethnology (J.F. Clarke, D.J. H. Ward), geography or regions (R.E. Hume, Oscar Peschel, and Vidal de la Blanche), language-race-geography (Conrad von Orelli), and culture (F.B. Jevons). Fred Louis Parrish, *History of Religion: the Destiny-Determining Factor in the World's Cultures* (New York, Pageant Press, 1965), 35-41.

will be a step in understanding the religious and cultural links among world religions, and in surveying both al-Biruni's and al-Shahrastani's views, as Muslims, towards other religious traditions, in general, and the *Hind*, in particular.

In his *Kitāb al-Āthār*, al-Biruni collects information on various civilizations' calendrical systems, which are related to religious events, and arranges them into certain themes. Some of the topics correspond solely to his curiosity and competency as an astronomer and astrologer. Other topics elaborate upon the religious events and festivals in various religious traditions. Since this book seeks to observe the chronology of ancient nations, as opposed to inspect world religious traditions, he provides no precise method of classification as al-Shahrastani does. For the most part, the topics of discussion are derived from festivals or religious events. Even so, he presents a wide-ranging discussion of the divisions of religious festivals by describing the similarities and differences of traditions, religious institutions, and opinions found within various groups or nations.

The festivals and feast days, the main topics in addition to the calendrical systems that so interest al-Biruni, are fine instances of how he effectively portrays the differences and resemblances among the religious traditions of the Jews, Persians, Christians, pre-Islamic Arabs, Sabians, and Muslims. His method of selection implies that he formulated a classification based on how people deal with religious festivals, dates, and calendars.

Furthermore, if we take the modern-day study of religion into account, we may say that his mode of presentation in *Kitāb al-Āthār* tends to be more "functionalist," for he begins with a discussion based on "religious events" as the main issue, rather than "substantivist," meaning one who is concerned mainly with religious doctrines. In the functionalist point of view, religious practices may reflect

THE *HIND* AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF
WORLD RELIGIONS

what people believe. For al-Biruni, in this case perhaps, a portion of religious doctrine is presented as the supportive information, not as the main argument, needed to give a religious event's theological background. We may also say that this book is written from his perspective as an astronomer, astrologer, and geographer, and not especially as a religionist. Therefore, his failure to elaborate further upon the significant types of each religious tradition's theological doctrines mentioned in *Kitāb al-Āthār* is not so strange.

Another comparative method used by al-Biruni can be traced back to his *Kitāb al-Hind*, in which he conducts a profound investigation of Hind's religious tradition and compares its theological and philosophical thought with those of the classical Greek religions, Christianity and Judaism, and also confronts their opinions so that he can reach a certain conclusion. To be sure, one who applies a comparative method must have critical insight, a careful outlook, and an accurate stance in looking at one or more religious traditions so that one can reach a reasonable conclusion. Regarding al-Biruni's comparative method when studying Hind, Jeffery notes,

[H]e will place before the reader the theories of the Hindus exactly as they are, and where there are similar theories among the Greeks, or in the teaching of the Christian sects, or the Sufis, as for example in the matter of transmigration of souls, or pantheistic doctrines of the unity of God with his creatures, he will accurately report their theories also for comparison.²

THOUGH al-Biruni makes no attempt to locate Hind's religious traditions within the world's religious traditions, we can deduce his perspective of the general classification of religion. In *Kitāb al-Hind*, he argues that the idolatry found in Hind and classical Greece can be measured as a kind of tradition that deviates from the truth

2 Jeffery, "Al-Biruni's Contribution to Comparative Religions," 128.

(*al-ḥaqq*). On this subject, Kamaruzzaman concludes that al-Biruni implicitly offers two typologies of religions: (1) *al-ḥaqq* (the Truth) or Islam, and (2) *kufr* (rejection of, or deviation from, the Truth) or *inḥiraf* (deviation from the Truth). Here, Kamaruzzaman interprets *al-ḥaqq* as “Islam,” since Muslims often employ this term to identify their own religion.³

However, since al-Biruni’s statements refer to the people of Hind and pre-Christian Greece who held idolatrous views, it is more accurate, in my opinion, to interpret *al-ḥaqq* as “the pure truth” or “monotheism” as employed by Sachau, rather than as “Islam” as used by Kamaruzzaman and based upon Naquib al-Attas’ translation.⁴ My argument is that in this passage al-Biruni simply talks about the idolatry of Hind and classical Greece vis-à-vis the monotheistic tradition.

Al-Biruni uses *inḥiraf* in the context of deviating from monotheism, as opposed to deviating from Islam. As we shall see below, he distinguishes between the *khawwāṣṣ* (elites) and the *‘āmmah* (ordinary) of Hindu believers, which also deals with the monotheistic view and the deviation from it. Moreover, Kamaruzzaman’s above argument is beyond the scope of this discussion, because al-Biruni also talks about Socrates, “who died faithful to the truth (*al-ḥaqq*)” for not partaking in his people’s idolatry. In sum, al-Biruni employs *al-ḥaqq* not only to distinguish monotheism from idolatry, but also for the “truth” (*al-ḥaqq*) that Socrates defended. Thus, the “truth” in this case is not simply Islam as an “organized religion,” but rather Islam as a monotheistic tradition.

Nevertheless, in another place he discusses the divisions of Hind’s society from a theological point of view and its cultural castes

3 Kamaruzzaman, *Early Muslim Scholarship*, 81; see also al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 24; Sachau, trans. *Alberuni’s India*, I, 12.

4 Kamaruzzaman, *Early Muslim Scholarship*, 81 footnotes 20.

THE *HIND* AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF
WORLD RELIGIONS

or social classes (*al-ṭabaqāt*). In addition to his two types of Hindus, mentioned above, he also recognizes that castes or colors (Sans. *varna*; Ar. *alwan*) are an important cultural aspect and that Muslims will perhaps find this feature difficult to understand, since these sociocultural classes determine the Hindus' spiritual types and rights. "We Muslims," al-Biruni states, "stand entirely on the other side of the question, considering all men as equal, except in piety (*taqwa*)."⁵

Such social classes or castes are not unique to Hind. Before describing its castes, for instance, he mentions a sort of caste system found in ancient Persia that bears certain similarities to that of Hind. For example, along with his effort to restore the Persian empire, Ardhasir ben Babak resurrected the following social hierarchy: the knights (*al-usawirah*) and princes (*abnā' al-mulūk*); the monks or pious men (*al-nussak*), fire-priests (*sadanat al-nayyiran*), and lawyers (*arbāb al-dīn*); the physicians (*al-atibba'*), astronomers (*al-munajjimīn*), and scientists (*aṣḥāb al-`ulūm*); and, finally, the farmers or peasants (*al-zarrā'i*) and artisans (*al-sunna'i*).⁶ The Hindus, as al-Biruni explains, have four major castes, each of which is determined by their texts and associated with Brahman's primordial existence: *brahmana* (brahmins [priests and teachers]), *kshatria* (warriors and rulers), *vaiśya* (farmers, merchants, artisans), and *sudra* (laborers) and other low-caste people.

In contrast to al-Biruni, who offers no precise taxonomy of world religious traditions, al-Shahrastani arranges them through a precise model of classification. In addition, as a heresiographer, he offers various technical and theological terms associated with Islamic and other religious sects. First, he proposes a general classification of world religions by presenting what "scholars" have posited, such as a classification based on the great ancient regions and great

5 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 48; Sachau, trans. *Alberuni's India*, I, 100.

6 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 48; Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, I, 100

nations,⁷ of which Hind is one. His classification is not restricted to regions or nations, because he also classifies world religious traditions according to their belief systems, especially when elaborating upon various sects within each religion.

Indeed, his *Kitāb al-Milal* mainly seeks to arrange world religious traditions based on their opinion (*al-ārā'*) and doctrines (*al-madhdhāhib*).⁸ To display his taxonomy sharply and systematically, he proposes such technical terms as “people of religions and sects” (*ahl al-dayanat wa al-milal*) and “people of opinion” (*ahl al-ahwa wa al-nihal*). While the former comprises the Magians, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the latter comprises the philosophers, materialists, Sabians, star and idol worshippers, and Brahmans.⁹

While al-Biruni's discussion of each religion's theological or philosophical view is not profound, al-Shahrastani, as a theologian or a heresiographer, makes a clearer distinction between their doctrines. In defining and categorizing religions or philosophical thought, he formulates such concepts as rationality, regulation or law, body of laws (*sharī'ah*), and prophecies that each tradition may have rejected or accepted.¹⁰ In addition, he mentions another one of religion's important and necessary aspect: scripture. In this case, he distinguishes world religious traditions based on their scriptures and divides them into categories: those that have books (*Ahl al-Kitāb*), those who have “pseudo-books” (*man lahū shubhat Kitāb*), and those who have laws and regulations “without books.” Hind's religious traditions, especially those of the Brahmans and the star worshippers, appear to belong to the third category. Apparently, al-Shahrastani had limited direct access to Hindus, so some Hindu scriptures are

7 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, I, 12.

8 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, I, 12.

9 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, I, 12.

10 Ahmad Khalifah, “Medieval Jewish-Muslim Contribution,” 285-286.

THE *HIND* AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF
WORLD RELIGIONS

missing from his *Kitāb al-Milal*. This is in contrast to al-Biruni, who elaborates to a great extent upon several Hindu scriptures to which he refers in his *Kitāb al-Hind*.

One more issue¹¹ I would like to highlight here concerns both scholars' insights on the relationship between philosophy and theology. This issue, in my opinion, is relevant because both of their investigations embrace several philosophers when discussing religions. Al-Shahrastani describes several philosophical systems in his *Kitāb al-Milal* and incorporates an extensive discussion of Greek, Arab, and Hindu thought in his *Kitāb Nihāyat al-Itqān*. On the other hand, Greek thought becomes the object of al-Biruni's comparative analysis of Hind's religious and philosophical thought.

In the Islamic scientific tradition, philosophy and theology are considered rational sciences (*'ulūm al-'aqliyah*) instead of transmitted sciences (*al-'ulūm al-naqliyah*). Even so, they have different concerns or objects of study: "While theological discourse (*kalām*) is concerned with God's existence and attributes and with human's destiny, philosophy is concerned with rational truth, being and non-being, and the nature of things, of God, and of the cosmos."¹¹ Yet al-Biruni is better recognized as a scientist, astrologer, and religionist than as a philosopher or theologian, while it is just the opposite with al-Shahrastani. However, their works imply that philosophy can somehow be a kind of theological thought. Therefore, studying religion and theology must involve a discussion of philosophy.

In regards to the terminological ambiguity of philosophy and theology in Islamic intellectual history, Seyyed Hossein Nasr notes:

In the context of classical Islamic civilization the name "philosophy" (*al-falsafah* or *al-ḥikmah*) is reserved for a particular set of disciplines associate with the well-known schools of "Islamic philoso-

11 Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *Islam: Faith and History* (Oxford: One World, 2004), 168.

phy” such as the Peripatetic (*mashsha’i*), Illuminationists (*ishraqi*) and the like, and not other schools, like theology (*kalam*), which often deal with philosophic ideas but are not officially recognized as philosophy. Therefore, the title of “philosopher” (*al-faylasuf*) is usually reserved for those who are masters of the doctrines of one these “philosophical” schools with all the different ramifications and nuances that various branches of these schools contain.¹²

IN ANOTHER context, Khalifah’s findings of al-Shahrastāni’s categorization of religion show that the third category (laws and regulations without a scripture), applies to the Sabians, while the philosophers, Brahmans, materialists, and star worshippers are classified in the fourth category (those who do not have book, laws, or legal principles). This categorization appears because Khalifah highlights this topic in light of “sharī’ah,” which can be defined as “divine law,” in which the philosophers do not believe.¹³

Whether al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani should more appropriately be regarded as philosophers or theologians is beyond the scope of this paper. My point here is how they distinguish philosophy from religion, since philosophical thought is intimately embodied within and attached to religious judgments. According to al-Shahrastani, the philosophers (*al-falasifah al-ūla*), along with the Brahmans and the star worshippers, are those who may have laws and regulations without a scripture (*min man lahū ḥudūd wa aḥkām dūna Kitāb*).¹⁴ By including philosophers in his discussion of religion, he shows that he considers philosophy as a sort of religion.

12 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “al-Biruni as Philosopher,” in *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, 92. This article also appeared in *al-Biruni Commemorative Volume*. The content of this article also deals with the thought of al-Biruni that make him is considered as “philosopher.”

13 Ahmad Khalifah, “Medieval Jewish-Muslim Contribution,” 288.

14 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, I, 12. 40.

THE HIND AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF
WORLD RELIGIONS

Muhammad Kamal Ja'far mentions that al-Shahrastani connects philosophy to religion in the context of their objective (*fi nitaq al-ghayah*) and compares the positions of prophets (*al-anbiya'*) and philosophers (*al-hukama'*).¹⁵ Accordingly, prophets confirm the spiritual support for establishing the matter of practical purposes and also take a stand as regards the logical dimension (*al-anbiyā' ayyadū bi imdādāt rūhaniyat li taqrīr al-qism al-'amali, wa bi turāfi mā min al-qism al-'ilm*), while philosophers provide sensible supports for establishing the logical or scientific dimensions and also take a stand on the matter of practices (*ta'rudhū li imdādāt 'aqliyah, taqirīran li qism al-'ilm, wa bi turāfi mā min al-qism al-'amali*).¹⁶

This means that both religion and philosophy have an equivalent goal: the quest for the truth. Therefore, the fundamental correspondence in terms of purpose between religion (prophets) and philosophy (philosophers), as described by al-Shahrastani, is coherent with his method of classification, which includes spiritual and philosophical traditions that have no book or prophets. In this regard, Ahmad Khalifah assumes that "according to the arrangement of this classification, religion seems to be rooted in philosophy."¹⁷ Al-Shahrastani even points out that Sabianism's essence lies somewhere between religion and philosophy.

As a result, the way al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani categorize religions and define religious elements influence how they examine Hind's religious tradition. Even though al-Shahrastani is more systematic and "comprehensive" than al-Biruni in arranging and examining world religious traditions and each of their sects, some important aspects of religion (e.g., religious practices and religious

15 Muhammad Kamal Ja'far, *al-Insān wa al-Adyān: Dirāsah Muqāranah*, (Qatar: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1985), 142.

16 Muhammad Kamal Ja'far, *al-Insān wa al-Adyān*, 142.

17 Ahmad Khalifah, "Medieval Jewish-Muslim Contribution," 287.

festivals) are missing from his work. The idea of comprehensibility in examining religion, however, is not entirely plausible, especially when we observe how al-Biruni deals with Hind's religious tradition, since he conducted actual field research in Hind. Al-Biruni's work covers various aspects of the Hindu traditions, such as society, theology, scripture, and festivals.

