



SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITY OF ABU RAYHAN BIRUNI AND THE METHODS USED BY THE SCHOLAR

Saidakbarkhon Avliyakhonov,

Doctoral Student (PhD) at the UNESCO Chair in Religious Studies and Comparative Study of World Religions,

International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan

Email: saidakbarxonavliyaxonov@gmail.com

Abstract: Beruni, as an encyclopedic scholar, left behind a vast body of written work. This article analyzes the approaches of global scholars in studying Abu Rayhan al-Beruni's scientific legacy, as well as the methodologies the scholar employed in the analysis and description of various religions. In his works dedicated to the history of religions, Beruni utilized diverse methods to elucidate the origins of religions, comparative analyses of their belief systems, worship rituals, sacred texts, and the conflicts between different sects. Furthermore, he articulated his insights regarding traditions that emerged millennia ago.

Keywords: Abu Rayhan al-Beruni, phenomenological method, comparative method, contrastive method, epoché, God, worship, the Gospel, history of religions.

Аннотация: Беруни как ученый-энциклопедист оставил после себя богатое научное наследие. В статье анализируются подходы мировых исследователей к изучению научной деятельности Абу Райхана Беруни, а также методы, использованные ученым при анализе и описании различных религий. В своих трудах, посвященных истории религий, он в рамках различных методологических подходов освещал вопросы зарождения верований, проводил сравнительный анализ их догматов, исследовал культовые обряды, священные писания и межконфессиональные противоречия. Кроме того, ученый изложил свои взгляды на традиции, возникшие тысячелетия назад.

Ключевые слова: Абу Райхан Беруни, феноменологический метод, сравнительный метод, сопоставительный метод, эпохе, Бог, богослужение, Евангелие, история религий.

Annotatsiya: Beruniy ensiklopedik olim sifatida ko'plab asarlar yozib qoldirdi. Maqolada Abu Rayhan Beruniy ilmiy faoliyatini o'rganishdagi dunyo olimlarining yondashuvlar va olim dinlarni tahlil, tavsif etishda foydalangan uslublar tahlil etilgan. Dinlar tarixi bilan bog'liq asarlarida dinlarning paydo bo'lishi, ularning e'tiqodlarini qiyosiy tahlili, ibodat marosimlari, muqaddas kitoblari va oqimlar o'rtasidagi ziddiyatlarni turli uslublarda yoritgan. Mingyillar avval paydo bo'lgan an'analarni to'g'risida ham fikrlarini bayon etgann.



Kalit so‘zlar: Abu Rayhon Beruniy, fenomenologik uslub, qiyoslash uslubi, taqqoslash uslubi, epoche, Xudo, ibodat, Injil, dinlar tarixi.

Introduction. One of the scholars who laid the foundation for the study of the history of non-Islamic religions in the Muslim world is Abu Rayhan Beruni, whose full name is Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni al-Khwarazmi. Beruni was born on September 4, 973, in Kath, the ancient capital of Khwarazm. He passed away in December 1048 in Ghazna [1].

Beruni worked across various fields of science, such as astronomy, geography, history, mathematics, and geometry. Furthermore, Beruni was among the first Muslim scholars to create the foundation for studying religions other than Islam.

From the late 9th century to the early 13th century, countries within the Arab Caliphate experienced high cultural development and major political changes. This progress and transformation were so drastic and world-shaping that they could not even be compared with the developments of the early centuries of Islam. In the 19th century, the Swiss Orientalist and historian Adam Mez comprehensively analyzed this period and termed it the Renaissance of Islam [2]. Beruni was an active participant in and contributor to this Islamic Renaissance.

In Abu Rayhan Beruni’s works written about the religions, customs, culture, and history of ancient peoples—such as “India” (“Kitab fi Tahqiq ma lil-Hind...”) and “The Remaining Signs of Past Centuries” (“Kitab al-Athar al-Baqiya an al-Qurun al-Khaliya”)—valuable information is provided regarding the holidays, customs, and rituals of Sogdians, Khwarazmians, as well as Hinduism, Christianity, and Judaism, along with the dynasties of kings and emperors who ruled in various countries. The most crucial aspect here is that the scholar approached the representation of other religions with remarkable objectivity in his works.

Research Methodology. To fully analyze the methods applied by Abu Rayhan Beruni in religious studies, methodological approaches based on a comprehensive approach to the scholar’s works were used in this scientific research:

Historical-typological method: The formation and development of Muslim religious studies thought, the scholar’s works, the methods used in them, their interrelation with modern methods of religious studies, and their general evolutionary trajectory were analyzed.

