



**ISLAMIC UNIVERSALISM: A CASE STUDY OF AL-
BĪRŪNĪ'S THOUGHT**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This research offers a new lens through which al-Bīrūnī's scholarship can be perceived. It provides an understanding of his broader analytical framework which has hitherto only been alluded to in passing by such persons the likes of Rosenthal and Lawrence among others. Drawing from a textual analysis of al-Bīrūnī's works ranging from his earliest to last, the thesis maps and attempts to give body to the pervading quality of universalism intrinsic to the corpus al-Bīrūnīcum. The study engages al-Bīrūnī from three distinct yet necessarily interrelated trajectories. We begin with the socio-historical whereby we argue that al-Bīrūnī approached the study of the Hindu civilisation not as a reaction to the political strategy pursued by Sultan Maḥmūd, but more so as a means to provide an Islamic intellectual understanding of Hinduism to learned Muslims. In this, we conclude that the interpretations of Sultan Maḥmūd's governance, especially towards the Hindus has coloured the ways in which al-Bīrūnī and his Kitāb al-Hind have been understood, and that for the most part, the far majority of historical representations of Sultan Maḥmūd have had significant political overtones culminating in a strategic misapprehension of Maḥmūd and by extension al-Bīrūnī. Following this, the thesis examines the axiological bases and theological foundations for a case of Islamic universalism from al-Bīrūnī's scholarship. Here, we argue that within the broader theme of axiology, al-Bīrūnī's deontological discourse in the introduction of his Kitāb al-Hind was unprecedented in the study of religion and civilisations, and represents a truly Islamic spirit to civilisational expansion. The thesis concludes by extending the same set of eudemonic values that emphasise the moral courage to accept reason over desire to an aspect of al-Bīrūnī's engagement with the scientific enterprise. Through a distinction between astronomy and astrology coupled with al-Bīrūnī's criticism of Aristotelian astral physics, the thesis argues that the language of neutral science is an important aspect in any discourse on universalism. In this discussion, a preliminary case for an Islamic humanism is argued. Not only do we believe that this thesis will encourage a new perspective on how al-Bīrūnī and the Islamic civilisation is understood, it has a clear relevance to contemporary issues, especially those troubling the West, concerning cultural integration, immigration, and conflict management, among others.

خلاصة البحث

تقدم هذه الدراسة نظرة جديدة للإسهام المعرفي للبيروني والصورة التي يمكن بها فهم هذا الإسهام، كما تعرض الدراسة فهماً جديداً للإطار التحليلي الواسع في فكر البيروني، والذي لم يحظ بقدر واف من التحليل من طرف الباحثين سوى إشارات بسيطة وردت في مساهمات روزنتال ولورانس. انطلاقاً من التحاليل النصية الواردة في مؤلفات البيروني والموزعة في كتبه من أولها إلى آخرها؛ تحاول هذه الدراسة رسم ملامح الفكرة الجوهرية في فكر البيروني، وهي العالمية التي دارت حولها اسهامات هذا المفكر. تتناول الدراسة فكر البيروني من ثلاث مسارات بارزة وذات علاقة مترابطة بالضرورة، أولها: الجوانب السوسيو تاريخية والتي بها نبرهن على أن البيروني تناول الحضارة الهندية بالدراسة ليس كإسباق للاستراتيجية السياسية التي انتهجها السلطان محمود، بل كوسيلة لوضع فهم وتصور فكري إسلامي للهندوسية يكون في متناول المثقفين والمفكرين المسلمين. من هذه النقطة، وصلت الدراسة إلى أن أغلب التفسيرات والتحليلات لسياسة السلطان محمود في الهند وخصوصاً اتجاه الهندوس تأثرت بالطريقة التي فهم بها كتاب البيروني الشهير: "كتاب الهند"، وبالنسبة للجزء الأكبر من البيانات التاريخية حول السلطان محمود والتي كانت لها اتجاهات ومعاني سياسية عكست سوء فهم استراتيجي لسياسة السلطان محمود ومن ثم البيروني. وكتيجة لهذا حاولت هذه الدراسة اختبار المسار الثاني لفكر البيروني وهو الأسس القيمية والعقدية لفكرة العالمية الإسلامية التي كانت عنده واضحة، كما نحاول على أن نبرهن أن خطاب البيروني الفكري وخصوصاً في مقدمة كتاب الهند والذي صيغ ضمن حدود النظم القيمية المشتركة، كان غير مسبوق في سياق دراسات الأديان والحضارات، وأن منهج البيروني عكس بشكل صادق روح التمدد الحضاري الإسلامي. خلصت الدراسة من خلال تعميم الجوانب القيمية ذاتها والتي قام عليها المشروع العلمي المعرفي للبيروني، والتي تقوم أساساً على الشجاعة الأخلاقية وتقديم العقل على الرغبة، من خلال التفريق بين علم الفلك وعلم التنجيم بالموازاة مع نقد البيروني للتصور الأرسطي للفيزياء الفلكية وهو ما يشكل المسار الثالث الذي تناولنا فيه فكر البيروني. كما حاولت هذه الدراسة البرهنة على أن لغة العلوم الطبيعية المحايدة عامل مهم جداً في التثاقف حول قيم العالمية. في هذه الدراسة تمكنا من وضع تصور حالة أولية للإنسانية الإسلامية، اعتقاداً منا أن هذه الأطروحة سوف تشجع منظور جديد لفهم فكر البيروني والحضارة الإسلامية، لما لها من أهمية واضحة للقضايا المعاصرة، وخاصة تلك التي تقلق الغرب في شأن التكامل الثقافي، والهجرة، وإدارة الصراع وغيرها من القضايا.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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In the name of Allah from whom all bounty extends.