The further question is how do both al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani see the religious tradition of the *Hind* in the light of Islamic and historical perspective? To answer that question, it is important to observe, first of all, how far al-Biruni and al-Shahrastāni associate Hinduism with the religious tradition mentioned in the Qur'ān and in the Islamic history. The following section will discuss the relevancy and irrelevancy of Hinduism and Sabianism to each other according to al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani.

Hinduism and Sabianism: Doctrinal and Historical Correspondences

IT IS INTERESTING to investigate the Qur'ānic concept of Sabians and how Muslim commentators define Sabianism, as well as how al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani correlate Sabians into the religious traditions of the *Hind*. In addition to the *ahl al-kitāb* (the People of the Book), which are mainly associated with Jews and Christians, the Qur'ān mentions the word "*al-ṣābi'īn*" in three verses.¹⁸ There is no

18 QS. 2 [al-Bāqarah]: 62: "Those who believe (in the Qur'ān), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." QS. 5 [al-Māidah]: 69: "Those who believe (in the Qur'ān), and those who follow the Jewish (scripture), and the Christians and the Sabians, any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." With a different tone and scope, the Qur'ān, in another verse, mentions: QS. 22 (al-Hajj): 17: "Those who believe (in the Qur'ān), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures) and the Sabians, Christians, Magians, and

THE HIND AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF
WORLD RELIGIONS

single agreement among the *ulama* about the meaning and scope of Sabians, since the actual reference of this term is quite mysterious and cannot, with certainty, be associated with either the ancient pagan Arab religions or other religious communities. According to Mahmoud M. Ayoub, the Qur'ānic verses mentioning Sabians have been "the subject of much controversy among commentators as well as jurists,"¹⁹ especially when they talk about the historical and actual identities of Sabians in the Islamic context. A similar opinion has been raised by Mamoud b. Sharif in the *al-Adyān fī al-Qur'ān*, "there is no ultimate agreements [among 'ulamas and Muslim exegetes] on this matter" (*lam ya'rifū al-kalimah al-akhīrah fī hādihā al-majal*).²⁰

'Abbas b. Mansur al-Saksaki (1219/20-1284-85) in his *al-Burhān fī Ma'rifat 'Aqāid Ahl al-Adyān* points out that *al-Sābiūn* is literally derived from *sabaa'*, which means "those who leave a thing" (*kharaja min shaiin*), or "those who leave any religion in order to embrace another religion" (*wa min dīn ilā dīn*).²¹ Western scholars J. Wansbrough and A. Guillaume correlate this term with the emergence of Islam, especially the appearance of Muhammad in the midst of religious belief systems of the Arab community. The *ṣābi'* is "he who separates from the religion,"²² translates Wansbrough, or

Polytheists, Allah will judge between them on the Day of Judgment; for Allah is witness of all things." The translation is taken from Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1989) revised edition.

19 Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and its interpreters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 109.

20 Mamoud b. Sharif in the *al-Adyān fī al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1970), 160.

21 'Abbas b. Mansur al-Saksaki, *al-Burhān fī Ma'rifat 'Aqāid Ahl al-Adyān*, tahqīq (edited by): Khalil Ahmad Ibrahim al-Haj (Dār al-Turāth al-'Arabi li al-Taba'ī li al-Nashr, 1980), 59.

22 J. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition in Islamic Salvation History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 102.

“a man who changes his religion,”²³ writes Guillaume. Therefore, in line with the existence of Muhammad, the *ṣābi'* has devastated the superiority of Quraisy.²⁴

Nevertheless, Muslim commentators differs over the identity of Sabians. According to Mahmoud Ayoub's investigation, such Muslim commentators as Qatadah and Tabarsi identify the Sabians as those who include belief in the existence of the Creator, the Judgment Day, and prophets, but they include the worship of the stars. Other commentators are inclined to associate Sabians to the “unique version” of the People of the Book. Mujahid and Hasan Basri mention that Sabians do not have a “definite form” of religion; they are between the Jews and Magians. While al-Suddi marks Sabianism as a sect of the People of the Book because they read Psalms, al-Khalil sees them as another form of Christianity with an additional emphasis on their status as the followers of Noah.²⁵

Moreover, Tabari presents various reports that have a similar tone to the preceding description. However, it is interesting to note that Tabari, based on some reports, includes the Sabians in the Muslims' concept of *al-mushrikūn*. Jane Dammen McAulife in her observation notes, “The hadith which reports this describes the group not as a religious but as monotheistic, commenting that

23 A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq Sīrat Rasūlullah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 205.

24 Indeed, the Sabians changed and developed from time to time. The contemporary of Muhammad called him a *ṣābian*. Then, 832-833 this term was associated with a monotheistic group resembling Judaism and Christianity that lived in Iraq. After 832-833 this term includes the Harranians as well as those who were involved in veneration of idols. According to Ajae, the original Sabians of the Qur'ān are the Mandaean. Ajae, “Sabians of the Qur'ān,” *Asuta: the Journal for the Study and Research into the Mandaean Culture, Religion, and Language*, Vol. 5, special issue, <http://www.geocities.com/mandaeans/sābians8.html>.

25 Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and its interpreters*, 109-110.

THE *HIND* AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF
WORLD RELIGIONS

it is a bare sort of monotheism, with neither book, nor prophet, nor '*amal*.'²⁶ Accordingly, the Sabians are worshipping angels and praying five times a day toward a certain *qibla* (direction). By contrast, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi perceives that the Sabians are not worshipping the sun or angels, but they are star-worshippers. Al-Razi connects the star-worshippers with the principle of monotheism. In regards to al-Razi's outlook, McAulife concludes that the relationship between God and the stars can be understood in two ways. "Both start by affirming God as the creator of the world," notes McAulife. The first way grasps that God as a creator ordered human beings to glorify the stars and to use them as a *qibla* for ritual and non-ritual prayer. The second way is in accord with a theory of divine emanation, "involving intermediate stages of emanation and sustaining activity." In emanation theory, stars were created earlier than earth, and at the same time, stars transform their regulative potentiality to this world. Therefore, it can be understood that when human beings glorify stars, as al-Razi claims, "because they are the regulative deities (*al-āliha al-mudabbira*) of this world."²⁷

In another context, Ibn Kathīr mentions that neither do the Sabians follow certain established religions, nor can they be identified as Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, or infidels. Their teachings presumably are derived from the "natural tendency" (*fitrah*). The Sabians, Ibn Kathīr continues, are those who have never been reached by the message of the prophets, but their religious view is monotheistic.²⁸ Therefore, due to the distinction derived

26 Jane Dammen McAulife, "Exegetical Identification of the *Ṣābiūn*," *The Muslim World*, Volume LXXII, No 2 (April 1982), 95-96.

27 Cited by McAulife, "Exegetical Identification of the *Ṣābiūn*," 99.

28 Cited by McAulife, "Exegetical Identification of the *Ṣābiūn*," 99. On this regard, a modern Muslim commentator Abdullah Yusuf Ali summarizes: "in Arabic term they are called *ṣubbī* (plural *ṣubbā*). They are called Sabians, Nasoraean, or Mandaean, or Christians of St. John. They claim to be Gnostic, or Knowers

from preceding assumptions of Muslim commentators towards the Sabians, we may summarize some general points, which perhaps are not related to each other: 1) The Sabians believe in God (the creator); 2) They embrace monotheistic tendencies; 3) They may reject the idea of prophethood; 4) They worship stars or use them or as a *qibla*; 5) They may also be planet-worshippers; 6) They are somehow associated with Christians and reading Psalms; 7) They cannot clearly be classified as Jews, Christians, or Zoroastrians.

Geographically speaking, some Muslim commentators have estimated that the region where the Sabians primarily resided is in the northern region of Mosul (*jazīrat al-mausil*).²⁹ In his *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, al-Tabari depicts this group as having correlated with the ancient Persian Kings and Noah. Derived from some reports, he tells us that Bewārasb who ruled in the time of Idrīs, “appeared in the first year of his rule and made propaganda for the religion of the Sabians.” In another place al-Tabari explains the origin of Sabians by claiming they are rooted in the *ṣābi'*, the son of Methuselah who lived by the time Noah sent by God as His messenger.³⁰ In relation to this case, Abdullah Yusuf Ali includes two other so-called Sabian communities, which are “the Syrian stars-worshippers with Hellenistic tendencies,” and the planet worshippers who originated in North Arabia and developed in South Arabia around 800-700 B.C.³¹

of the Great Life. They dress in white, and believe in frequent immersions of water.” According to him, “they resemble the Sabiun mentioned in the Qur’ān, but are not probably identical with them.” Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’ān: Text, Translation and Commentary*, 33.

29 Cited by McAulife, “Exegetical Identification of the *Ṣābiūn*,” 96; Ayoub, *The Qur’ān and its interpreters*, 109-110.

30 Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, Vol. I, 345-347, 354.

31 Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’ān: Text, Translation and Commentary*, 33.

THE *HIND* AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF
WORLD RELIGIONS

Christopher Buck, by referring to Waardenburg's observation on the existing religious communities outside Arabia points out that geographically and historically, Muslim scholars, writers, and commentators associate the Sabians in any case with some religious community in different regions, such as Mandeans in south Mesopotamia, Harranieans in north Mesopotamia, Manichaeans in Mesopotamia and Egypt, Buddhist and Hindus in the *Sind*, and the followers of tribal religions in East Africa.³²

This chapter will not go further by explaining Sabians' position in Islamic legal history. Instead, it will analyze al-Biruni's and al-Shahrastani's perceptions toward the Sabians and their connection to Hinduism. First of all, since al-Biruni's *Kitāb al-Āthār* is concerned with various religions only if they are related to religious events and festivals, he fails to observe deeply the origin, essence, and characteristic of religions in a systematic way. Therefore, we may discover that al-Biruni's assessment of the Sabians is not as elaborative and systematic as al-Shahrastani's examination.

In the *Kitāb al-Āthār*, al-Biruni writes a special chapter on the fast on the feast days of Sabians (*shiyām al-ṣābiīn wa a'yāduhum*) when he elaborates the feast days of ancient Magians (*a'yād al-majūs al-aqdamīn*). He seems to associate the Sabians with the Jews who were captured by Nebuchadnezzar in Jerusalem and then transferred to Babylonia. After having acclaimed themselves to the Babylonian rulers, the Sabians preferred to stay in Babylonia, not return to Syria. The intercultural and religious contacts between Jews and the Magians, in turn, influenced some of Jews religiously.

32 Christopher Buck, "The Identity of the Sabi'un," *T Muslim World*, Volume 76, No 3-4 (July-October 1986), 173-174; see also J. Waardenburg, "World Religions as Seen in the Light of Islam," in *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge*, edited by A. Welch and P. Cachia (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 248.

Al-Biruni concludes, “So their religion became a mixture of Magian and Jewish elements (*fa imtujizat madhāhibuhum min al-majūsiya wa al-yahūdiyyah*) like that of the so-called Samaritans” (*al-Sāmirah*) who were transferred from Babylon to Syria.³³ Al-Biruni also notes that the Sabians are primarily living in Sawad al-‘Irak. Genealogically, the Sabians trace themselves back to Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam.

Along with al-Biruni’s observation, the Sabians can be associated not only with the ancient Magians and Zoroastrian’s sect or the sun-worshippers (*Shamsiyyah*) the ancient people of Harran, but also with the Harrānians, the followers of the ancient religion of the West (*Ahl al-dīn al-qadīm al-maghribī*), when the Ionian Greeks (ancient Greek) adopted Christianity. Accordingly, their religious system is derived from Agathodmon (Aghadhīmūn), Hermes, Wālīs, Mubā, and Sawār, to whom the prophethood is awarded.³⁴ These followers of the ancient religion of the West were well recognized as the Sabians, even though this term had not been used until the ‘Abbasid ruler reckoned them as a part of *Dhimma* (the protected non-Muslim communities) in 228 H. According to al-Biruni, before that time, they had been called heathens, idolaters, and ḥarrānians.³⁵

33 Al-Biruni, *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah*, 407; Sachau, trans., *Chronology*, 314.

34 Al-Biruni, *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah*, 408; Sachau, trans. *Chronology*, 314-315; Buck, “The Identity of the Sabi’un,” 175-176; Jeffery, “Al-Biruni’s Contribution to Comparative Religions,” 156-157.

35 The Arabic version edited by Azkāei uses term *ḥunafā* which is translated by Sachau as heathens. The term *ḥunafā* is actually more appropriate to be translated as a plural form of the noun *ḥanīf*, which means “the true religion” or “pre-Islamic monotheists.” Another term that has the same root is the word *ḥanafī* (singular) or *ḥanafīyyūn* (plural), which means pagan, heathen, or idolater. The Sachau’s translation is coherent with the context of the sentence, even though the Arabic term “heathen” is not the exact translation of that word *ḥunafā*. Yet, we can consider another explanation used by Ibn Nadhim in his *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, as cited by Buck, who signifies the monotheistic *hanīf* as “the Ibrahimitic Sabians.” The later explanation is in

THE *HIND* AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF WORLD RELIGIONS

However, al-Biruni shares other opinions concerning the Harrānians to indicate that these communities are not “the real Sabians,” but those who are called in books “Heathens” (*al-ḥunafā*) and “Idolaters” (*al-wathaniyyah*). Al-Biruni puts this idea in plain words:

2 For the Sabians are the remnants of the Jewish tribes who remained in Babylonia, when the other tribes left it from Jerusalem in the day of Cyrus and Artaxerxes. Those remaining tribes felt themselves attracted to the rites of the Magians, and so they inclined (were inclined, *i.e.* *ṣābī*) towards the religion of Nebukadnezar, and adopted a system mixed up of Magism and Judaism like the Samaritans in Syria.³⁶

IN ANOTHER place, al-Biruni explains further about Harrānians:

The remnants of those Sabians are living in ḥarrān, their name (*i.e.* Alharrāniyya) being derived from their place. Other derive it from ḥārān b. Terah, the brother of Abraham, saying that he among the chiefs was the most deeply imbued with their religion and its most tenacious adherent.³⁷

ON HIS OBSERVATION about the religious community in Samarqand, al-Biruni finds some vestiges that are considered Manichaeans and seen as Sabians.

2 Of his adherents, some remnants that are considered as Manichaeans are still extant: they are scattered throughout the world

line with the meaning of *ḥanīf* or *ḥunafā*. Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic Writing*, edited by J. Milton Cowan (Beirut: Librairie du Liban; London: McDonald & Evans Ltd., 1974), 210.