Comparative method: The methods applied by the scholar in his works were compared with modern methods in religious studies, demonstrating that he employed modern religious studies methodologies in his works.

Source-critical (Heuristic) method: The Arabic-language works written by the scholar were studied as primary sources. Their language, content, contextual placement, and historical significance were analyzed based on source-criticism principles.

Constructive-analytical method: Based on studied historical and theoretical evidence, efforts were made to reveal the scholar’s contribution to the emergence and development of Eastern religious studies, his intellectual heritage, and its scientific significance today. These methods were also utilized to describe and substantiate the phenomenological, discourse analysis (dialogic), and comparative methods used by Abu Rayhan Beruni in his works.



Analysis and Results. The research conducted by Abu Rayhan Beruni contains rich empirical data. That is, it provides the reader with valuable information about Beruni's own views on the religious traditions he examined, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Greek religion, Judaism, Christianity, Sabianism, Khwarazmian traditions, pre-Islamic Arab paganism, and Islam. However, to help the reader evaluate Beruni's contribution to a broader interdisciplinary study of religion, it is a far more effective approach to examine the questions Beruni sought to answer.

Abu Rayhan Beruni did not provide exhaustive explicit commentary on his method for researching other cultures.

Beruni's approach to studying religious traditions primarily presupposes the existence of universal human truths across all religious traditions or, like a radical pluralist, a genuine readiness to see truth and value in other cultures. All cultures hold equal validity in their religious and social expressions. Rather, what Beruni emphasizes is that there is a common human element in every culture that makes all cultures distant relatives, no matter how alien they may seem to one another. Bruce Lawrence notes that Beruni likely proposed "a pattern of human behavior, belief, and relationship to the natural environment among the Hindus as among other civilized peoples". This theme is clearly evident in places where Beruni compares the views and customs of different cultures in India [3].

To prove his point that a common human element exists making all cultures distant relatives, Beruni critiques the literature regarding Indian culture available in his own society. In his view, existing literature on Hinduism was not only insufficient but also misleading, representing a severe distortion of commitment to the truth (al-Haqq) [4]. He states: "All that is available on this topic in our sources consists of second-hand information copied from one another, a vast amount of unexamined material." According to Beruni, this did not align with the moral framework presented in the Sacred Scriptures of Islam and Christianity. He illustrates his argument by referring to the Quran and the Bible, respectively. The Holy Quran states: "Speak the truth, even if it be against yourselves" (Quran: 4:135) [5]. Similarly, the Bible states: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul..." (Matt. X.18, 19, 28; Luke XII. 4) [6]. Therefore, it is more fitting to argue that it was these religious and ethical concerns above all else that led Abu Rayhan Beruni to study other cultures from a comparative perspective.

It can be said that we examine Beruni's methodology through three primary frameworks: the phenomenological method, the dialogue/discourse analysis method, and the comparative method.

Discussion. Phenomenological Method

Abu Rayhan Beruni's method is phenomenological. This position is articulated at the beginning of his book *India*, where he clearly states that his work is not polemical and that he is interested in presenting facts as provided by the Hindus themselves. Beruni says:

"I do not present the arguments of our opponents in order to refute them, as I consider that improper. My book is nothing more than a simple record of historical facts. I shall place the theories of the Hindus before the reader just as they are, and mention similar theories of the Greeks in connection with them to demonstrate their relationship" [7].



In other words, Abu Rayhan Beruni tries to understand Indian culture from its own perspective, allowing them to speak for themselves. The drive to record facts as they are, free from value judgments, is one of the most crucial aspects of Beruni's methodology. In this sense, it can be argued that Beruni's approach to the study of religious traditions closely approaches modern methodology—specifically, the phenomenological method in religious studies, even though Beruni never used the term phenomenology.

To better understand what Beruni intended to achieve, it is necessary and appropriate to examine one of the fundamental concepts of phenomenology: the phenomenological concept of epoché (suspension of judgment).

Epoché was a term used by Greek skeptics to denote the attitude of non-commitment and suspension of judgment that ought to be adopted in a world of doubt and uncertainty. However, as a phenomenological term, it became widely known in the second half of the 20th century through Edmund Husserl, whose influence was pivotal in the history of Western thought, and his phenomenological project.

Epoché is one of the primary concepts Husserl employed in his phenomenological method, through which he hoped to answer questions about how to begin philosophizing and how to enter the transcendental realm of absolute subjectivity—the absolute foundation of all knowledge.