This thesis is dedicated to every married student who has had to juggle between providing and caring for their family, whilst also finding time to focus on research and to every spouse, child, parent, supervisor, and friend who supported them in one way or another to ease their heavy burden. Few realise the struggle and sacrifice.

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For every *mujahid* is a bountiful reward.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Abstract in Arabic	iii
Approval Page.....	iv
Declaration.....	v
Copyright Page.....	vi
Dedication	vii
Acknowledgements.....	viii
Transliteration	xi
 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	 1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Statement of Problem	3
1.3 Background and History	4
1.4 Justification of the Problem	12
1.5 Research Questions.....	16
1.6 Research Objectives.....	16
1.7 Theoretical Framework.....	16
1.8 Methods and Procedures.....	18
1.9 Literature Review	18
 CHAPTER TWO: REVISITING AL-BĪRŪNĪ'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	 40
2.1 Introduction.....	40
2.2 The Conceptualisation of al-Hind.....	44
2.3 Early Muslim Conquest of Hind: Sultan Maḥmūd and Historical Reconstruction	55
2.4 Maḥmūd, Somanāth and Muslim-Hindu Relations	59
2.5 Conclusion	85
 CHAPTER THREE: AN EXEGETICAL INTERPRETATION OF ISLAMIC UNIVERSALISM IN <i>TAḤQĪQ MĀ LI AL-HIND</i>.	 91
3.1 Introduction.....	91
3.2 The Burden of Historiography and the Need for Substantial Representation	100
3.3 Addressing Otherness through Religion.....	116
3.4 Al-Bīrūnī's Framing of Islamic Universalism.....	121
3.5 Conclusion	137
 CHAPTER FOUR: AL-BĪRŪNĪ'S SCIENTIFIC ENTERPRISE AND ISLAMIC HUMANISM.....	 144
4.1 Introduction.....	144
4.2 Astronomy and Astrology:	145
4.3 The Relation between Hellenistic Astronomy and Islam	149
4.4 Isolating Philosophy from Astronomy.....	153

4.5 The Use and Limits of Calculation and Observation	158
4.6 Muslim Departure from Hellenistic Paradigms	162
4.7 The Case for an Islamic Humanism.....	167
4.8 Conclusion	180
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	183
BIBLIOGRAPHY	191

TRANSLITERATION

The following Arabic transliteration equivalents for Arabic words and names have been used throughout the course of this work:

ء	'	خ	kh	ش	sh	غ	gh	ن	n
ب	b	د	d	ص	ṣ	ف	f	هـ	h
ت	t	ذ	dh	ض	ḍ	ق	q	و	w
ث	th	ر	r	ط	ṭ	ك	k	ي	y
ج	j	ز	z	ظ	ẓ	ل	l		
ح	ḥ	س	s	ع	ʿ	م	m		