36 Al-Biruni, *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah*, 244; Sachau, trans. *Chronology*, 188.

37 Al-Biruni, *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah*, 243; Sachau, trans. *Chronology*, 186.

and do not live together in any particular place of Muhammadan countries, except the community in Samarqand, known by the same of Sabians. As regards non-Muhammadan countries, we have to state that the most of the eastern Turks, of the people of China and Tibet, and some of the Hindus, adhere are still to his law and doctrine.³⁸

WHILE in the foregoing discussion al-Biruni connects the Sabians with the religious communities such as the Mandaean in south Mesopotamia, the Harrānians in north Mesopotamia, and the Manichaeans in Samarqand, he also in some way incorporates the Sabians with the regions of the *Hind* in his exploration about “the eras of the pseudo-prophets” (*tawārīkh al-mutanabiīn*). Accordingly, Budhāsaf came to the *Hind*, brought in the Persian writing and “called people to the religion of the Sabians” (*wa da’ā ilā millata al-ṣābiīn*). Many people followed his call. Al-Biruni adds that a number of kings and people at that time in Balkh even venerated the sun, moon, planets, primal elements (*kulliyyāt al-anāṣir*), and perceived such things as holy beings.³⁹

In Christopher Buck’s assessment, al-Biruni perhaps was familiar with the Arabic romance *Kitāb Bilawhar wa Yūdāsaf* that deals with the history of Buddha. This argument is supported by the fact that after telling Budhāsaf, al-Biruni mentions Balkh in which a Buddhist minority lived.⁴⁰ Certainly, al-Biruni mentions Balkh when he discusses his approach to the *Hind*. However, there is no single statement or reference proving his recognition towards *Kitāb Bilawhar wa Yūdāsaf*. In addition to this, al-Biruni in his *Tarīkh al-Hind* uses the term *Shamaniyyah* in naming the Buddhist community in Balkh, and he does not employ the term Budhāsaf

38 Al-Biruni, *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah*, 254; Sachau, trans. *Chronology*, 191.

39 Al-Biruni, *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah*, 244; Sachau, trans. *Chronology*, 188.

40 Buck, “The Identity of the Sabi’un,” 177.

THE *HIND* AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF
WORLD RELIGIONS

as we have found in his *Kitāb al-Athār*.⁴¹ According to al-Biruni, the Magians, a religious community in Babylonia, also existed in the *Hind*. They are called *Maga* (*wa baqiya al-majūs ilā al-ān bāridh al-hind wa yusammūna Maga*).⁴²

Al-Biruni's works does not precisely link between Sabianism and Hinduism or the religious tradition of the *Hind* besides Budhashaf. This is different from al-Shahrastani who puts *Ārā al-Hind* separately from Sabians. First of all, it should be noted that al-Shahrastani from the beginning of his *Kitāb al-Milal* arranges a classification of religions based on either the types of theological thought or divisions of religious institution. For al-Shahrastani, as Waardenburg has noted, Sabianism "serves as a kind of 'model' for a specific sort of religion situated, so to say, between monotheism and polytheism, just as dualism and Christianity can serve as models for certain types of religion."⁴³ He, first of all, divides his chapter of Sabians into three sub-chapters: "the followers of spiritual beings" (*aṣḥāb al-rūḥāniyah*), the admirers of temples and figures (*aṣḥāb al-hayākil wa asykhāṣ*) and Harrānians (*al-harnāniyyah*).⁴⁴ Al-Shahrastani compounds various terms in order to categorize the varieties of Sabianism such as "the ancient Sabians," "the first Sabians," "the Greek Sabians," and "the Indian Sabians."⁴⁵

According to al-Shahrastani, the Sabians are inclined to deny the ideas of prophecy and at the same time espouse the limit of the prophetic tradition. Since al-Shahrastani believes that prophecy is a central issue of the "true religion," it is understandable when

41 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 10; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I 21.

42 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 11; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I 21.

43 Waardenburg, "World Religions as Seen in the Light of Islam," 253.

44 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 281-345.

45 See Lawrence, *Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 64; Waardenburg used term "the ṣābian in Harrān" instead of the "first ṣābian," the term used by Lawrence, see Waardenburg, *ibid.*

al-Shahrastani categorizes the Sabians among those who have “pseudo-books,” those who “profess religious beliefs and adhere to religious communities,” as well as “those who deny prophecies.”⁴⁶ On the other hand, al-Shahrastani says that the Sabians, especially those al-Shahrastani calls “the first Sabians,” might revere the teachings of certain prophets, such as Adhīmūn (Ādhīmīm) and Hermes but they rejected other “real” prophets, from Adam until Muhammad.⁴⁷

While al-Biruni is inclined to be descriptive in his work of this matter, al-Shahrastani seems to be involved in “theological dispute” with the ideas held by Sabians concerning prophecy. Previously I have mentioned that some Sabians consider Adhīmūn (Ādhīmīm) and Hermes as their prophets, or at least the Sabians follow their teachings. Al-Shahrastani, to criticize the Sabians’ idea of prophecy, raises some questions:

You Sabians acknowledge Adhīmūn (Ādhīmīm) and Hermes (who are Seth and Idrīs) as prophets. Do you know that they are veracious because of their teaching and the report (you have heard) or by proof and thought (*naẓar*)?...If you say that human apostleship is impossible why do you adopt these two men as apostles?... If you say that they were sage, not prophets, we reply then why follow scrupulously their laws and regulation in doctrine, prayer, fasting, and alms when you are their equal intelligence?⁴⁸

BESIDES highlighting the prophecy in the discourse of the Sabians, al-Shahrastani in another place confronts and compares between the Sabians and the monotheists (*ḥanīf*). In this case, al-Shahrastani

46 Lawrence, *Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 64-65.

47 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 282; see Lawrence, *Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 69. also Buck, 177; Monnot, “Les Sabeean de Sahrastāni,” II, 9.

48 Al-Shahrastani, *Nihāyah al-Iqdām*, 428; Alfred Guillaume, *The Summa Philosophiae*, 137.

THE *HIND* AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF
WORLD RELIGIONS

does not straightforwardly give a clue which Sabians he means. Perhaps, he means by it what he calls “the first Sabians.” On the one hand, “the Sabians admit the apostleship of spiritual beings and pay homage to the seven planets, their temples; they make images (*ashkhās*) after they form of the temple and venerate them....” On the other hand, “the monotheists admit the apostleship of mortals and pay homage to their person (*ashkhās*); but they do not choose idol for gods nor believe that the prophets are divine beings (*arbāb*). They hold that they have a human and a prophetic aspect...”⁴⁹

Above all, while al-Biruni in his *Kitāb al-Āthār* connects the Sabians to the religious traditions of the *Hind* through his discussion about *Budhāsaf* who came to the *Hind* and taught Persian tradition, al-Shahrastani straightforwardly correlates the Sabians with Brahmans because both Sabians and Brahmans rejected prophecy. In the *Kitāb Nihāyah*, especially on the chapter of the “Proof of Prophecy” (*fī ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*) al-Shahrastani says, “Brahmans and Sabians hold that prophecy is impossible intellectually” (*ṣārat al-barāhima wa al-ṣābiyah ilā al-qaul istihālah al-nubuwwāt*),⁵⁰ while for

49 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 429, especially sub-chapter “*al-munādhārāt bain al-sābiyah wa al-ḥunafā*,” 285-329; see also G. Monnot, “Les Sabeen de Shahrastani, especially sub-chapter “les controverses avec le hanīfs,” 11-13. In this case, concerning the term *ḥanīf* or *ḥunafā* used by al-Shahrastani, Alfred Guillaume translates it as “monotheists.” Guillaume notes, “he Shahrastani means Muslims, but uses the term *ḥanīf* as he does in the long passage in the *Milal*. The choice of this term, which in the Qur’ān denotes the primitive religion of Abraham in its original purity, is probably a conscious tribute to the antiquity of the religion of the Sabians.” Al-Shahrastani, adds Guillaume, “implicitly claims for Islam an ancestry equal to that of Sabianism.” Guillaume, *The Summa Philosophiae*, 137. This translation is diametrically opposed to the translation of Edward Sachau who uses term “heathen” for *ḥunafā*. For a comparison see also the view of a ninth century Jewish theologian, Dāwud ibn Marwān al-Muqammis, who concern with the monotheistic idea and its relationship to the discourse of prophecy. S. Stroumsa, *The Barāhima in Early Kalām*,” *ISAI*, 6, 1985, 234.

50 Al-Shahrastani, *Nihāyah al-Iqdām*, 417; Alfred Guillaume, *The Summa Philosophiae*, 133.

the Mu'tazila and Shi'a prophecy is rationally necessary, and for the Ash'arī and Sunnī this idea is intellectually possible.

In addition to this, as we will see in the next chapter, one of the sects of the *Hind* and that of the Sabians discussed in al-Shahrastani's *Kitāb al-Milal* is the followers of the spiritual beings (*aṣḥāb al-rūḥāniyāt*),⁵¹ as well as the star worshippers. The *Hind*'s sect is also even connected to the philosophers. Shahrastani has ranked between the Sabians and Brahmans differently. Lawrence has noted, "in introducing the doctrine of mankind, Shahrastani places the ancient Sabians on a rung above the Brahmans. The former are said to have statutes and ordinances in place of a revealed book; the latter—together with ancients and materialist philosophers as well as star and idol worshippers—are described as those who have neither a revealed book nor legal statutes and ordinance."⁵² This view is not entirely constant, because al-Shahrastani also grades the Sabians along with the philosophers and Brahmans as those "who only follow their own judgments, denying prophecies and rejecting ordained laws and statutes."⁵³

In sum, al-Shahrastani seems to be clearer in connecting the Sabians with the religious tradition of the *Hind* than al-Biruni. This implies that though al-Biruni sees the religions of the *Hind* as having monotheistic tendencies, they are different from the Sabians. Therefore, we may conclude that it was the al-Biruni's perspective to conclude that the elites (*al-khawāṣṣ*) among the Hindus have a monotheistic view, a view which is also held by Sabians, though this religious community of the *Hind* is unknown in the Qur'ān. By contrast, al-Shahrastani clearly regard the Hindus as a kind of or a part of Sabians. Therefore, in his evaluation of

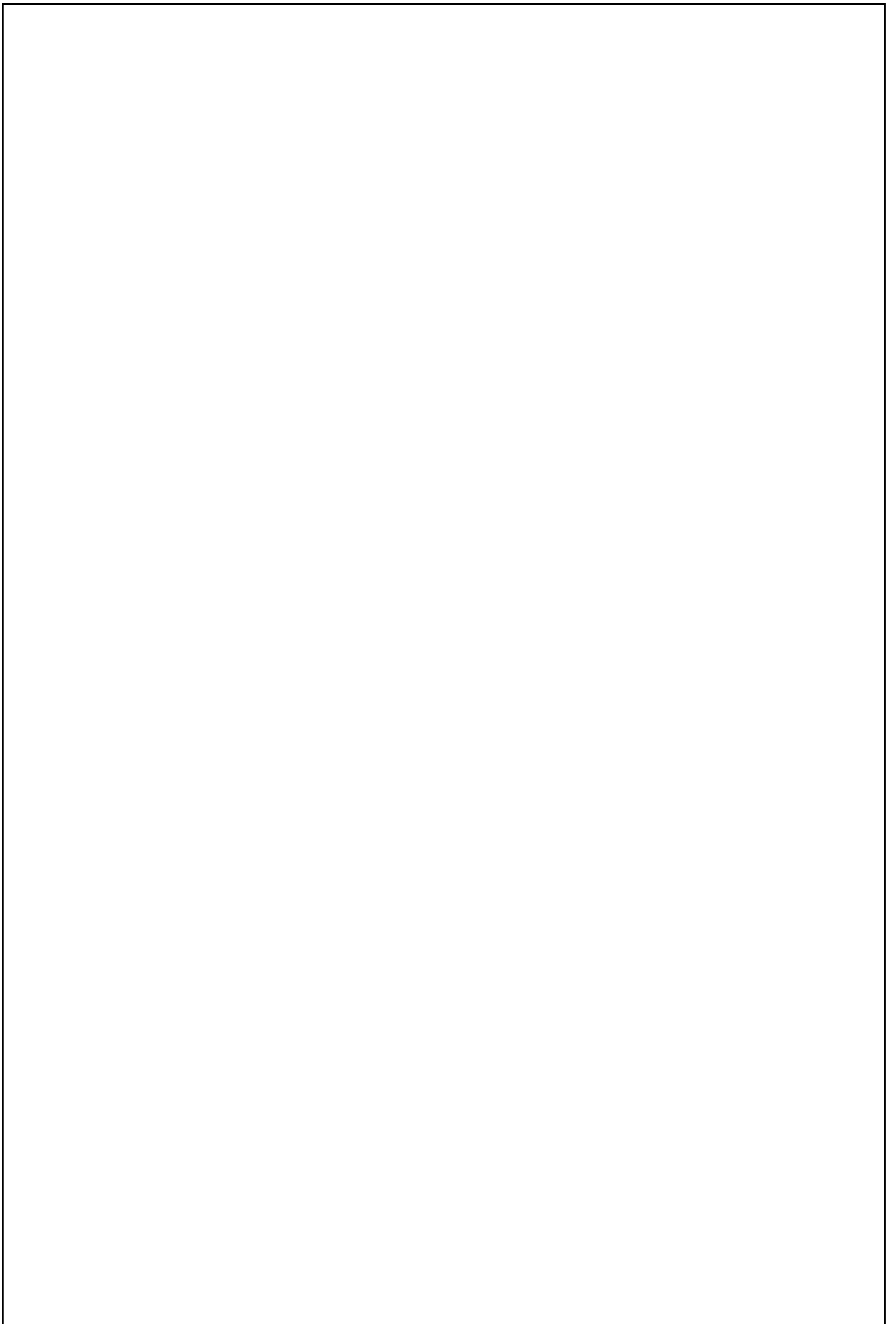
51 Al-Shahrastani, *Nihāyah al-Iqdām*, 282-329 and 601-602.