To execute his project, Husserl proposes a dual procedure. He first states: "I attempt to determine how the I, the thinking and acting subject, finds itself in relation to the world" [8]. My relationship to the things around me—whether I maintain a conscious relationship with them or not—is what Husserl calls an indeterminate attitude or the "natural standpoint," which includes thinking, evaluating, decision-making, and taking a stance. "My judgments, positions, decisions, and so forth occur according to predefined concepts." This stance is the opposite of what Husserl terms the "phenomenological stance," "transcendental-phenomenological reduction," or "phenomenological epoche."

According to Husserl, the natural standpoint hinders the path to philosophizing, i.e., entering the transcendental realm. Therefore, he suggests: "Instead of remaining at this point, we propose to radically alter it." This leads us to a second step, raising another inevitable question about the reliability of effecting this transformation. For Husserl, this involves performing an initial move he calls the "transcendental-phenomenological epoché," which implies a suspension of the natural attitude—a certain refraining from judgment. According to Husserl, only through this suspension does access to the vast richness of the transcendental realm become possible. Only in this way is it possible to return to the "things themselves"—to the given, objective world as presented directly in our experience or consciousness [9].

The impact of the phenomenological movement can be observed not only in various fields of philosophy but also in the field of religious studies. Before long, the phenomenological concept of epoché was introduced into the study of religion.

One of the leading figures responsible for introducing phenomenology into religious studies was Gerardus van der Leeuw, according to whom phenomenology is the systematic study of that which manifests itself (phenomena). Like Husserl, he emphasized that it is concerned with

explaining what lies behind epoché. In other words, the phenomenologist aims to view the objectified world as it is given to our consciousness and experience.

In the project of the renowned Scottish scholar Professor Ninian Smart, epoché came to mean “methodological agnosticism”—the bracketed suspension of truth claims regarding the focus of a religion. This interpretation of epoché implies an approach whose main objective is simply to describe or explain religious phenomena without affirming or denying their objective existence. It is precisely in this context that Prof. Smart makes a crucial distinction between the expression of a religion and its description. In this sense, the phenomenology of religion began to be defined as a new discipline seeking to describe religious phenomena, suspending value judgments through bracketing, and hoping to let subjective religious facts speak for themselves [10].

Although a value-free methodology in the human sciences in general, and in religious studies in particular, is considered a product of the Enlightenment spirit, Abu Rayhan Beruni approached the study of foreign cultures from the standpoint of objectivity, neutrality, and allowing the subject to speak. Modern scholars note that while Beruni in some ways converges with modern phenomenologists, he also differs from them significantly.

First, by assuming the existence of a value-free method in the human sciences, the modern phenomenologist seems to overlook the affective (Gefühl) dimension of human existence. This detached stance gives the thinking, acting subject a false sense of superiority over the studied subject and allows unacknowledged, inadequately reflected assumptions and norms to guide the process of understanding. It is true that Beruni also aimed to present a method that provides a relatively objective interpretation of the subject; however, he was also aware that this ideal could never be fully achieved. He recognized his own limitations as a human being. Thus, toward the end of India, he states: “We ask God to forgive us for every incorrect statement we have made,” acknowledging that as human beings, we view the world through the lenses provided to us by society.

Second, the modern phenomenologist is interested in the phenomenon as it presents itself to our consciousness, ignoring the diachronic dimension. Furthermore, they assume an ideal context isolated from historical processes and do not aim to examine complex cause-and-effect relationships. Beruni also deals with phenomena, but he is interested in identifying what lies behind appearances, paying special attention to the historical-cultural context and the specific conditions surrounding a given phenomenon. The best example supporting this point is Beruni’s assessment of the animosity felt by Hindus toward Muslims during his time.

Beruni notes that hatred toward Muslims was common among Hindus. This is a phenomenological observation—viewing an object as it presents itself to human consciousness without initial focus on causal relationships. In other words, when I, as a phenomenologist, observe Hindu society, there is a sense in which I can observe the presence of hatred regardless of its cause. That is phenomenology. However, Beruni, like a modern anthropologist or interpretive sociologist, seeks to understand what is causing this hatred. Furthermore, Beruni emphasizes that without considering the context in which a specific event occurred, our interpretation remains incomplete. Consequently, the conclusions we reach become controversial and subject to misinterpretation. Identifying the existence of hostility among Hindus is only one step in the problem-solving process. The second step is answering the

inevitable question: what is causing this hostility? While Beruni mentions various causes, two are directly relevant to the current topic:

The first is the religious factor. According to Beruni, Hindus “differ from us in religion, for we do not believe in anything in which they believe, and vice versa.” They call others *mleccha* (i.e., impure) and forbid any contact with them. He further notes: “It is impossible for them to accept anyone who does not belong to them, even if he were inclined toward their religion.” “This is another reason,” says Beruni [11], making any interaction with Hindus extremely difficult.