Short Vowels	
ـَ	a
ـِ	i
ـُ	u

Long Vowels	
ا + ـَ	ā
ي + ـِ	ī
و + ـُ	ū

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Let me begin with what I take to be the most significant feature of this thesis. First it addresses an area that is woefully under-discussed: al-Bīrūnī's scholarship and the underlying ideals of Islamic universalism, especially as espoused by his approach in the *Taḥqīq mā li al-Hind*. Discussing Islamic universalism is a massively important and potentially influential field in its own right not to mention the very broad spectrum of al-Bīrūnī's scholarship in addition to the very colourful socio-political circumstances he experienced. Bringing the two together into a single dialogue makes tremendous sense; a sentiment that we hope readers will come to appreciate. This thesis accomplishes much in this regard but also underscores the amount of work that needs to be developed. Bringing together issues such as virtue epistemology, philosophy of religion, analyses of truth/faith, historical representation, renders our work of interest to a wide variety of fields.

Before engaging in this endeavour, it is important to first clarify our meaning behind the use of 'Islamic universalism' as opposed to 'universalism in Islam'. Although the term makes perfect sense in Arabic when *ʿAlamiyyah al-Islām* is used, this is not the case for the English equivalent. To avoid unnecessary philosophising, our choice of 'Islamic universalism' as opposed to 'universalism in Islam' is a rather simple one. When used independently, 'universalism' can pertain to ethical, mathematical, logical, and theological issues with each field consisting of numerous theories and philosophies that hardly capture the totality of Islam's claim to universality. Rather, they may be exceedingly complex (or highly philosophised

depending on your perspective) as in the case of Kantian and Platonic ideals of the universal from which philosophies of universalism have emerged. Alternatively, they can be directly opposed to Islamic universal ideals, as is the case of the salvationist ideals of Christian universalism. In short, without first qualifying universalism through the phrasing ‘Islamic universalism’, we are creating ambiguous space open to a large range of possible interpretations that are unlikely to agree with the long established intrinsic characteristic of *‘Alamiyyah al-Islām’*.¹

The idea of Islamic universalism in al-Bīrūnī’s narrative in his *Tahqīq* is significantly embedded in evidences found in the introductory chapters of this major treatise. Although the methodology designed and adopted by al-Bīrūnī when approaching the study of Hindus and Hinduism is central to the theme of Islamic universalism, the several factors through which al-Bīrūnī chose to frame his discussion set the scene for a narrative on Islamic universalism by providing it with a set of what al-Bīrūnī believed to be real issues plaguing both the Muslim and Hindu communities. These factors justify al-Bīrūnī’s narrative and place it in the correct context.

With the exception of the methodological factor, the factors identified by al-Bīrūnī are Islamic governance as embodied in the leadership of Sultan Maḥmūd, particularly concerning Hindus, the socio-economic devastation that threatened Hindu prosperity,² and the socio-religious dichotomy between Muslims and Hindus. From al-

¹ A more detailed exposition of the foundations of Islamic universalism is elaborated in the introduction of chapter three.

² “Maḥmūd utterly ruined the prosperity of the country (Hind) and performed there wonderful exploits, by which the Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions, and like a tale of old in the mouth of the people. Their scattered remains cherish, of course, the most inveterate aversion towards Muslims.” ²Abū Rayḥān Al-Bīrūnī, *Alberuni’s India An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030*, Vol. 1, translated from Arabic by Edward C. Sachau, (London: RoutledgeTrübner’s Oriental Series 2000), 25. and Abū Rayḥān Al-Bīrūnī, *Tahqīq ma li al-Hind min Maqūlah Maqbūlahfi al-‘Aql aw Mardhūlah*, (n.p: n.p., n.d.), 12.

Bīrūnī's account of these platforms of Muslim-Hindu engagement, readers are left with an indeed dire environment in which Muslims and Hindus seem to live completely separate lives and any and all interaction seems to favour the Muslims due to their political domination and military prowess.³ The single glaring fault of the Hindus seems to be their attitude towards Muslims and all foreigners for that matter,⁴ which is not conducive to dialogue or mutual understanding.

From the above it becomes evident that there is a need to address these obstacles in the path of better Muslim-Hindu relations and to promote a framework for mutual dialogue, understanding, and respect in order for a new and effective hybrid community can be formed consisting of both Muslims and Hindus.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

With increased globalisation and the association of races and religions, human communities have been forced to address questions pertaining to how best to engage others with a set of customs, beliefs and traditions commonly perceived as different and at times antagonistic to their own. In this global predicament, each community is forced to examine their prejudices objectively in search of racial and religious harmony in multi-racial and multi-religious societies. Perhaps the most significant force with the power to completely inspire change, subdue anxieties and bring about

³ According to al-Bīrūnī, "All these events planted a deeply rooted hatred in their hearts." Sachau, *India*, Vol. 1, 21. and Al-Bīrūnī, *Tahqīq*, 11.

