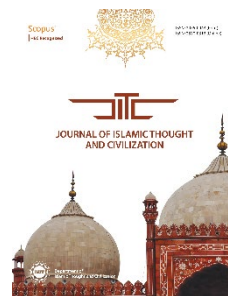
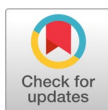


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# Representation of Hinduism in Muslim Theological Writings in Arabic

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## Abstract

The current study aimed to demonstrate that classical Muslim theological (*kalām*) literature misrepresents the Hindu position on prophecy. Muslim theologians, including al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazālī, al-Shahrastānī, and others, attributed to the *Barāhimah* (Hindus) an outright denial of prophecy and divine revelation, claiming they consider prophetic missions rationally impossible. According to the author, this representation is untenable and unsupported by Hindu sacred texts. *Ilm al-kalām*, the Islamic science of dialectical theology, bears responsibility for articulating and defending articles of faith against external threats. In fulfilling this role, *kalām* scholars engage with other religions through convergence, contrast, or contradiction. Such engagement necessarily involves representing the doctrines of those religions. This study examined the accuracy of these representations by analyzing how *kalām* scholars portrayed Hindu beliefs regarding prophecy. Through analysis of Hindu sacred texts, it has been demonstrated that Hinduism is grounded in divine revelation (*śruti*) transmitted through prophetic figures (*ṛṣis*) and divine manifestations (*avatāras*). The study utilized a dual-source methodology, examining both classical *kalām* texts and Hindu sacred literature (*Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, Bhagavad Gītā) to assess the accuracy of theological representations. By analyzing the concepts of *śruti*, *ṛṣi*, and *avatāra*, this research attempted to demonstrate functional parallels between Hindu and Islamic understandings of the concept of prophecy. It was proposed that *kalām* scholars may have encountered heterodox schools, such as the materialist *Cārvāka* philosophy and mistakenly attributed their views to mainstream Hinduism. This study concluded by recommending systematic reassessment of *kalām* representations of other religions as a way to revitalizing the science of *kalām* in contemporary Islamic scholarship.

**Keywords:** *avatāra*, *Barāhimah*, *kalām*, prophecy, *Veda*, Vedic religion, *ṛṣi*

## Introduction

Theology, despite being defined as the science of God, incorporates a multitude of topics that overlap with many distinct areas of inquiry. These include history, religion, ethics, philosophy, physics and metaphysics, logic and hermeneutics, language and rhetoric, as well as sociology and psychology. However, each religion has its own way of defining and constructing theology in accordance with its own understanding of the nature of itself and the foundational realities of its faith system. This entails that the term theology cannot be taken as a given in a non-Christian context, and the peculiar nuances that belong to each system must be maintained. A quick glance at the historical nomenclatures, by which the Muslim science of God and its engagement with issues of divinity is known, helps us understand its nature and the perspectives underlying it. Muslim intellectual tradition provides us with five titles:

1. *Al-Fiqh al-Akbar* (the greater understanding of beliefs), in contrast to *al-fiqh al-aṣghar* (understanding of religious rulings and guidance concerning life) and *fiqh al-qulūb* (understanding concerning the affairs of the heart or spiritual practices, also known as

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*taṣawwuf*).

2. *ʿAqīda* (creed), what every Muslim has to believe in.
3. *Uṣūl al-Dīn* (foundations of religion), emphasizing the fact that all other aspects of the religion are based on the faith system or principles of faith.
4. *Tawhīd* (unity), emphasizing the fact that faith in the oneness of God represents the most distinguished foundational pillar of the Islamic faith system.
5. *ʿIlm al-Kalām* (the science of speech), emphasizing the importance of the belief that the Qurʾān is the *ipsissima verba* of the divine speech, as well as the extensive debates that took place among Muslim theologians during the early centuries of Islam around it. These marked a unique watershed in the development of this science of God in Islam.

Al-Azhar University of Cairo houses a program for Islamic creed and philosophy (*al-ʿAqīda wa al-Falsafa*) as a department within the College of Uṣūl al-Dīn (Foundations of Religion, one of the five nomenclatures mentioned above). This program executes highly specialized and sophisticated theological studies based on classical *kalām* texts along with courses on modernistic trends and challenges to religion and revelation. It is interesting to note that while the program is called *ʿAqīda* and *Falsafa*, the course on creed is offered inside the program with the title *Tawhīd*. Despite the tradition that attests to the popularity of the term *ʿilm al-kalām* from the beginning, and to the fact of its scholars being called *mutakallimūn* (scholars of *ʿilm al-kalām*) or *ʿulamāʾ al-ʿaqīda* (scholars of creed) interchangeably, and despite the continuation of this usage in every part of the Muslim world and in modern Muslim writings as was the case in the past, the terms *ʿaqīda* and *tawhīd* remain the popular titles of the subject in almost all educational institutions of the Muslim world.