According to Beruni, a more severe and tangible cause for this animosity was the general resentment Hindus held toward foreign invaders, particularly Muslims. When Muslims entered India, the country had already been bloodied by the devastations of the Sakas and others. Then came the Muslims: as Muslims began entering their lands, the hatred of Hindus toward foreigners grew increasingly intense. “Subsequent events fostered a deep hatred in their hearts,” Beruni notes. The underlying cause of this hostility seems to be explained by the following passage: “Mahmud utterly ruined the prosperity of the country... The Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions. Their scattered remnants naturally harbor the most ingrained aversion toward all Muslims” [12].

From these passages, one can conclude, first, that although Beruni chose a method that helps the reader understand facts as they are, he does not claim to offer a presuppositionless method that exists only as an ideal.

Second, according to Beruni, genuine understanding is impossible without taking into account the context in which a phenomenon or concept acquires new meaning. If one attempts to understand the animosity between Hindus and Muslims in 11th-century India, the background of the issue (the historical context) cannot be ignored. In other words, the co-existence of phenomenological and historical orientations in Beruni’s approach to studying religious traditions serves as an essential element for genuine analysis.

Discourse Analysis (Dialogic) Method

Abu Rayhan Beruni’s method is dialogic. This phrase can be understood in different ways. In the first sense, it explains Beruni’s intention to study Indian culture and write his primary book, *India*; in the second sense, it refers to the ways Beruni collected his materials while executing his project.

As noted above, Beruni wrote *India* to assist those who wished to engage in dialogue with Hindus. According to Beruni, dialogue with Hindus was necessary because there were many complex and obscure topics. Had there been more contact between Muslims and Hindus, this would have been evident. In other words, the purpose of studying other religions was—as modern scholars of religion describe it—to “promote closer acquaintance among followers of different religious traditions” and to “emphasize the universal elements in all religions” [13].

Since Abu Sahl shared Beruni’s view on this matter, as stated in the preface of *India*, he asked Beruni to write down what he knew about the Hindus as an aid for those who wished to discuss religious matters with them. We can say this implies there were people in Muslim society who intended to enter into debates with Hindus on religion, science, philosophy, and other topics. Thus, Beruni must have addressed a specific audience when writing *India*. In this sense, it can



be argued that Beruni was perhaps the first scholar in the Muslim world whose interest in other religious traditions transcended the general trend of his time, which viewed Hindus as heretics or polytheists simply because they appeared idolatrous.

For Beruni, the best way to enter the world of another culture was through personal encounters, textual criticism, and direct observation. However, he must have realized that one cannot enter the life of another civilization without understanding the veils inherent in language that hinder precise comprehension. As a result, as noted earlier, Beruni not only overcame the language barrier by learning Sanskrit, but his mastery of Sanskrit ultimately led to the translation of books from Arabic into Sanskrit and from Sanskrit into Arabic. In this endeavor, especially when dealing with complex philosophical and religious issues, Beruni did not hesitate to learn from Indian scholars. In India, he states:

"It was extremely difficult for me to work on this subject, although I am deeply devoted to it, and in this regard I was alone in my time. I wondered where to find them, and I spared neither time nor money in buying Sanskrit books from various places and securing the help of Hindu scholars from distant places who could understand them and teach me" [14].

At a time when hostile attitudes toward other cultures prevailed, Beruni made prudent use of the Pundits and Shastris with whom he engaged extensively. Muhammad Yasin highlighted this beautifully, stating: "India appears like a enchanted island of quiet, impartial research amidst a world of clashing swords, burning cities, and torched temples" [15].

Beruni's attempt to study Indian religion, science, and philosophy was not limited to personal encounters; he also engaged in textual criticism. He noted that he spared no expense or time collecting Indian books wherever they were found, translating several of them into Arabic.

According to Franz Rosenthal, what is remarkable about Beruni is that ideas found in the literature of other cultures he studied—such as the Yoga Sutras—entered his own epistemological thinking. The following statement serves as an example. In Beruni's translation of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, one reads: "When a potential object of knowledge is unknown, the desire to know it intensifies until it becomes known." It discusses the relationship between the pursuit of knowledge and what happens when the unknown becomes known. This sentence, like many others in Beruni's works, is not merely a simple report or quotation from Patanjali. It appears that Beruni absorbed the meaning and, finding foreign ideas acceptable, integrated them into his own forms of thought. Therefore, it can be suggested that by engaging in dialogue with Hindus, Beruni viewed the concept of dialogue as both a tool and an objective in studying and understanding foreign cultures.