⁴ "...all their fanaticism is directed against those who do not belong to them—against all foreigners. They call them *mleccha*, i.e. impure, and forbid having any connection with them, be it by intermarriage or any other kind of relationship, or by sitting, eating, and drinking with them, because thereby, they think, they would be polluted. They consider as impure anything which touches the fire and the water of a foreigner; and no household can exist without these two elements." Sachau, *India*, Vol. 1, 20, and Al-Bīrūnī, *Tahqīq*, 10; In reference to the causes of hatred, al-Bīrūnī also mentions, "...there are other causes. The mentioning of which sounds like a satire—peculiarities of their national character, deeply rooted in them, but manifest to everybody. We can only say, folly is an illness for which there is no medicine, and the Hindus believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no religion like theirs, no science like theirs, they are haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited, and stolid." Sachau, *India*, Vol. 1, 22. and Al-Bīrūnī, *Tahqīq*, 11.

comprehensive and lasting human reforms is religion. Islam, as one of the world's oldest and largest religions boasting over a billion adherents plays a decisive role in deciding the outcome of this meeting of civilisations. However, Islam and Muslims will only ever be truly content with solutions and approaches proposed through incidents from its own histories and guided by its own fundamental beliefs. To date, there remains no conclusive research of an organic and original instance of Islamic universalism from classical Muslim literature. As a remedy, this study proposes to provide a narrative of the life and scholarship of al-Bīrūnī that will demonstrate Islam's transcendent appeal to human erudition as both a counter measure to ethnocentricity and bigotry as well as an invitation to Islam.

1.3 BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The search for allusive general truths is perhaps nearly always more valuable than the idiosyncratic movements of flesh and blood. Identifying these truths explain why people are the way they are and what they should properly be. As such, the search for these truths becomes of great importance. With it, we stand to better understand ourselves and the ways of others.

There can be little ignoring the blatant fact that the majority if not all of al-Bīrūnī's works have centred in and around his profound preoccupation with understanding the technical mechanisms present in nature. Doubtless, the exhaustive computations and calculations, precarious experimentations and laborious observations carefully recorded in orderly charts and analysed through algebraic and geometric equations predominated a good deal of his scholarship. So numerous, sophisticated and profound are his astronomical and mathematical calculations that the astronomer and mathematician cannot help but be mesmerised by such advanced

thinking for his age while the common reader is hard pressed not to be turned completely off al-Bīrūnī. With such a grand and elaborate cosmic narrative, readers can almost be expected to overlook the underlying fact that throughout his life, from childhood through to his death, al-Bīrūnī was subjected to a period in history wherein it was in vogue for princes, caliphs and sultan's to annex the lands of neighbouring kingdoms be they Muslim or otherwise. Through exile and forced migration at the hands of his conquerors, al-Bīrūnī faced the always-challenging task of having to search for means of livelihood and ways to satisfy his intellectual pursuits in places where he was unknown and probably seen as an outsider. In order to achieve some sense of acceptance, as an 'outsider' so to speak, al-Bīrūnī has had to develop a certain degree of sensitivity to the customs and traditions of his host communities. He has had to search for methods and strategies that transcend the apparent external differences distinguishing races and communities from each other and search for reasons that explain why communities after seeming so different at first, appear to be rather alike. In this sense, al-Bīrūnī's life is an unfolding tale of human interaction and societal reconciliation and it is by focusing on this integral aspect of al-Bīrūnī's development that allows him to be seen as a sociologist of sorts.