52 Lawrence, *Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 71.

53 Lawrence, *Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 71.

THE *HIND* AND THE NOMENCLATURE OF
WORLD RELIGIONS

the divisions of religions of the *Hind*, al-Shahrastani uses a similar method as he examines the Sabians. However, we may also see that not all sects of the *Hind*'s religious traditions can be associated with the Sabians since the people of the *Hind* have various religious belief systems. Finally, the above description is very helpful in understanding al-Birūnī's and al-Shahrastani's stance towards the variety of theological doctrines of the Hindus and how these two scholars attempt to find theological and doctrinal arguments from the Qur'ān. In this case, al-Birūnī and al-Shahrastani have shared different ways to identify the religious traditions of the *Hind* and their connection with the religions mentioned in the Qur'ān.[]





CHAPTER IV

Divisions and Theological Thought of The *Hind*

Al-Biruni on the Types of the Hindu Adherents

BEFORE observing the Hindu's religion, al-Biruni clarifies the grouping of Hindu society. It is necessary to do so because people have different insights and conceptions of the abstract ideas (i.e. the supernatural), depending upon their knowledge and intellectual background. He divides the believers into two: elites and ordinary people. By dividing the believers into such a type, al-Biruni expects that there would not be misinterpretation of what Hindus believe. It appears that “the educated believers” or elites (*al-khawāṣṣ*) in this case are Hindu scholars or theologians who are able to “conceive abstract ideas and to define general principles (*yunāzi'u al-ma'qūl wa yuqṣadu al-taḥqīq fī al-uṣūl*),”¹ while “the uneducated believers” are the common and ordinary people (*al-'āmmah*).² In addition to this, the social classes among the Hindus,

1 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 13; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I. 27.

2 Muhammad Murād, *al-Biruni Faylasūfan*, 48.

which have extensively influenced and shaped the variety of belief systems, become al-Biruni's concern. Al-Biruni's investigation of the Hindu adherents for the most part is based upon Hindu texts, especially when he presents the religious and theological thought of the Hindu philosophers or theologians. His description of the "popular culture" of the religious traditions of the Hind is commonly based on his own observation.

Classification-based Theological Thought

LIKE other religious communities, the Hindus deal with the idea of a supernatural. They believe in God. By tracing the educated people's religious thought in describing the nature of God, al-Biruni concludes that the idea of supreme beings in Hindu religion is, in principle, monotheistic, and not polytheistic. The Hindus believe that God is one, eternal, without beginning and end, acting by freewill, almighty, all-wise, living, giving life, ruling, preserving; one who in his sovereignty is unique, beyond all likeness and unlikeness, and that he does not resemble anything nor does anything resemble him.³

To support his conclusion as to the theological conception of the educated believers, al-Biruni quotes some verses from Hindu texts, primarily *Yôgasutra*, *Gitā*, and *Sāmkhya*.⁴ Some Sanskrit

3 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 13; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 27.

4 See al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 4; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, 8; see Pines Shlomo and Tuvia Gelblum, "Al-Biruni's Arabic Version of Patanjali's Yoga Sutra: A Translation of the Fourth Chapter and a Comparison with Related Text," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 52, No. 2 (1989). Moreover, al-Biruni himself recognizes eighteen *Purānas* used by Hindus. Most of *Purānas* are, "called by the names of animals, human or angelic beings (*bi asmā' al-hayawānāt wa unās wa malāikat*)," al-Biruni mentions, "because they contain stories about them, or because the contents of the book refer in some way to them, or because this book consists of answers which the creature whose name forms the title of the book has

DIVISIONS AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT
OF THE *HIND*

sources to which al-Biruni often refers are the Patañjali's *Yôgasutra*, *Gītā*, *Sāmkhya*, and various *Purānās*. Scholars have discovered many intellectual benefits contributed by al-Biruni through his direct citation of such original Hindu texts: first, al-Biruni has introduced the Hindu belief system as directly reflected by Hindu texts to his Muslim fellows. This contribution of interfaith discourse and comparative religion of al-Biruni can be traced when he translated *Yôgasutra* and *Sāmkhya* into Arabic. The former consists of "the emancipation of the soul from the fetters of the body (*wa takhlīs al-nafs min ribāth al-badan*)," the latter describes "the origins and a description of all created beings (*fī al-mabādī wa sifāt al-maujūdāt*)." These two books, according to al-Biruni, might represent the elements of the worldviews of the Hindus.

Those books listed above have shared different emphases in describing God, including His universality, His relation to human beings, and His knowledge. In the Patanjali's *Yôgasutra*, there is a dialogue between the master and the pupil regarding the characteristic of the worshiped. The ideas that come out from the narrations of *Yôgasutra* reflect the absolutism and the universalism of God.⁵ The Patanjali's *Yôgasutra* also describes that God reveals knowledge to some ordinary peoples, which are the sages, through

given to certain questions." However, he only had a chance to reach three portions, which are: *Masya*, *Aditya* and *Vayu-purānas*. Al-Biruni then listed the *Purānas* as follows: (1) *Ādi-purāna*, i.e. the first; (2) *Matsya-purāna*, i.e. the fish; (3) *Kūrma-purāna*, i.e. the tortoise; (4) *Varāha-purāna*, i.e. the boar; (5) *Narasimha-purāna*, i.e. a human being with a lion's head; (6) *Vāmana-purāna*, i.e. the dwarf; (7) *Vāyu-purāna*, i.e. the wind; (8) *Nanda-purāna*, i.e. a servant of Mahādeva; (9) *Skanda-purāna*, i.e. a son of Mahādeva; (10) *Āditya-purāna*, i.e. the sun; (11) *Soma-purāna*, i.e. the moon; (12) *Sāmba-purāna*, i.e. the sun of Vishnu; (13) *Brahmānda-purāna*, i.e. heaven; (14) *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāna*, i.e. a great Rishi; (15) *Tārکشya-purāna*, i.e. the bird Garuda; (16) *Viśṇu-purāna*, i.e. Narāyana; (17) *Brahma-purāna*, i.e. the nature charged with the preservation of the world; and (18) *Bhaviṣya-purāna*, i.e. future things.

5 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 13; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 27-28.

different ways, as well as sends down the *Veda* upon Brahmans.⁶ Meanwhile, according to Patanjali, there are three ways how God, in His eternality, communicates with the sages: first, He bestowed a book (*fa minhum man ulqiya ilaihi kitāban*); second, He opened a door (*wa minhum man futiḥa liwāsithtatin ilaihi bāban*) to be able to communicate with him; and third, He inspired someone (*wa min man ūḥiya ilaihi*) so that “he obtained by cogitation what God bestowed upon him.”⁷ Until this point, al-Biruni does not use his comparative analysis, even supposing this topic is closely similar to the Islamic concept of revelation in Islamic tradition.⁸ Similar to the *Yôgasutra*, moreover, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* underscores the universalism and the eternality of God. This book also explains that God is beyond the ordinary human recognition, and can only be perceived by human

6 In Hindus' account, the *Veda*, as al-Biruni writes, is a knowledge or religious system “which comes from God, and was promulgated by the mouth of Brahman (*kalām nusībūhu ilā Allāh Ta'ālā min famm Barāhim*).” Like other religious texts, the *Veda* consists of commandments (*awāmir*), prohibitions (*al-nawāhi*), pronouncements about rewards and punishments (*al-targhīb wa al-tarhīb fī tahdīd wa ta'yīn*), hymns of praises (*al-mu'dhamuh 'alā tasābih*), and explanations about types of sacrifices (*wa qurābīn bi anwā'ihā*). Because of the lofty content of the *Veda*, ordinary peoples are not allowed to trace, learn, or even to memorize it. It only may circulate among Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Even the Brahmin, the highest caste of Hindus, to some extent only could memorize it without understanding its meaning and its interpretation. The *Veda* is transmitted by memory and maintained through rites and religious practices. Vasukra is a famous Brahmin and a native of Kashmir who initiates to write the *Veda* and commit to interpreting its content. Unlike other Hindu religious texts, which are composed in a particular metre called *sloka*, the *Veda* is written and recited in another way. Hindus believe, as al-Biruni notes, that the *Veda* has extraordinary metre that “no one could compose anything in the same metre.” Al-Biruni also mentions that the *Veda*, according to tradition, has been divided into four kinds; *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda*, and *Āthārvanaveda*. al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 40-41; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 125-126.

7 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 14; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 29.

8 Mentioned in the Qur'an 42:51: “It is not fitting for a man that Allah should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by the sending of a Messenger to reveal, with Allah's permission, what Allah wills: for He is Most High, Most Wise.”

DIVISIONS AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT
OF THE *HIND*

beings through their senses. Interestingly, Vāsudeva's statement in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* obviously distinguishes, like what al-Biruni does, between those who are able to recognize the eternity of God, using their senses, and those who are unable.⁹

For al-Biruni, the above types of philosophical and theological views reflected from Hindu texts become a considerable example of how the educated people believe in God. Through their knowledge and their ability to absorb the abstract theological ideas, they are able to bring their opinions into accounts that the unity of God is absolute and everything besides God will be pluralistic. He concludes:

This is what educated people believe about God. They call him *śvara*, i.e. self-sufficing, beneficent, who gives without receiving. They consider the unity of God as absolute, but that everything besides God which may appear as a unity is really a plurality of things. The existence of God they consider as a real existence, because everything that exists exists through him. It is not impossible to think that the existing beings are *not* and that he *is*, but it is impossible to think that he *is not* and that they *are*.¹⁰

UNLIKE the educated people who are able to conceive the abstract notions into different philosophical and theological reflection, the common people among Hindus present their God through all possible iconographical representations. Al-Biruni summarizes the differences between the educated and uneducated Hindus: the former has substantive and metaphorical understanding (in conceiving God), while the latter has symbolic and literal expression.

9 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 14; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 30.

10 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 15; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 31.

If an educated man hears what we have mentioned, that God comprehends the universe so that nothing is concealed from him, he will at once imagine that this comprehending is effected by means of eye-sight; that eye-sight is only possible by means of an eye, and that two eyes are better than only one; in consequence he will describe God as having a thousand eyes, meaning to describe his omniscience.¹¹

TO support his insight on the variety of theological doctrines, al-Biruni makes a theological and a philosophical comparison between religious traditions by highlighting the term *God* semantically and conceptually in Greek, Arabic, Hebrew/Syriac, and Sanskrit, as well as applying each concept in the discourse of idol worship and anthropomorphic notions. His account implies that the variety of the concept of God in every tradition, at least within major religious traditions, have been generated by the differences in the scope of linguistic concepts applying to God. For example, in Greek tradition, the word God generally means “everything that is glorious and noble (*jalīl al-Sharīf*).”¹² It is often associated with great thing such as mountains and seas. The word God is also commonly attributed to the *First Cause* (*‘illat al-ūlā*), to angels (*malāikat*) and their souls (*wa anfūsihim*). Thus, Greek term for “God” constitutes a vast scope.

In contrast, God in Arabic means “the pure truth (*al-ḥaqq*),” i.e. *Allāh*. This word has an exclusive meaning that can only apply to the greatest name of God. It is difficult to use Arabic *Allāh* to other beings that are not considered gods. As a comparison, the word *Allāh* in Arabic is equivalent to the word *Rabb* in Hebrew. However, while the *Rabb* (Lord) in Hebrew cannot be attributed to other entities besides God, the usage of the word *Rabb* in Arabic is applicable, according al-Biruni, to be associated with others, like

11 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 16; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni’s India*, I, 35.

12 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 16; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni’s India*, I, 35.

DIVISIONS AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT
OF THE *HIND*

the *Rabb* of the house and *Rabb* of property. Also, the word *'Eloah* in Hebrew, which can be employed to call other entities besides God, corresponds to the Arabic term *Rabb*.¹³

Moreover, al-Biruni also analyzes semantically the word Father (*Ibn*) and Son (*wald*) that often appear in religious communities in identifying and attributing God and His manifestation. The word Son (*wald*) in Arabic and Islam is always associated with a restricted meaning, a child, and it must be related to natural order of beings. Likewise, it is difficult in Arabic and as an Islamic term to call the Eternal Lord of creation by the word "Father," or to associate God's manifestation using the word "Son." However, in other languages and religious communities, both the words Father and Son prevalently emerge in their religious texts. In Christianity, the word Son is associated with Jesus in a specific meaning (*bi ma'na al-ikhtishāṣ*), but at the same time this word is also applicable to the others besides Jesus. Jews and Manichean use the word Father and Son in the same way as well. The limit of language in describing the abstract concept of God sometimes stimulates religious communities to draw the supernatural anthropomorphically (*yushawwirūna ālihatahum fī ashkāl insāniyyah*). The terms "Father" and "Son" in the above discussion indicate that Greek, Manichean, Jew and Christian concepts of God and His manifestation, semantically, have fallen into anthropomorphism, though at the same time each religious community believes that God is universal and eternal. On the one hand, religious texts, theologians, or educated people present the universality of God; on the other hand, the worshipers sometimes need certain symbolic expressions.

Thus, the semantic problems to conceptualize the supernatural have been followed by practical problems in worshipping it. From this point of view, representing the supernatural into certain

13 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 17; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 36-37.

physical symbols, imagining God through anthropomorphic images, or attributing the divine powers as concrete manifestations does not exclusively belong to the Hindus; it can also be experienced by 'uneducated people' in other religious communities, including the ordinary Muslim and Christian believers.¹⁴ In fact, in Christianity, anthropomorphism appears not only on the level of language, but also on that of iconographical symbols. The ignorant Muslims perhaps will also fall into the same circumstances if somebody made the picture of the prophet Muhammad.

These words of mine would at ones receive a sufficient illustration if, for example a picture of the prophet were made, or of Mecca and the Ka'ba, and were shown to an uneducated man or woman. Their joy in looking at the thing would bring them to kiss the picture, to rub their cheeks against it, and to roll themselves in the dust before it, as if they were seeing not the picture, but the original, and were in this way, as of they were present in the holy places, performing the rites of pilgrimage, the great and the small ones.¹⁵

AL-BIRUNI writes that the educated Hindu believers "abhor anthropomorphism of this kind" (*wa al-khawāṣṣ min al-hind ya'budūna hādhihī al-aushāf*). However, most ordinary Hindus believers could not omit symbolic understanding. More than other religious communities, the ordinary Hindus associate all physical process, such as delivering a baby and rendering a pregnancy. Above all, the ordinary Hindus, as al-Biruni points out, "even so little pious, that, when speaking of these things, they do not even abstain from silly and unbecoming language."¹⁶

14 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 18-19; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 31-32.

15 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 53-54; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 111.

16 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 19; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 39.

DIVISIONS AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT
OF THE *HIND*

Interestingly, al-Biruni goes further by theoretically explaining idolatry's origin as a deviation from "the right path." The veneration of idols or temples continues because people find it difficult to comprehend abstract matters. In addition, they forget the history of why such idols or temples were built. Above all, such a phenomenon is the result of a natural human tendency to commemorate one's ancestors. Al-Biruni clarifies:

This is the cause which leads to the manufacture of idols, monuments in honour of certain much venerated persons, prophets, sages, angels, destined to keep a live their memory when they are absent or dead, to create for them a lasting place of grateful veneration in the heart of men when they die. But when much time passes by after the setting up of the monument, generations and centuries, its origin is forgotten, it becomes a matter of custom, and its veneration a rule for general practice.¹⁷

WE may also see that Hindus, particularly according to the information depicted by al-Biruni in the *Gītā*, are monist¹⁸ or pantheist¹⁹ in theology as some of them believe that the whole creation has roots in the body of Visnu. Therefore, all creations and existences are divine in character. "They think that it is (creation) is a unity" (*annahum yazhAbuna fī al-maujūdi ilā annahu shaiun wāhidun*), al-Biruni explains.²⁰

17 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 53-54; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 111-112.