Comparative Method

Abu Rayhan Beruni's method is comparative. According to some prominent scholars, the only valid reason to engage in the study of other religions is to improve relations among followers of different religious traditions. What else could be the ultimate meaning and purpose of a student of religion's efforts? As emphasized repeatedly, the main driver behind Beruni's cross-cultural interest was to dispel widespread misconceptions about Hinduism and foster better acquaintance between two religious traditions—Islam and Hinduism.

As Bruce Lawrence notes, Beruni must have assumed that there existed among Hindus, as among other civilized peoples, a pattern of human behavior, belief, and relationship to the



natural environment. However, this evaluation should not lead the reader to conclude that Beruni proposed a kind of perennial philosophy implying the transcendental unity of all religions. Rather, as a Muslim, he acknowledged certain differences among various peoples. In other words, he believed that “God created the world containing many differences within itself, and these differences should be welcomed” [16]. To prove his arguments, he sought to examine the most controversial issues across different cultures, such as God, polytheism, creation, the caste system, and others. Here, we discuss only the concept of God—the most widespread topic in every culture around which all other issues develop.

Conclusion. In conclusion, it can be said that Beruni lived and created during the Islamic Renaissance of the Early Middle Ages. As a polymath, he engaged in numerous fields alongside other scholars. Even today, his works “India” and “The Remaining Signs of Past Centuries” hold tremendous value in science due to the exceptionally detailed information provided within them. To this day, numerous studies, books, and articles are written globally regarding these works. As Indian scholars themselves have stated: “No non-Hindu has ever analyzed Indian religions as deeply as Beruni.”

Through his works on the history of religions, Beruni extensively explored the histories of religions such as Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism. In short, his perspective and approach to comparative religion consisted of gathering as many traditions as possible on a given topic, objectively evaluating their validity, rejecting those that contradicted reason or nature, and comparing the remainder to find reliable, consistent solutions to any contradictions. He understood that this task could never be completely fulfilled—both due to the limits of time and resources available to a historian and because much relevant material had been lost or corrupted—yet he considered it his duty to attempt it. The information presented here represents only a fraction of the rich data contained in the works of the great thinker Abu Rayhan Beruni regarding Jewish, Christian, and Hindu traditions and teachings. Indeed, as a polymath, Beruni possessed deep knowledge of the religious teachings, calendars, traditions, and rituals of other peoples of his era, leaving behind an objective record of this information in his works.

REFERENCES

1. Yoqut Hamaviy. Mu’jam al-udabo. Bayrut. Dorul g’arb al-islomiy, 1993. - 180-190 b.
2. Adam M. The Renaissance of Islam. Michigan. Jubilee Printing and Publishing House, 1937. - 56 p.
3. Jalolov G.D. Beruniyning “Hindiston” kitobi, 1962. -195-220 b.
4. O’sha asar – 195-220 b
5. Qur’oni karim ma’nolarining tarjima va tafsiri. Tarjima va tafsir muallifi Shayx Abdulaziz Mansur. Toshkent. “Toshkent islom universiteti nashriyot- matbaa birlashmasi”, 2018. - 99 b
6. Muqaddas Kitob. Muqaddas Kitobni tarjima qilish instituti. 2016. - 393 b
7. Abu Rayhon Beruniy. Tanlangan asarlar. II jild. – Toshkent: Fan, 1968. – B. 65
8. Gusserl. **G’oyalar I.** – Galle: **Max Niemeyer Verlag**, 1913. –65 b.
9. Gusserl. **G’oyalar I.** – Galle: **Max Niemeyer Verlag**, 1913. – 66 b.
10. Ninian Smart. **The Religious Experience of Mankind.** – Nyu-York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969. – 200-210 b.



11. Abu Rayhon Beruniy. Tanlangan asarlar. II jild. – Toshkent: Fan,1968. – B. 50.
12. Abu Rayhon Beruniy. Tanlangan asarlar. II jild. – Toshkent: Fan,1968. – B. 75..
13. Abu Rayhon Beruniy. Tanlangan asarlar. II jild. – Toshkent: Fan,1968. – B. 67
14. Abu Rayhon Beruniy. Tanlangan asarlar. II jild. – Toshkent: Fan,1968. – B. 45.
15. Muhammad Yasin. **A Social History of Islamic India, 1605-1748.** - Lakxnau: **Upper India Publishing House,1958.** - 134 b.
16. Abu Rayhon Beruniy. Tanlangan asarlar. II jild. – Toshkent: Fan,1968. – B. 445