On closer observation, most if not all of al-Bīrūnī's works contain evidence of his interest in human beings and the structural make up of their beliefs, thoughts, personalities, customs and traditions. This is most true of his earliest work 'The Chronology of Ancient Nations' and among his later works 'Al-Bīrūnī's India'. Al-Bīrūnī's major preoccupation in the 'Chronology' was to achieve some sort of universal standard of time, which can be used in the calculation of historical events and, thus by doing so, achieve a common chronological perspective of the events that shaped the world. This project provided al-Bīrūnī the opportunity to begin

familiarising himself with the literature of a number of major civilisations and acquaint himself with the sensibilities of its peoples. His restless scientific acumen developed through astronomical and mathematical learning prompted him to seek for the roots and origins of a civilisation's sensibilities. He was guided in his approach by the basic belief that every effect must be the result of some cause. More often than not, al-Bīrūnī manages to reach an explanation of the causes of a civilisation's peculiar tendencies through some historical event or religious tenet. To achieve this, al-Bīrūnī appropriated the cornerstone of objectivity and scientific method from the scientific methods of the natural sciences and applied it to the study of civilisations for the purpose of isolating tangible reasons explaining why a particular civilisation harbours and values their own beliefs, customs, traditions and practices. After all, he is known best as a scientist, so it is not surprising that he begins with an analysis of independent data but proceeds to find himself reaching a synthesis of individual data sources to form greater generalisations akin more so to the philosopher than the scientist. This approach, argues Dr. Kamaruzaman,⁵ is the cornerstone for contemporary approaches to the study of comparative religion and thus renders al-Bīrūnī the father of contemporary practices in comparative religion. This research will not attempt a repetition of Dr. Kamaruzaman's work but proposes instead to focus on a few of the very real implications of al-Bīrūnī's interest in human beings and their communities that are beyond the scope of her work in the aim to establish what the researcher proposes is al-Bīrūnī's attempt to assert a sense of universal religiosity and ethicality generic to human beings irrespective of creed and colour.

The twenty or so years which separated al-Bīrūnī's work on the 'Chronology' from his 'India' gave his early insight into the solidarity of human beings time to

⁵ Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, *Early Muslim Scholarship in Religionswissenschaft*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, IIUM, 2003).

mature. Nurtured by his encounters with other creeds, customs and traditions and an objectivity developed through scientific learning, al-Bīrūnī had undergone unconscious preparation for his encounter with the Hindus. In the midst of war where prejudices were all pervasive and hatred rampant among both Muslim and Hindu, al-Bīrūnī struggled with the question of who the Hindus really were. Were they heathens—bewitched by generations of idol worship that any appeal to moral goodness or intellectual clarity would be meaningless? Could the message of Islam be made to reach the heart and mind of a people long subjected to the ‘will of deities’ that little independent thought remained? How were Muslims, and subsequently Islam, to embrace such an apparently different people, were they to be considered people of the book or something else entirely? This was Islam’s first substantial encounter with the Hindus and as a consequence, Muslims were faced with many serious questions demanding delicate answers. In addition to this, the manner in which Muslims choose to interact and govern the Hindus would, to the conquered, reflect nothing but Islam itself. So here we have a situation whereby Islam itself was on trial and its future in Hind and among the Hindus was at stake. Would Islam come to be known as a religion for all of mankind or would it be known as a religion for those whom are already Muslims...

Adding to the precariousness of the situation were the attitudes of the Hindus towards all foreigners particularly the Muslims, and the uncompromising severity of Sultan Maḥmūd’s attitude towards idol worshippers. In addition to this, earlier works by Muslims on the Hindus have been tainted by a marked disregard for objectivity, and by doing so, have failed to represent the depth and sophistication of Hindu belief and the archaism of its civilisation. Al-Bīrūnī critically appraised the Muslim works on the Hindus and found them to be unreliable at best. He found that the majority of

accounts were methodologically flawed; depending on secondary reports without any real measure for testing the credibility of such reports as a reliable source upon which to base their account of the Hindus. Hearsay, as it were, cannot in any shape or form provide credible information. Al-Bīrūnī found that at the heart of this intellectual mistake was a very serious ethical problem to which none were immune Muslim or otherwise except those who actively committed to transcendent ethical virtues. Such an approach towards an attempt to understanding others breeds from “motives of questionable cupidity and animosity”.⁶ In such circumstances, truth is victim to falsehood, fact victim to fabrication, honesty to lies and justice to injustice. Here Muslims have, in their ignorance and arrogance, sacrificed the justice and equality of their faith and have done Islam an incredible injustice.