18 See Jefery, 143.

19 See Kamaruzzaman, 127.

20 Vasudeva, as cited by al-Biruni, says in the *Gītā*: "...we must say that all things are divine; for Vishnu made himself the earth that the living beings should rest thereupon; and he mad himself water to nourish them thereby; he made himself fire and wind in order to make them grow; and he made himself the heart of every single being..." Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 19; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 40.

Classification-based Caste in Society

THE caste system of the Hindus has been very determinative in forming the religious orientation of Hindu society. Albeit castes are constructed by society relating to social class, they, to some degree, deal with the types or divisions of Hindu religious adherents. As mentioned previously, castes have been legitimized by Hindu texts, connecting to the origin of human being as the creations of Brahman. The caste system within Hindu tradition represents social class, which is determined by the occupation and perhaps the genealogy the Hindus have. They believe that this regulation started during the origin of creation of human beings. The highest caste belongs to the Brahmana or Brahmins who are seen as the extraordinary human beings (*khayrat al-insān*) since the Brahmana, as long as the Hindu texts are concerned, were created from the head of Brahman. Lower than the Brahmana are the Kshatriyas who were created from the shoulders and hands of Brahman. Next to them are the Vaisyas who were created from the thigh of Brahman, and the Sudra from the feet of Brahman. In addition, there are other low-caste people following the Sudra, such as Antyaja, Hādī, Candāla, and Badhatau.²¹

In al-Biruni's account, the nature of such castes and their moral qualities were rooted in the conversation between Arjuna and Vasudeva. In this case, Vasudeva mentions that the members of the caste have to be appropriated with their occupation, not violating or taking part of occupations that belong to the other castes. The members of the caste also must act in proportion to his caste status. Vasudeva, as cited by al-Biruni, says: "If each member of these castes adheres to his customs and usages, he will obtain

21 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 49 ; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 10. See also the castes of India (*ajnās al-Hind*) as have been recorded by Ibn Kurradhādhbih, *al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik*, 105.

DIVISIONS AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT
OF THE *HIND*

the happiness he wishes for, supposing that he is not negligent in the worship of God, not forgetting to remember him in his most important avocations.”²² Vasudeva then describes the theological consequences when such a regulation within the caste is violated: “if anybody wants to quite the works and duties of his castes and adopts those of another caste, even if it would bring a certain honour to the latter, it is a sin, because it is a transgression of the rule.”²³

Where there are social boundaries for each caste to intermingle, it is possible to discover different religious traditions and theological views in the Hindu caste. Their access to the *Veda* and their possibility in attaining liberation, for example, reflect that their religious experiences are “different.” “According to some,” al-Biruni insists, “only the Brahmana and Kshatria are capable for it, since the other cannot learn the *Veda*...”²⁴ Al-Biruni does not mention straightforwardly those who have such an opinion. It seems that this opinion belongs to the “ordinary people” since the opposing opinion has been raised by philosophers. “According to Hindu philosophers,” al-Biruni points out, “liberation is common to all castes and to the whole human race, if their intention of obtaining it is perfect.”²⁵

Hindu religiosity can also be shaped social class. In addition to the Brahmin, as al-Biruni writes, the Kshatria are allowed to read and learn the *Veda*. However, they do not teach it. The Sudra’s religious right is more inferior to Kshatria and Vaisya. The Sudra are not even permitted to act, to have, and to take part in the duties that “belong” to the privilege of the Brahmana such as reciting

22 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 50 ; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni’s India*, I, 103.

23 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 50 ; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni’s India*, I, 103.

24 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 50; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni’s India*, I, 104.

25 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 50; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni’s India*, I, 104.

Veda, saying prayers, and offering sacrifices.²⁶ All other castes besides Brahmana are not allowed to perform meditation and to work of piety and almsgiving. Again, in this case, al-Biruni sees that such an unequal regulation revolved around ordinary society. By referring to the sayings of Vasudeva, al-Biruni assumes that the matter of salvation actually belongs to all people.²⁷

We may conclude then that al-Biruni's division of the "educated" and "uneducated" influences his examinations over the theological issues of the Hindus, including when he discusses caste system. The approaches utilized in examining the thought of the educated and uneducated believers are mainly focused on how he looks at and compares the religious ideas people have thought and how the Hindu texts have dealt with such ideas. The discussion of the Hindu castes cannot even be disconnected from the perception of both the educated Hindus (*khawāṣṣ al-hunūd*) and the ordinary people (*wa 'awāmuhum*).²⁸ The class system among the Hindus is not restricted to the social and religious rights of society such as the right to pray, perform rites, or conduct religious occasions; rather it also, to some degree, determines the types of idol to be worshipped. In this case, al-Biruni would like to emphasize that each class within society has its own figure.²⁹

26 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 271; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, II, 136.

27 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 271; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, II, 137.

28 See Muhammad Abu Zahrah, *Muhādharrāt fī Muqāranāt al-Adyān: Al-Qism 1, al-Dayānāt al-Qadīmat* (Al-Qāhirah: Mathba'ah Yusuf, 1966), 24.

29 Al-Biruni, for example, writes, "to the idol of Vishnu are devoted the class called Bhāgavata; to the idol of the Sun, the *Maga*, i.e. the Magians, to the idol of Mahādeva, a class of saints...the Brahmana are devoted to the eight mothers, the Shamanian to Buddha, to Arhat the class called *Nagna*." Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 59; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 121.

Al-Shahrastani on the Divisions of the Religions of the *Hind*

THE varieties of Hindu believers are portrayed in the work of Shahrastani, primarily in the *Ārā al-Hind* section of the *Kitāb al-Hind*. He finds similarities between the religious traditions of the *Hind* and other traditions in terms of their reception to the concept of prophecies, their perception of spiritual beings, and their view of the idols. In line with the method al-Shahrastani has used in the entire chapters of the *Kitāb al-Milal*, he seeks to discover the main divisions of the Hindu tradition and then explore the sub-divisions of each tradition.

Brahmans/Barāhima

THE first major division of the Hindu is *al-Barāhima* or Brahmans. Al-Shahrastani often mentions this community when discussing the Sabians either in the *Kitāb al-Milal* or *Kitāb al-Nihāyah* as those who deny prophecies and tend to use their rationality. The term “*Barāhima*” itself, according to al-Shahrastani, is derived from *Brahām* who does not believe in prophecies. This term is not from *‘Ibrāhīm* (Abraham) in the biblical traditions. Even though there are Indians who believe in Abraham, theologically they are dualist (*al-thanawiyah*).³⁰ In this case, however, al-Shahrastani does not mention anything about Brahman (*Barāhimā*) as the principle and creator of the universe, or as the Highest God (*akbar al-ālihah*) of the Hindus gods to whom Brahmans (*al-Barāhima*) can be connected.³¹

Nevertheless, four arguments proposed by Brahmans in denying prophetic tradition are: first, the prophetic message can

30 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 593.

31 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 593-594; see also Shālih al-Suhaibānī, *Manhaj al-Shahrastani fī Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 636.

be either rational (*an yakūna ma'qūlan*) or irrational (*an lā yakūna ma'qūlan*). According these people, when the prophetic message is rationally acceptable, we are, therefore, able to accept it. But if it is irrational, we would have to deny it. Without the appearance of the prophets, human intellect, according to this community, can naturally distinguish between such messages (i.e. between rational or irrational). Second, with regard to God, the intellect of human beings can consider His existence. Without prophets, human beings still have the ability to recognize God and to thank Him. Third, the religious obligation in the form of religious law is somehow irrational and worthless, such as the obligation to perform pilgrimage or religious sacrifice. Fourth, there is no special quality of the so-called “messengers.” They eat and drink what other people eat and drink. They have body and soul as the common people have, and the common people even could interact with them like with other people.

Therefore, the question that arose within this community is in what sense the prophets are better from other human beings? Al-Shahrastani, of course, disagrees with them on this matter. As mentioned previously, prophecy is among the primary aspect of al-Shahrastani's definition of religion.³² In his description, the Brahmans can be divided into three sub-divisions, namely: the followers of Buddha (*aṣḥāb bidadah*),³³ the proponents of meditation and imagination (*aṣḥāb al-fikrah wa al-wahm*), and the adherents to metempsychosis (*aṣḥāb al-tanāsukh*). The first sub-division, Buddhism, will be discussed in another section along with al-Biruni's description of it.

32 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Mīlāl wa al-Niḥāl*, II, 594; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 40-41; also his *Nihāyat al-Iqdām*, 428; Alfred Guillaume, *The Summa Philosophiae*, 137.

33 There are a number of Muslim's terminologies used in Arabic to identify Buddha and Buddhist, see Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 41.

DIVISIONS AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT
OF THE *HIND*

The second sub-division is the proponents of meditation (*ashāb al-fikrah wa al-wahm*). Al-Shahrastani knows that the Hindus have a great tradition in astronomy (*al-nujūm*) and astrology (*al-falak*). He makes a concise comparison between the Indian, Greek, and Persian astronomers in the way they study and apply astrological sciences. The proponents of meditation append the important roles of thought. “They uphold it as the intermediary between the sense of world and the intelligible world, since the forms of the *sensibilia* (*al-mahsūs*) and the essences of the *intelligibilia* (*al-ma’qūl*) alike go back to it,” al-Shahrastani insists.³⁴ This group also believes that thought may comprise the wisdom of both “the sense of world” and “the intelligible world.” In order to connect between such two worlds, they conduct passionate exercise through meditation. Accordingly, meditation has a great power and specific influence. It, to some extent, is also able to enclose the supernatural beings, to hold back rains, as well as to attach their imagination on any living person and kill him straight away. The important entity within this group is called the *Bakrāntīniya* whose method of acquiring knowledge is through meditation and imagination. The profusion of knowledge as the result of the force of imagination and the power of imagination, as *Bakrāntīniya* believe, will burst their bellies. Therefore, it is common among them to cover their body with a set of iron in order to prevent the explosion of their bellies because of knowledge they have earned.³⁵

The last sub-division of the Brahmans is the proponents of metempsychosis. Al-Shahrastani knows that the doctrine of metempsychosis (*al-tanāsukh*) is a common model of spirituality that can be found in many regions and in the different religions,

34 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 597; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 44; Monot, 534.

35 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 598; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 45-46; Monot, *ibid*, 535.

but of course, each religious entity has a different sense in the way they explain such a doctrine. The doctrine of *al-tanāsukh* of the Hindus in al-Shahrastani's thought, according to Bruce Lawrence, may consist of two different models of "transformation of soul": first, it means "metempsychosis," which is "the movement of the soul from one body to another death body"; second, it means transference, which is "the cyclical recurrence of similar phenomenal pattern."³⁶ Similar to the proponents of meditation, this group employs astronomy and astrology, and only considers the orbits of the fixed stars, rather than the orbit of the planets.

The Followers of Spiritual Beings

WHILE the Brahmans do not refer their teachings to the "divine inspiration" instead of their rationality, the followers of spiritual beings (*ashāb al-rūḥāniyyah*), as far as al-Shahrastani is concerned, refer to the divine message sent by God through the messenger as the intermediary (*mutawaṣṣiṭah*). Of sub-division which believes that their apostle is the spirit-angel (*malak rūḥānī*) sent by God in the form of human beings is *al-Bāsawiyyah*.³⁷ Comparable to other concept of God's messenger in biblical religions, the messenger of this community bring commands and prohibitions as their religious regulation. Above all, the divine messenger ordered this community to establish figurative symbol in the form of statue in order to be worshipped. Similar description is addressed to other sub-divisions of the follower of spiritual beings who believe that their apostles are God's representation in the form of human beings, such as *al-Bahūdiyyah*, *al-Kābaliya*, and *al-Bahādūniya*, who

³⁶ Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 46.

³⁷ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Mīlāl wa al-Niḥāl*, II, 601; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 47-48.

are also believed as God's intermediaries.³⁸ The difference among them is very symbolical such as their visual appearance and the way the messenger comes to their communities.

The Star Worshipers

THERE are two theological schools of the star-worshippers (*'abadat al-kawākib*): those who are inclined to worship sun (*'abadat al-shams*), those who tend to venerate moon (*'abadat al-qamar*). According to al-Shahrastani, this community resembles the Sabians whose religious orientation is highly concerned with the "heavenly altar" (*al-hayākil al-samāwiyah*) without restricting deity (*al-rubūbiyah*) and godship (*al-ilāhiyah*) to them.³⁹ The sun-worshipper is called *Dīnākītiya*. They believe that the sun is the angle that has soul (*nafs*) and intellect (*'aql*). The sun also has enlightened stars and earth. The characteristic of this community is akin to the religious types of the Sabians. They make God image by building statue (idol) and create a special temple. They pray to the idol three times a day. They also do fasting and seek healing from the power of idol. Like the *Dīnākītiya*, the moon worshipper, which is called *Jandrīkāniya*, also regards moon as one of the angels. Idol becomes their center of worship. Fasting is usually conducted in half of each month. They don't interrupt it until the moon appears fully. They present offerings such as food and milk to the moon. When they need anything, they pray and ask the moon by looking at it.⁴⁰ Even though the star-worshippers deal with the so-called idol, al-Shahrastani

38 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 601-602; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 48-50.

39 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 604; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 50.

40 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 605; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 51.

does not categorize them as the idol worshippers because he presents another specific category for the Idol-worshippers.

The Idol-Worshippers

FOR AL-SHAHRASTANI, the idol-worshippers (*'abadat al-aṣnām*) directly look up to the idol and make it as the central of their worship. While the followers of spiritual beings and the star-worshipper establish idol, the idol-worshippers simply use the idol as the “representation” of the other existence they essentially worshipped. Al-Shahrastani himself disagrees with such an “anthropomorphic” theological view. He insists, “we are absolutely certain that a rational person cannot put his hand to a piece of wood and chisel it into a form and then believe that it is both his God and his Creator and the God of all” (*fa na'lamu qat'an anna 'āqilan mā lā yanhitu jasman biyadihi wa yuṣawwiruhu sūratan thumma ya'taqidu annahu ilāhahu wa khāliqahu, wa ilāh al-kulli wa khālik al-kulli*);⁴¹ because such idol actually was created and erected by the chiseler.

Five sub-divisions have been drawn by al-Shahrastani. The first is the worshippers of *Mahākālīya*, an idol with four hands and long-haired head, holding a huge snake, staff, and human skull in his hands, as well as with a crown of skull bones on his head. In order to venerate him, people also dedicate him temples, and they come to this temple three times a day. Another sub-division is the tree-worshippers called the *Barkashīkiya*. The tree that is being worshipped is usually the highest and the widest tree. Like the previous one, they make an idol and settled it in the whole of the huge tree they have made. Next to it is the *Dankīniya* who venerated an idol in the form of a statue of a woman with so many

41 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Mīlāl wa al-Niḥāl*, II, 606; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 52.

DIVISIONS AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF THE *HIND*

hands and crown on her head. They sacrifice animals to this idol by cutting down their necks, using a sword, in the front of it. The water worshippers, called the *Jalahakiya*, are included in this sub-division. They emphasize the important of water as the sources of life. Without it, according to this people, the birth and growth of things would be hard or even impossible. Human beings even employ water to purify themselves as well as to cultivate plants. In performing the ritual, they slice aromatic plants, throw it into the water, and pray. The last sub-division is the fire-worshippers, called the *Akniwāṭriya*. This community is honoring fire as the source of the light of the universe. Throwing whatever valuable things they have, such as food, clothing, perfume, etc. into fire is the way they give offerings. Even so, and differ from other Hindus ascetic tradition, they do not immolate and sacrifice human bodies on it. Like other sub-division, the fire-worshippers perform fasting.⁴²

Indian Philosophers

PHILOSOPHERS are among the important groups of the Hindus that draw's al-Shahrastani's attention. Accordingly, the Hindu philosophical tradition has been rooted in the Greek Philosophy, especially when a disciple of Pythagoras, which was Qalānūs, came to India.⁴³ The teachings of wisdom belonging to Greek

42 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, II, 606-609; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 51-55.

43 The idea mentioning the historical links between the Hindus and Hellenistic thought can be discovered in al-Biruni's statement. By referring to another version of translation eliminated from the work of Sachau, Bruce Lawrence has quoted al-Biruni's statement as follows: "Philāyūs went to India, where Brahman, the founder of Brahmanism became his disciple for seven years and learned from him the doctrine of Pythagoras." This phrase is similar to the above al-Shahrastani's phrase. See Bruce Lawrence, *Al-Biruni's Approach to the Comparative Study of Indian Culture*, 42-43, quoted by Lawrence from "S.H. Taqizadeh, " A New Contribution to the Materials Concerning the Life of Zoroaster," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, 8 (1935-1937), 953.

tradition then were brought and disseminated by Brahmanan (*Barakhmanīn*). The main ideas taught by the philosophers through Brahmanan are the concept of purity, soul, the other world, and asceticism. The Hindu philosophers can be divided into two groups: the first group emphasizes the important of purification by avoiding procreation or reproduction (*tanāsul*) in this world. This group therefore sought to restrain themselves from consuming nice food and wholesome drink and else that might convey them into pleasure and procreation. Some of them even believe that in order to purify themselves physically and spiritually they ought to throw themselves into the fire. On the contrary, the other group of philosophers embraces a more moderate view. They see procreation, food, drinking, and other desirable things are permissible (*ḥalālan*) as long as those are used in line with the way of truth (*bi qadr al-ladhī huwa tariq al-ḥaq*). In regards to their view about God, al-Shahrastani illustrates: “Their doctrine concerning the Almighty Creator is that He is pure light, but He takes on some bodily shape for concealment so that He is seen only by those fit and suitable to see Him. Indeed, the Creator is like one who puts on the hide of an animal in this world; then he takes it off, someone whose glance falls on him can look at him, but if he does not put it on, no one is able to see him.”⁴⁴ Aside from the views which emphasize on God and asceticism, some of the Hindu philosophers have tradition to glorify and even worship the sun because they are amazed with the clear and beautiful light spouted by it.

44 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Mīlāl wa al-Niḥāl*, II, 611; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 58-59.

The Hindus: Between Monotheism and Polytheism

ONE ISSUE that can be discussed about Hinduism's divisions and theological doctrines in both scholars' writings is their opinion on the monotheism-polytheism discourse. Since Islamic theology stresses the Higher Being's unity (*tawhīd*) and purity, it is probable that they might attach dissimilar theological evaluations to Hind's religious traditions. As Rosenthal notes, "monotheism in al-Biruni's time," and perhaps in al-Shahrastani's, "did not allow of reconciliation with any form of pagan idol worship or theology."⁴⁵

Tawhīd is a core Islamic belief, as seen in the *shahadah* (the testimony of faith): "There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God." Even though Muslims agree on God's oneness, their understanding of His attributes, manifestation, and authority differ. The resulting heated theological debates are long-standing and were especially vigorous during the eighth to the tenth centuries.⁴⁶ Given that both scholars recognize that Hind's religious traditions are among the oldest living traditions, the Islamic creed can apply only "partially," namely, the concept of God's oneness, and not the concept of Muhammad's prophethood. Even so, the concept of prophecy is one to which al-Shahrastani devotes a great deal of major attention.

45 Franz Rosenthal, "Al-Biruni between Greece and India," in Ehsan Yarshater (Ed.), *Biruni Symposium*, 5.

46 Some Muslim heresiographers have recorded the variety of Islamic theological views such as al-Baghdadi's *al-Farq bain al-Firaq*, al-Shahrastāni's *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, Ibn Hazm *al-Fasl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwa wa al-Niḥal*, al-Isfarā'ini's *al-Tabsīr fī al-Dīn*, etc. Unlike Christian theology, which developed systematically and was mainly as the product of theoretical reflection, Islamic theology (*kalām*) for the most part appeared as the result of political and social tensions among Muslims or between Muslims and non-Muslims. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, especially chapter V and X; Madjid Fakhry's "Philosophy and Theology" in John L Esposito (editor), *Oxford History of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), chapter VI.

Both men raise different opinions concerning the Hindus' monotheistic or polytheistic tendencies. Although al-Biruni does not connect the Hindus directly with the Sabians, a religious community that allegedly had a monotheistic inclination, he sees that Hinduism is monotheistic in nature. As a matter of course, some Hindu texts contain opinions indicating that God is the One, the highest reality, eternal, unique, and beyond all likeness and unlikeness. Therefore, he sees polytheism as a common accidental deviation from the monotheistic outlook, one that is caused mainly by the people's inability to understand "non-symbolic" philosophical and theological matters. Thus, in this case polytheism is simply a matter of the "symbolic shapes" of religiosity that typically exist when people need a concrete manifestation or representation of the Higher Beings.

Moreover, al-Biruni identifies two hypotheses of idolatry's origin: it existed before God sent His Messenger, and it might be a deviation from the "true religion." His opinion of the types of idolatry appears to be quite similar to al-Shahrastani's idea that idolatry does not come in just one form. The pagan Arabs, Greeks, Romans, and Indians all have the same tradition of worshipping idols; however, some of them think that the idol becomes a mediator, an intercessor with God, His manifestation, as well as His representation,⁴⁷ whereas others see it only as a memorial.⁴⁸ "The classical Greeks also considered idols as mediators between themselves and the first cause," states al-Biruni, "and worshipped them under the names of the stars and the highest substances."⁴⁹ Furthermore, he explicates: "The Hindus honor their idols on account of those who erected them, not account of the material of which they are made."⁵⁰

47 Jeffery, "Al-Biruni's Contribution," 137.

48 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 60; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 124.

49 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 59; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 123.

50 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 58; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 121.

DIVISIONS AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF THE *HIND*

In connection with the above case, al-Shahrastani observes the variety of Hindu perceptions as regards the Higher Beings' symbolic representation by presenting his types of idol worshippers. According to him, their perception of idols is not monolithic. Some perceive them as God's representation or manifestation through divine messengers in the form of human beings and, at the same time, use them as intermediaries; others regard idols or such things as water, fire, and tree as "angels" or "the higher beings." Even though al-Shahrastani does not claim that the Hindus are monotheists, he implies that some of them need symbolical representation while worshipping the higher beings, such as when he describes the followers of spiritual beings (i.e., the Basawiya, Bahuwadiya, Kabaliya, and Bahaduniya) and the star worshippers (i.e., the Dinakitiya and Jandrikaniya). His opinion on their idolatry is, in short, based on the types of idol worshippers and their basic understanding of the relevant idols.

Ritual, Festival and Pilgrimage

DESPITE the theological aspects of the *Hind*, both al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani discuss the ritual or rites conducted by the Hindus. They had a difference of opinion over the Hindus' rites. When talking about fire offerings, for instance, al-Biruni says that "this rite is conducted by the Hindus," without identifying further which of the Hindus performing such a ritual, while al-Shahrastani, clearly, but briefly, presents the sub-division of the Hindus, including its own ritual tradition. In the case of the fire-worshippers or fire offerings, al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani present different types of information. With regard to the sacrifice and fire-offerings al-Biruni illustrates:

Most of the *Veda* treats of the sacrifices to the fire, and describes each one of them. They are different in extent, so that certain of them can only be performed by the greatest of their kings...according to the Hindus, the fire eats everything... That which the fire eats for its share, reverts to the Devas, because the fire comes out of their mouths. What the Brahmans present to the fire to eat is oil and different cereals—wheat, barley, and rice—which they throw to the fire. Further, they recite the prescribed texts of the *Veda* in case they offer on their own behalf.⁵¹

MEANWHILE, al-Shahrastani describes:

...Most of the Indian kings and nobles revere fire greatly because of its substance, preferring it to all other existing things...They (the Hindus) worship it (fire) by digging a square trench in the ground and lighting a fire in it. Then, whatever savory food, fine drink, expensive garment, fragrant perfume or precious stone they have—they throw them all into the fire, drawing near and seeking its blessing.⁵²

IN COMPARISON to the al-Shahrastani's description, the rites involving fire in al-Biruni's account is not aimed at identifying the fire-worshippers. Instead, it is viewed by al-Biruni as a ritual commonly performed by the Hindus. Furthermore, al-Biruni presents legends based on the Vishnu-Dharma as a background for why the fire is utilized or worshipped by the Hindus, while al-Shahrastani only discusses the practical aspects of such a ritual in his study without presenting information taken from the Hindu text. Concerning the ritual aspects of the Hindus, al-Biruni has presented a broader scope and detailed explanation than what

51 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 272; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, II, 140.

52 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Mīlāl wa al-Niḥāl*, II, 609; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 55.

DIVISIONS AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT
OF THE *HIND*

al-Shahrastani offers. Al-Shahrastani's account on such a matter comes up only when the topic is related to his observation of the division of the Hindus, while al-Biruni offers particular chapters about that.

As we have observed previously that al-Biruni's *Kitāb al-Āthār* has been concerned with the festivals and religious events, but it fails to observe the festivals and festive days of the *Hind* because when he wrote this book, he had not yet conducted his field observation. This topic can only be found in *Kitāb al-Hind*.⁵³ According to al-Biruni, no obligation for the Hindus to perform pilgrimage, it is facultative and praiseworthy. "A man sets off to wander to some holy region, to some much venerated idol or to some of the holy rivers. He worships in them, worships the idol, makes presents to it, recites many hymns and prayers, fasts, and gives alms to the Brahmans, the priest, and others,"⁵⁴ al-Biruni tells us. In addition to the holy rivers, Ganges, much venerated ponds are located in the mountains.

Some Hindus even build their own ponds intended for ablution. Concerning this tradition al-Biruni points out: "in this they have attained to a very high degree of art, so that our people (Muslims), when they see them, wonder at them, and are unable to describe them, much less to construct anything like them."⁵⁵ The human tendency to visit the holy places is a very common phenomenon, especially the places that historically relate to their own religious tradition. For the Hindus, Benares is one of the ideal holy places to live, like the Ka'ba in Mecca for Muslims. "They want to live there

53 Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, Chapter LXXXIV-LXXXVI.

54 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 273; Sachau, trans. *Alberuni's India*, II, 142.

55 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 273; Sachau, trans. *Alberuni's India*, II, 144.

to the end of their lives there,” al-Biruni illustrates, “that their rewards after death should be better for it.”⁵⁶

Since al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani have different resources and access to the land of *Hind* in composing their works of the *Hind* religious tradition, the practical aspects of religion depicted by both also vary. Al-Shahrastani as heresiographer does not disregard the practical aspects of religion in addition to the theological dimension about which he is more concerned. In this case, al-Shahrastani can identify the religious practices of the Hindus in line with the divisions of Hindu religions. Al-Biruni, on the other hand, offers much more information on this matter, but at the same time, does not straightforwardly connect it with the division of the *Hind* as he fails to come out with the various groups of the *Hind*.

Buddhism/Shamanians

SINCE Buddhism can be regarded as a living major tradition hitherto that differs from the co-called “Hinduism,” it is noteworthy to present it in a specific section. Al-Biruni’s discussion regarding Buddhism is very concise. He frequently uses the term “Shamanians” (*shamaniyyūn*) for the Buddhists. Al-Biruni knows that even though the Buddhists widely exist in the regions of China, India, and perhaps among the Turki tribes,⁵⁷ in the earlier period, especially before Zoroastrian’s penetration, the followers of Buddha spread across regions, not only in India, but also in Khurasan, Persia, Iraq, and Mosul.⁵⁸ According to the books called *Shaburkān* which was written by Mani, a pupil of Fadarūn, the Buddha, as al-Biruni has quoted, is regarded as a prophet: “Wisdom

56 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 275; Sachau, trans. *Alberuni’s India*, II, 146.

57 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 59; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni’s India*, I, 121.

58 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 10-11; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni’s India*, I, 21.

DIVISIONS AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT
OF THE *HIND*

and deeds have always from time to time been brought to mankind by the messenger of God. So in one age they have been brought by the messenger, called Buddha (*al-budd*), to India (*ilā bilād al-hind*), in another by Zaradusht to Persia, in another by Jesus to the West.”⁵⁹ Whereas in the *Kitāb al-Āthār* al-Biruni uses the term *al-budd* for the Buddha, in his *Kitāb al-Hind* he uses Buddhodana (*buddhahūdana*). According to A Jeffery, when al-Biruni calls the Buddha, at least twice, with the last term, it is probably because of “a textual corruption.”⁶⁰

Nevertheless, al-Biruni mentions three conceptual terms in Buddhism relating to “three power potentiality” (*thalath bi al-quwwah*), not actuality (*dūna al-fi’li*) that are equal with the Hindus’ concept of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. As far as al-Biruni has been concerned, those terms are equivalent with the Buddhist’s concept of *buddha*, *dharma*, and *sangha*, which mean intelligence (*al-‘aql*), religion (*al-dīn*), and ignorance (*al-jahl*) respectively. Al-Biruni continues:

The first power is rest and goodness, and hence come existing and growing. The second is exertion and fatigue, and hence come firmness and duration. The third is languor and irresolution, and hence come ruin and perishing. Therefore, the first power is attributed to the angels, the second to men, and the third to animals. The ideas before, afterwards, and thereupon may be predicated of all these things only in the sense of a certain sequence and on account of inadequacy of language, but not so as to indicate any ordinary notions of time.⁶¹

59 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Āthār*, 252; Sachau, trans. *The Chronology*, II, 190.