Since Hindu perception of Islam is itself on trial, al-Bīrūnī took the opportunity to propound the Islamic belief that human beings are essentially monotheistic and ethical. To do this al-Bīrūnī took it upon himself to undertake an objective study of Hindu society, beliefs, sciences, customs and traditions, in short its civilisation in order that it may be correctly represented and to demonstrate that although there were many difference there remained a fundamental theological and ethical similarity that would facilitate a mutually appreciative sense of interaction between Muslims and Hindus in the vein of the universal fraternity of human beings. By adopting an objective approach towards the study of the Hindus and suspending judgement until after a credible study had been conducted, al-Bīrūnī was advocating that the superiority of Islam is not to be found in the clash of steel on the battlefield but in the

⁶ Abū Rayḥān Al-Bīrūnī, *Alberuni's India An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030*, Vol. 1, translated from Arabic by Edward C. Sachau, (London: RoutledgeTrübner's Oriental Series 2000), 4. For the Arabic original see, Abū Rayḥān Al-Bīrūnī, *Tahqīq ma li al-Hind min Maqūlah Maqbūlahfi al-'Aql aw Mardhūlah*, (n.p: n.p., n.d.), 2.

comfort of its own rational and ethical superiority. Al-Bīrūnī was betting on Islam's ability to reconcile truth rather than the discriminatory customs and practices often originating from tribal tendencies.

Another stumbling block impeding the achievement of an informed mutual appreciation of each other was the Hindu attitude and behaviour towards foreigners particularly Muslims. Al-Bīrūnī accused Hindu clerics of sensationalising Muslims; painting them as warmongering heathens with the propensity of irreversibly corrupting all those they chance to meet. Al-Bīrūnī says,

...all their fanaticism is directed against those who do not belong to them—against all foreigners. They call them *mleccha*, i.e. impure, and forbid having any connection with them, be it by intermarriage or any other kind of relationship, or by sitting, eating, and drinking with them, because thereby, they think, they would be polluted. They consider as impure anything which touches the fire and the water of a foreigner; and no household can exist without these two elements.⁷

The Hindus, al-Bīrūnī continues, are introverted racists. They nurture and take pride in the cultivation of Hindu-centrism by which they believe that there is “...no country like theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no science like theirs. They are haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited, and stolid.”⁸ The current generation of Hindus, al-Bīrūnī claims, are plagued with narrow mindedness caused from self-love, which is fed, by political interest and religious fanaticism.

The third major factor in the drama of Muslim-Hindu relations is the person of Sultan Maḥmūd al-Ghaznawī and his administrative policies in practice in the governance of the conquered territories of Hind. Sultan Maḥmūd was a staunch Sunni of Turkish decent who inherited authority from his father Sebūktigin. He found himself in charge of an area surrounded by Hindus on the one side and Ismaili

⁷Sachau, *India*, Vol. 1, 20. Al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq*, 10.

⁸Sachau, *India*, Vol. 1, 22. Al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq*, 11.

Fatimids on the other. He ruled in a time where Arabic and Persian elements constantly competed with each other for superiority. It was a time of cultural diversity. Yet in such an environment ripe for dialogue between civilisations, Sultan Maḥmūd was incredibly sensitive to the sanctity of Sunni thought. Surrounded by beliefs and practices other than Sunni thought, he could not help but perceive them as threats to his beloved belief which caused him to exercise shades of severity towards all those who did not agree with his particularly strict form of Islam. Whether or not Maḥmūd's apparent championing of Sunni Islam was more of a political instrument rather than borne out of a zealous conviction to its tenets is far from readily discernible. Effectively al-Bīrūnī says of his approach towards the Hindus;

Maḥmūd utterly ruined the prosperity of the country (Hind) and performed there wonderful exploits, by which the Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions, and like a tale of old in the mouth of the people. Their scattered remains cherish, of course, the most inveterate aversion towards Muslims.⁹

It took people like al-Bīrūnī to remind Maḥmūd that Islam was not defined by the sword but by its ability to transcend races and cultures and appropriate them to become part of Islam. Sultan Maḥmūd had to be reminded that the richness of Islam is drawn from its malleability—a malleability that works at transcending divides and process differences into becoming part of itself. The richness of Islam does not lie in the riches of wealth but in the richness of truth. Islam alone recognises the natural nobility of mankind and provides an active and workable framework encompassing his/her beliefs and actions. This is one of the reasons why Islam has been immensely successful in spreading across the globe. It transformed Persian, Turkish, Malay along with a variety of Eastern and Asian cultures into an Islamic culture which asserted the

⁹Sachau, *India*, Vol. 1, 25. Al-Bīrūnī, *Tahqīq*, 12.

good to be found in those cultures while purging it from its questionable ideals and practices.