60 Jeffery, 148.

61 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 20; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni’s India*, I, 40-41.

HOWEVER, in the above case al-Biruni seems to have not had reliable sources of information, especially the Buddhist scriptures, since he says “I have heard that...” (*sami'tu anna...*), and therefore he, as Jeffery points out, “has no proper understanding.” As to the Buddhist scriptures that he never had access to, he mentions that there is a book called *Godhamana* (?) that deals with “the knowledge of the unknown” (*ilm al-ghayb*) written by the Buddha.⁶²

Two Buddhist customs have been mentioned in al-Biruni's writings. He describes that the *Shamanians* (Buddhists) have a tradition of throwing dead bodies into the water. “People relate that Buddha had ordered the bodies of the dead to be thrown in the water. Therefore his followers, the *Shamanians*, throw their dead into the rivers,” al-Biruni explains.⁶³ He also sees that, like the Hindus, the Buddhists were ultimately inclined to be anthropomorphist since they create and deal with scriptures as a representation of the Buddha. Al-Biruni describes: “[as for] the Idol Jina, i.e. Buddha, give a face and limbs as beautiful as possible, make the lines in the palms of his hands and feet like a lotus, and represent him seated on a lotus; give him grey hair, and represent him [as having] placid expression, as if he were the father of creation.” He continues: “If you make Arhant, the figure of another body of the Buddha, represent him as a naked youth with a fine face, beautiful, whose hands reach down to the knees, with the figure of Sri, his wife, under the left breast.”⁶⁴

Correspondingly, Al-Shahrastani regards Buddhism as a subdivision of Brahman. He explains that *Shākyamūni* (*Shākamīn*), which means “the noble master” (*al-sayyid al-Sharif*), is the name with which Buddha is associated. The Buddhists believe that

62 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 75; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 158.

63 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 284; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, II, 169.

64 Al-Biruni, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 57; Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India*, I, 119.

DIVISIONS AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT
OF THE *HIND*

they seek the truth until the highest level. The level of Buddha is higher than that of Bodhisattva. Al-Shahrastani notes that the Bodhisattva means someone who searches for the way of truth (*al-insān al-ṭālib sabīl al-ḥaqq*).⁶⁵ In order to attain the level of Buddha or Bodhisattva, one should achieve some “ethical doctrines,” which are: (1) patience (*al-ṣabr*) and alms-giving (*al-‘aṭiyyah*); (2) “seeking after that what ought to be sought” (*wa bi al-raqhbah fīmā yajibū an yurghabu fīhī*); (3) self-restraint and pulling out from the world (*al-‘imtina’ wa al-takhalli ‘an al-dunyā*) and being averse to its desires and pleasures (*‘azūf ‘an shahwātihā wa lidhatihā*); (4) self-restraint from what is forbidden (*al-‘iffah ‘an mahārimiha*); (5) being kind to all living creatures (*al-rahmāh ‘alā jami’ al-khalqī*); (6) avoiding ten offenses (*al-ijtināb ‘an dhunūb al-‘ashrata*) (i.e. killing any living beings, consuming or using human property unlawfully, committing adultery, lying, uttering calumnies, using bad or obscene language, vilifying, slandering, saying a stupid word, and denying reward and punishment in the afterlife); and performing ten virtues (*bi istikmāl ‘asyra kiṣālin*) [i.e. performing goodness and generosity, reducing anger, denying the worldly desires, meditation, exercising intellect, controlling our soul, speaking respectfully, being a good person and respect other people, turning totally toward the truth by being away totally from created beings, and seeking the truth]. He also mentions that the teachings of the Buddha do not so extensively exist in India; it barely spreads in certain parts. In addition to this, according to al-Shahrastani, the perfectness of Buddha as perceived by the Buddhists, and if this is true, may be comparable to the figure of Khaydir in Islamic legend.⁶⁶ When al-Shahrastani assumes that Brahmans denied

65 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 596; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 42.

66 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, II, 597; Lawrence, *al-Shahrastāni on the Indian Religions*, 43.

prophecies and only follow natural tendencies based on rationality, these three sub-divisions seems to have not dealt with the ideas of “prophetic tradition” or theological discourse. Concerning the first sub-division, neither does al-Shahrastani explain the Buddhists’ perception of prophetic tradition, nor does he elaborate their theological doctrines. Nevertheless, when he classifies Buddhism in the sub-division of al-Barāhima, it indicates that he knows that Buddhism is originated from “Hinduism.” Moreover, the term *badada* and the Buddhists’ “ethical concepts,” as al-Shahrastani has verified, rightly refer to Siddharta of the clan Gautama, while the term *Shākyamūni* (*Shākamīn*) signifies the Sakya Kingdom.

In short, the variety of Hind’s religious traditions shows that Hindus differ both culturally and spiritually. The structure of Hindu theological doctrines, as articulated by Hindu theologians and philosophers through their holy books and respected scriptures, still leaves room for the ordinary people to modify and contextualize such doctrines in accordance with popular points of view. The gap between philosophical-theological formulations and (popular) religious practices exists in almost all religious traditions.

From al-Biruni’s and al-Shahrastani’s investigations, we may also see that each religion, including Hinduism, has a philosophical dimension and a popular manifestation. For the elites, the religious tradition, like that of other religious communities, is monotheistic, especially with regard to defining the concept of the Highest Being. At the popular level, namely, that of religious symbols, the iconographic representation and figurative symbols (e.g., idols or statues) is also expressed in other religious traditions. In both scholars’ opinion, the particularity of religious traditions can be observed in how the religious communities connect the Highest Reality to the figurative symbols they have created to represent the highest (monotheistic) Reality.[]



CHAPTER V

Conclusion

THE relevance and contribution of medieval Muslim scholars and theologians to the study of religion cannot be disregarded in forming the modes of comparative religion (*muqāranat al-adyān*), especially in modern Muslim literature and, perhaps, in contemporary western scholarship. In our case, the classifications or categorizations of religions made by these two scholars can be regarded as their contribution to the modern study of religion. Before exploring Hind's religious tradition, they discussed other religions. Al-Biruni wrote *Kitāb al-Hind* after *Kitāb al-Āthār*; al-Shahrastani's chapter "Ara al-Hind" is the last chapter of his *Kitāb al-Milal*.

Differences are also apparent in how they investigate each religious tradition. Whereas al-Biruni focuses on the history of religion and religious rituals/festivals, al-Shahrastani is more interested in the divisions of theological doctrines and religious sects. Thus they present different insights in classifying world religions. It is hard to find a systematic and detailed explanation of each religion's doctrinal teachings in al-Biruni's writings, excluding his exploration of Hind, because his interest is the ancient nations' religious festivals and calendrical systems. In contrast, while we can

easily read a detailed narrative of the doctrines of world religions in al-Shahrastani, it is hard to find any attention given to religious festivals or practices in his work. Therefore, I would say that their approaches to world religious traditions are complementary.

This also can be seen in their discussion of Sabianism. Al-Biruni presents data about several ancient religious communities that Muslim scholars have considered to be Sabian. In the context of our discussion, it is correct, as modern scholars say, that al-Shahrastani was the first Muslim scholar to connect the Sabians with Hind's religious communities, since he discovered that their teachings are similar to those of the Brahmans. On the other hand, there is no clear clue that al-Biruni ever brought up such an issue when discussing Hind's religious tradition. However, in regards to the discourse of Sabianism, al-Biruni, al-Shahrastani, and other Muslim scholars opined that the Sabians might have had monotheistic tendencies or at least had "deviated" from or "modified" their monotheistic views.

Al-Biruni on Idolatry, the "Elites" and "Vulgar" of the Hindus

IN PRESENTING the types of Hindu believers, al-Biruni differentiates between philosophers and ordinary people. This workable categorization is still used by modern scholars of religion and, perhaps, some anthropologists who study religious systems. Al-Biruni's journey in Hind and his chance to examine some Hindu scriptures and investigate Hindu religious practices allow him to make such a distinction by presenting a categorization of Hind's religions at both the philosophical and the popular levels. More importantly, he introduces the distinction between *khawwāṣṣ* and *'āmmah*, as a general theory, to show how the theologians and the philosophers or "the elites" (*khawwāṣṣ*) apprehend religious ideas,

CONCLUSION

and how “the vulgar” or the grassroots (*`āmmah*) might perceive and actualize such religious doctrines in the popular context.

Moreover, from this categorization we may draw some theoretical notes as to why and how, according to al-Biruni, a monotheistic view can diverge within a given society. First, people may “deviate” due to their limited ability. Different people with different educational backgrounds might produce different views about philosophical and abstract concepts. His conclusion that the Hindus’ theological concept is monotheistic is unusual and surprising, but his assertion of an intellectual gap between the educated and the uneducated believers is a common phenomenon and can be used to analyze other religious communities.

Second, a “natural process” may also generate the “deviation.” Human beings have a propensity to decode such abstract concepts as “supernatural,” “God,” “angel,” and “demon” by presenting them as figurative objects. Therefore, anthropomorphism is very common and can be found in almost all religious traditions. Even the elites have a tendency to be anthropomorphist.

Third, it still relates to the previous point: People venerate religious symbols, statues, or temples long after they forget the original motive of the given symbol’s creation. An earlier community builds a sculpture to honor and commemorate a specific person (e.g., the Buddha) and give him respect, and a later community transforms that tradition into a “religious ritual.”

Finally, anthropomorphism as a “deviation” from monotheism can occur due to linguistic limitations within societies. Al-Biruni’s comparative explanation about this, as in the case of Greek, Arab-Islam, Hebrew, and among Christians, reveals different probabilities in producing anthropomorphism. Interestingly, as modern scholars point out, theology (i.e., doctrinal systems) is also constructed by the structure of a given society’s language.

As al-Biruni explains, idolatry is a major tradition within Hind's religious traditions, especially among those Hindus who need symbolic and iconographic representations of the Highest Being, various deities, and angels. This tradition absolutely contravenes Islam, which is totally against idolatry and all other iconographic symbols. Even so, al-Biruni highlights another viewpoint of Hinduism: At its philosophical core, Hinduism exhibits a monotheistic tendency. Monotheism is not the only theological inclination among Hindu philosophers, since there is also a pantheistic mystical view. When al-Biruni writes that idolatry is a "deviation" from the truth, it echoes his Islamic perspective (the idea of monotheism) as a central theological tool in his investigation of other religions. Nevertheless, this field observation, which led him to encounter Hindu religious ideas and practices objectively, is not very popular among Muslim scholars and heresiographers, who traditionally have considered religions from a doctrinal point of view.

Al-Shahrastani on Idolatry and the Concept of "Representation"

IN CONTRAST, al-Shahrastani's classification represents how Muslim heresiographers classify sects and Islamic theological schools of thought. He presents the founder of each religious sect and then examines its subsets' characteristics. Such heresiographers as Ibn Hazm, Tahir ibn Muhammad al-Baghdadi, and Muhammad ibn Isfara'ini use a similar style. He also formulates some criteria of religions and religious communities in their dealings with scriptures, prophets, and deity/deities.

Al-Shahrastani's distinction reveals that his model of classification determines his view. We may summarize his view as follows: First, almost all of these divisions and subdivisions deal closely with the concept of "idol." As depicted by al-Shahrastani, the

CONCLUSION

Hindus have different ways of perceiving their idols; some consider them to be the actual deity/deities, while others just see them as the “representation” of the Higher Being. Therefore, the existence of an idol does not necessarily indicate that all Hindus worship it; instead, some of them use it as a symbol of a higher being and so may worship what the symbol represents.

Second, he distinguishes between idol worshippers (i.e., the tree-water-fire worshippers) and star worshippers (i.e., the Sun and Moon worshippers). But it is hard to discover this difference, as perhaps the only difference between them is the way they associate their “respect” or “admiration” with the Moon, the Sun, water, fire, or a tree. However, as regards their creating and honoring the idol and performing rituals, there is no fundamental disparity. In this case, we may say that he discusses idol worshippers as a special case. However, worshipping stars is not unique to Hindus: ancient religions or the Sabians in Mesopotamia, Iraq, or Syria also had such a tradition.

Therefore, this categorization is probably his way of emphasizing his concern with differentiating this group from the tradition that purely worships idols. Third, there is a connection between the Brahman (*al-barāhimah*) and Indian philosophers (*ḥukamā’ al-hind*) in the matter of thought and tradition: Both deal primarily with reason and wisdom. The highest potentiality of human beings is found in their endeavors by using reason to distinguish between right and wrong, as well as between true and false.

In al-Sharastani’s depiction, the concepts of “intermediaries” and “representation” in the context of the human–divine relationship within Hind’s religious sects and subsects is discussed frequently. Through this point, he offers a basic supposition of how Hindus conceptualize their theological ideas and attaches the concept of intermediaries to the notion of iconographical representation of the

higher beings (e.g., gods, goddesses, and angels). Therefore, idolatry is one of his main concerns. Al-Shahrastani presents five main sects or religions, some of which, especially among the star worshippers and idol worshippers, deal with idolatry, while other main “sects,” especially the Brahmans and Indian philosophers, mainly deal with either “reason” or mysticism and therefore do not really involve themselves with idols.

Even though both scholars employ different approaches, the intersecting notion between them of Hind’s idolatry is seen in some conceptual keys: religious representation, intermediaries, anthropomorphism, and “deviation” from monotheism. It is understandable that their investigations would reveal a common phenomenon within a religious discourse: the distinction between philosophical thinking and religious practice. Idolatry, as far as they are concerned, is a natural human tendency, especially among religious communities that are faced with describing abstract ideas.

Their works may also represent a typical study of religion conducted by medieval Muslim scholars who used their own frameworks. Al-Biruni’s concept of “deviation” from monotheism and al-Shahrastani’s refutation of the Brahmans concerning prophecy show that Islam’s basic teachings are still in play in their analyses. It may say that their arguments and judgments regarding other religions are polemical and apologetic. However, this is not really the case, for their description, evaluation, and analysis of other religious beliefs and practices reveal a genuine interest in understanding non-Islamic religions through comparison.

Furthermore, critical notes can be addressed to both scholars and their perceptions or judgments of how the Hindus perceive monotheism and polytheism. I mentioned above that al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani issued some conceptual terms in their divisions, such as “deviation,” the “elites” and the “vulgar,” “representation,” and

CONCLUSION

“intermediaries.” Such an approach, borrowing Peter Brown’s term, is called the “two-tiered model” and is still used today. Without neglecting the two scholars’ efforts to study non-Islamic religions as they are, both still used their own religious and theological views to judge other religions.

Moreover, we can raise some questions regarding their classifications: Is it true that polytheism is a “deviation” from monotheism? Do polytheistic views and monotheistic doctrines exist independently? Can we say that monotheism is a perfect form and a result of the “evolution” of religious belief systems? Why do al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani say that paganism or polytheism is a “deviation” from monotheism? Is it true that the “vulgar” or “ordinary people” are commonly ignorant? Who has the right to say that “popular religion” is worse than “formalized religion”? What is the standard? Do religious beliefs and practices require philosophical thinking? Other Muslim theologians have used this two-tiered model of analysis. As Brown rightly observes, Christian scholars working in Late Antiquity were already using this perspective. This standpoint even appeared in modern western scholarship in the 1970s when David Hume, in his essay “The Natural History of Religion,” discussed the “intellectual limitation of human mind.” For Hume, the history of religions is characterized “by the tension between theistic and polytheistic ways of thinking.” Hume assumes that there are “intellectual and cultural limitations among the masses” concerning the original monotheism and, therefore, “the vulgar” (borrowing from al-Biruni) have fallen into anthropomorphism and (borrowing from al-Shahrastani) needed “representation.”

In the case of Christianity’s Late Antiquity era, this intellectual limitation engendered the cult of saints. But if we employ Brown’s findings to analyze al-Biruni’s and al-Shahrastani’s viewpoints, we may say that this cult does not simply represent “the vulgar” or comes from “the masses” who, due to their Intellectual limitations,

need “representation.” Instead, the cult of saints, burial practices, and the veneration of idols, temples and shrines are elitist in nature, for the clergy formulates them to bridge the gap between the elites and the masses. Although the majority of modern scholars have accepted Brown’s critical remarks, the two-tiered model remains popular and continues to be used by many contemporary Muslim scholars.[]



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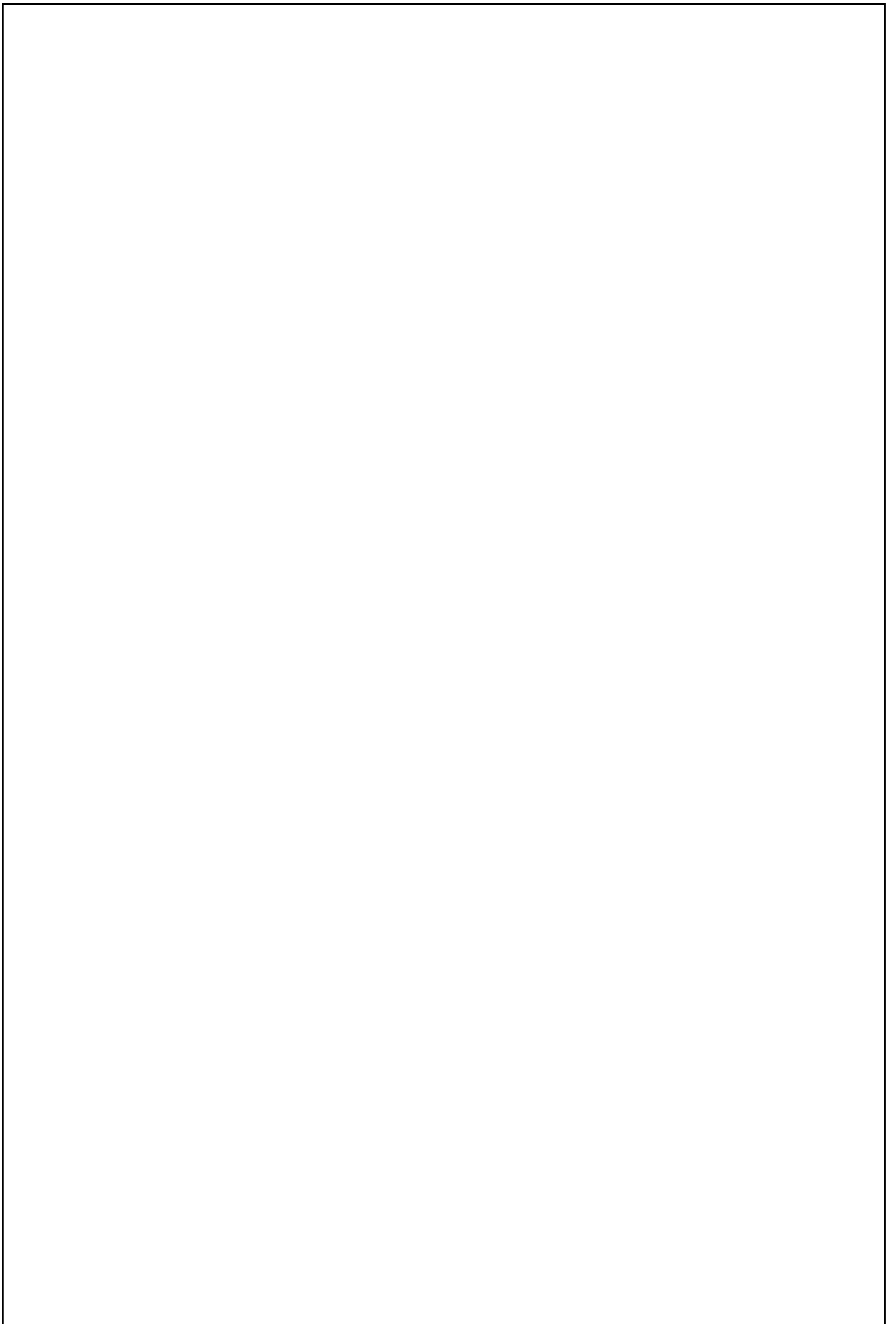
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Index

A

'abadat al-kawākib, 73
'abadat al-qamar, 73
'abadat al-shams, 73
abnā' al-mulūk, 37
Abraham, 49, 53, 69
Agathodmon, 48
ahl al-ahwa wa al-nihal, 38
Ahl al-Bayt, 23
Ahl al-dīn al-qadīm al-maghribī, 48
ahl al-kitāb, 42
al-Bahādūniya, 72
al-Bahūdiyyah, 72
al-falak, 22, 71
al-hayākil al-samāwiyah, 73
al-Kābaliya, 72
al-maḥsūs, 71
al-ma'qūl, 57, 71
Al-Tahāfut al-Falāsifah, 26
Anawati, George C., 24
angel, 72, 89
Ansari, Abu al-Qasim Sulayman ibn
 Nasr al-, 23
Antyaja, 66
'aql, 73, 83
Ara al-Hind, 87
Arabic culture, 4
Arab-Indian, 6

arbāb al-dīn, 37
Artaxerxes, 49
ashāb al-tanāsukh, 70
ashāb al-'ulūm, 37
ashāb bidadah, 70
Asia, 3, 5, 6, 17, 21, 98, 99
astrology, 7, 17, 22, 32, 71, 72
astronomy, 7, 17, 21, 22, 32, 71, 72
Avicenna, 17, 24, 25, 100
Ayoub, Mahmoud M., 39, 43, 44

B

Babylonia, 47, 49, 51
Badhatau, 66
Bahuwadiya, 79
Bakrantīniya, 71
Basawiya, 79
Bayt al-ḥikmah, 4
Bhagavad-Gītā, 20, 60, 61
Biruni, Abu Rayhan al-, 1
Brahmans, viii, 7, 9, 38, 40, 53, 54, 60,
 69, 70, 71, 72, 80, 81, 85, 88, 92
Buck, Christopher, 47, 50
buddha, 83
Buddha, 50, 68, 70, 82, 83, 84, 85, 89
Buddhist, 6, 27, 47, 50, 70, 83, 84

C

Candāla, 66
 Central Asia, 3, 6, 17
 Chaldeans, 2
 China, 2, 6, 7, 9, 50, 82, 102
 Chinese, 2, 9
 Christians, 3, 4, 21, 34, 38, 42, 45, 46,
 89
 Cyrus, 49

D

Dankīniya, 74
 demon, 89
 deviation, 14, 36, 65, 78, 89, 90, 92, 93
 dharma, 83
dūna al-fi'li, 83

E

East Africa, 47
 Egypt, 47
 Egyptians, 2
 ethical concepts, 86
 Europe, 3

F

Fasting, 73
fi nitaq al-ghayah, 41
 fiqh
 usūl al-fiqh, 23

G

Ganges, 81
 Gautama, 86
 Gitā, 58, 59
 God, 3, 8, 16, 26, 31, 35, 39, 45, 46, 58,
 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 67, 69, 70, 72,
 73, 74, 76, 77, 78, 79, 83, 89

Golden Age

The Golden Age of Islam, 15, 99
 Greek, 3, 4, 7, 16, 20, 35, 39, 48, 51, 62,
 63, 71, 75, 89, 98
 Greeks, 2, 35, 48, 78
 Guillaume, A., 43, 44

H

Hādī, 22, 66
ḥalālan, 76
ḥārān b. Terah, 49
 Hasan Basri, 44
 Hebrew, 5, 62, 63, 89, 97
 Hellenism, 3, 7
 heresiographer-religionist, 31
 Hermes, 48, 52
 High Religion, 11
 Hinayana, 9
Hind, vii, viii, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,
 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 26, 27,
 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37,
 38, 39, 41, 42, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 57,
 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67,
 68, 69, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84,
 86, 87, 88, 90, 91, 92, 95, 96, 97, 101
 Hindus, viii, 13, 21, 28, 29, 30, 35, 37,
 38, 47, 50, 54, 55, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61,
 64, 65, 66, 68, 69, 71, 72, 75, 77, 78,
 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 86, 88, 89, 90,
 91, 92

I

ibn `Iraq, Abu Nasr, 17
 Ibn Kathīr, 45
 ibn Khammar, Abu al-Khayr, 17
 ibn Sina, Abu `Ali, 17
'ilm al-ghayb, 84
 Indians, 2, 9, 17, 28, 30, 69, 78
 Iranshahri, Abu al-`Abbas al-, 27
 Islamic jurisprudence, 23

INDEX

J

jalīl al-Sharīf, 62
 Jandrikāniya, 73
 Japan, 6, 102
jazīrat al-mausil, 46
 Jerusalem, 47, 49, 103
 Jews, 3, 21, 34, 38, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 63

K

Ka'ba, 64, 81
 Kamaruzzaman, Kamar Oniah, 10, 20
 Kennedy, E.S., 18
 khawwāṣṣ, 36, 88
 Khaydir, 26, 85
 khayrat al-insān, 66
 kibar al-umam, 30
Kitāb al-Āthār, 11, 17, 18, 20, 21, 27, 34, 35, 47, 53, 81, 83, 87
Kitāb al-Hind, 20, 21, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 35, 36, 37, 39, 51, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 78, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 87
Kitāb al-Milal, 11, 24, 25, 28, 29, 32, 38, 39, 51, 54, 69, 87
Kitāb hikāyat, 29
Kitāb Nihāyat al-Iqdām, 12, 25
Kitāb Nihāyat al-Itqān, 39
 Korea, 6, 102
 Ksatria, 67

L

Lawrence, Bruce, 10, 12, 24, 72, 75
 Low Religion, 11

M

Mābā, 48
 Madani, `Ali ibn Ahmad al-, 23
 Madelung, Wilfred, 23, 25, 26
 Mahākāliya, 74

Makkah, 8, 23
 malāikat, 58, 62
 Marwazi, Nasr al-Din Mahmud ibn
 Abi Tawba al-, 24
 Mayer, Toby, 24, 25, 26, 100
 Mayhani, As'ad ibn Abi Nasr al-, 23
 McAulife, Jane Dammen, 44, 45
 Mecca, 8, 64, 81
 Medieval Muslims, vii, 5
 Mesopotamia, 47, 50, 91
 Messenger of God, 77
 monolithic, 79
 Monotheism, viii, 77, 90
 monotheistic, 14, 36, 44, 45, 46, 48, 53, 54, 58, 78, 86, 88, 89, 90, 93
 moon, 50, 59, 73
 Musawi, Majd al-Din al-, 25
mutawaṣṣiṭah, 72

N

Na'ini, Muhammad Rida Jalali, 26
 Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, 17, 18, 19, 25, 39, 40
 Nebuchadnezzar, 47
 Noah, 8, 44, 46
 North Africa, 3
 North Arabia, 46

P

Persians, 2, 7, 30, 34
 philosophers, 17, 21, 25, 26, 38, 39, 40, 41, 54, 58, 67, 76, 86, 88, 90, 91, 92
 Pilgrimage, viii, 79
 Polytheism, viii, 77
 Purānās, 59

Q

Qusayri, Imam Abu Nasr al-, 23

R

Rabb, 62, 63
 rajas, 83
 Razi, Fakhr al-Din al-, 45
 Rosenthal, Franz, 1, 8, 10, 77, 101

S

Sabians, 2, 3, 34, 38, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45,
 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55,
 69, 73, 78, 88, 91
 Saksaki, 'Abbas b. Mansur al-, 2, 43
 Samarqand, 49, 50
 Sāmkhya, 58, 59
 sangha, 83
 Sanskrit, 5, 7, 20, 27, 29, 58, 62
 sattva, 83
 Sawār, 48
 scientist-religionist, 31
shahadah, 77
 Shahrastani, Abd al-Karim al-, 1
 Shahrastani, Muhammad b. 'Abd al-
 Karim b. Ahmad al-, 12
 Shams-alma'ali, 16
 Sharif, Mamoud b., 43
 Shī'i, 18
 Sudra, 66, 67
 supernatural, 57, 58, 63, 71, 89
 symbolic shapes, 78
 Syria, 47, 48, 49, 91

T

tah̄rif, 4
 tamas, 83
 taqwa, 37
Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk, 8, 46, 101
tawārikh al-mutanabiin, 50
Tawhīd, 77
 Tiflisi, Abu Sahl `Abd al-Mun`im ibn
 `Ali ibn Nuh al-, 27

tradition, 3, 11, 17, 28, 29, 31, 32, 35,
 36, 38, 39, 41, 42, 51, 53, 54, 60, 62,
 66, 69, 71, 75, 76, 78, 79, 81, 82, 84,
 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91
 Turks, 2, 21, 50

U

ummah kabīrah, 31

V

Vaisya, 67
 Veda, 60, 67, 68, 80
 Visnu, 65

W

Waardenburg, Jaques, 2, 8, 10
 Wālīs, 48
 Wansbrough, J., 43

Y

Yôgasutra, 58, 59, 60

Z

Zaradusht, 83
 Zoroastrians, 2, 3, 21, 45, 46

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