Al-Bīrūnī presented a different perspective. He taught us that which is truly valuable is an internal configuration of oneself to truth. To achieve this is to see. He also taught us that which is truly small; a self-centeredness based on arrogance and ignorance. To be inflicted by it is to be blind.

The conditions of al-Bīrūnī's predicament have collectively contributed in forming a situation whereby the path of action adopted by Muslims towards the Hindus will provide a lasting impression of what Islam is. The actions of Sultan Maḥmūd rang loudly in the ears of the Hindus. His destruction of their temples and severe stance towards them threatened to drown whatever good he may have done. As a chief representative of the Muslim community, he had failed to express the voice of Islam's compassion and its true sense of superiority. It fell upon al-Bīrūnī to advocate a different strain of Islam that promoted the fraternity of mankind. Faced with troubling circumstances from within and without, the example of al-Bīrūnī is perhaps one of the earliest examples of how Islam has chosen to represent itself when faced with the task of accepting a new people to its folds. His example illustrates what the researcher proposes to be a universal model of human reconciliation and cultural amalgamation in which Islam asserts its superiority without compromising itself.

The objective scientific approach engineered and adopted by al-Bīrūnī opened up the phenomenon of civilisations to the precise mechanisms of science. He proposed a strategy that makes order out of the chaotic dynamism of civilisation. His strategy was to focus on the fundamental sources that guide and influence the customs and practices of a civilisation. Understanding the heart that causes the body to move, the mind to think and the soul to reflect along with understanding the framework of that

reflection is to uncover the true identity of a civilisation. By proposing a framework of understanding, al-Bīrūnī paved the way for others to engage in such exercises as to understand those unlike themselves. His efforts made it possible for future development and progress to be made in this area. The many divides that separate human beings can be bridged resulting in man being seen through the synthesis that is humanity.

1.4 JUSTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

The need for holistic understanding is emerging with increasing persistence in subject after subject as the process of globalisation extends itself further and further and human relations extend across old divides. Growing recognition of the many kinds of the inter-dependence of environments, societies and nations has accentuated the need to assert the unity of mankind and to develop understanding of a kind which forwards this both in theory and practice. This approach realises unity in diversity. The principle belief is that, just as the human beings are essentially the same the world over, so human nature and constitution is essentially the same. If in Islam we believe in a natural disposition, the search for the same natural disposition in others is only to be expected. The utility of this manifests itself when considering how to understand or interpret others. Principles serve to delineate the scope and nature of their thoughts and practices. They are intended as thought-regulative ideals, being based on the investigation of the essential nature and functioning of human understanding in the broadest sense, while also taking account of specialised forms of thought based on the symbolic ideals of their faith and the historical experience of their civilisation. The results of such an investigation and the principles and methods adopted help in further understanding processes for engaging others.

Although a great amount of classical and modern literature exists on early Islamic history, many pertinent aspects are to date yet to be explored and scrutinized. The Islamic liberation of nations and civilisations from corruptive beliefs and practices and its assertion of human nobility remains a fact of the past waiting for someone to remind us of its significance. Thus, when it comes to socio-historical transformation and the formation of a united fraternity of human beings, the available material remains in a raw and often inaccessible state. How much do we really know for example of early Hindu conversion to Islam, or of Indonesia's peaceful acceptance of Islam, or the transformation of a vast number of cultures into an Islamic culture? A sense of readily accessible examples presented in a clear and coherent fashion is certainly difficult if not unattainable. The seriousness of this problem can be understood when thinking of mankind in terms of a species of creation common in its origin, configuration and objectives. The need to bridge the shallow and often obscure divides of religious sectarianism and race not only reflects the sentiments of an enlightened humanity but recall the fact that Islamic conquests introduced to human society a new religious, political, linguistic, literary, ethical and cultural civilisation that stood to embrace others and transform them into becoming part of itself.

The very emphasis on the history and growth of human communities into such a thing as civilisation has always aimed at finding a greater purpose. The many achievements of mankind and the ever-growing diversity of human experience is unimaginable without diversity of human activity. The importance of diversity is seen in almost every kind of endeavour. Thus, variety is clearly 'the spice of life'. However, the variety of human groups does not necessarily have to translate into war and conflict. There need not be a clash of civilisations. A framework for mutual respect and understanding can be achieved. It but only requires a change in the way