While the use of “Muslim theology” or “Islamic theology” has been the Western tradition, one can observe the term *kalām* taking preference over others in contemporary Western literature. Duncan Black Macdonald's *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory* (1903), Harry Austryn Wolfson's influential work *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (1976), and the volumes of Dimitri Gutas are good examples.<sup>1</sup> The term “creed” as translation of *ʿaqīda* is also not unknown. W. Montgomery Watt's work *Islamic Creeds: A Selection* (1994), which includes translations of Muslim late medieval theological texts, and A. J. Wensinck's *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (1932) exemplify this approach.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the term used in Western writings, the author preferred to use the term *kalām* for Muslim theology for two reasons. Firstly, the popularity of *kalām* among Western scholars of Muslim theology; secondly and most importantly, the significant differences between theology in Christianity or in its original connotation on one side and the nature of what is called Muslim theology on the other. Using the term *kalām* provides conceptual clarity. After all, this is a domestic original term from the Muslim tradition itself.

<sup>1</sup> Duncan Black Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903); Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), <https://philpapers.org/rec/WOLTPO-5>; Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbāsīd Society* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>2</sup>W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Creeds: A Selection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474473460>; A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), <https://archive.org/details/dli.ministry.15039>.

### 1.1. Nature of *Kalām* Studies

*Kalām* scholars, by virtue of being so, have been interested in other religions. By definition, *kalām* is “a science that involves arguing with logical proofs in defense of the articles of faith and refuting innovators who deviate in their dogmas from the early Muslims and Muslim orthodoxy,” says Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406).<sup>3</sup> Defending articles of faith could naturally open the doors to engaging with other faiths and creeds, irrespective of the purpose of the engagement. Muslim intellectual history has a rich record of interfaith rhetoric and dialectics, debate and controversies, apologetics and critical scientific studies in this regard.

Some *mutakallimūn*, such as ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), wrote an encyclopedia of religion. This made scholars after him consider him as a pioneer in the field of history of religions, to the extent that the great historian of comparative religion Eric J. Sharpe highlighted al-Shahrastānī’s importance. He highlighted his reputation by saying: “The honor of writing the first history of religion in world literature seems in fact to belong to the Muslim al-Shahrastānī (1153), whose Religious Parties and Schools of Philosophy describe and systematize all the religions of the then known world, as far as the boundaries of China. This outstanding work far outstrips anything which Christian writers were capable of producing at the same period.”<sup>4</sup>

But in general, theologians were not always interested in studying other religions except for polemical purposes. Whenever they discuss a point in Muslim creed which is in contradiction with, or in contrast to, or different from what is found in other religions, they enter into discussion of the issue in a way they deem appropriate. They might just report the opposing ideas and concepts in passing, such as the *Sunnī* theologian Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), who mentioned the Sophists as deniers of essential knowledge without presenting clearly and authentically their theory: what it is in its details, or engaging in, at least, a brief comparative critical reference to it, as most of the *mutakallimūn* very often do.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.2. Representation of other Religions in *Kalām* Literature

It was due to its polemical nature that there has been no serious interest on the part of the *mutakallimūn* in studying and understanding other religions’ theological views, except in cases where these views contradict or contrast the Islamic ones. Here, Muslim theologians used the methodology of simply mentioning other religious positions and trying to refute them without feeling the necessity of analyzing those opposing views. However, the problem lies in the sources of the *mutakallimūn* for those views. *Kalām* literature usually does not provide the sources for what they ascribe to other religions, and they also do not present those ideas in their full details and logic as the adherents see them.

Though the example of the Sophists just mentioned is sufficient, the author quotes another one from ‘Aḥd al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355) to illustrate this point. In the chapter on *tanzīh* (incomparability of God), he dedicates a section to discuss the impossibility of *ittiḥād* (God becoming united with any of His creatures) and *ḥulūl* (God descending into anything). After explaining the Islamic position of outright rejection of both, he says:

Know that there are certain groups who contradict us on these two principles. The first are the Christians. Their doctrine can be articulated as follows: Either they claim that the essence of

<sup>3</sup>Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 3:34.

<sup>4</sup>Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, 2nd ed. (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1986), 11.

<sup>5</sup>Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī with the commentary of Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafiyyah ‘alā al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafiyyah* (Dābil, Gujarāt: Idārat al-Ṣiddīq, 1439 AH/2018 CE), 46–55.

God unites with Jesus, or His essence descended into him, or His attribute descended into him—all of this occurring either through his body or through his soul—or they do not claim any of these things. In the latter case, either they say that Allah granted him power to create, or they do not, but rather affirm that Allah distinguished him with miracles and called him 'son' as a token of respect, just as He called Abraham 'friend' (*khalīl*). These are eight possibilities, all of which are false except the last. The first six are false for the reasons we have explained, and the seventh is false for what we shall explain: that there is no effective agent except Allah. As for the details of their doctrines, we shall mention them at the end of the book.”<sup>6</sup>

As the reader can see, al-Ījī does not feel the need to bring in the Christian arguments in this regard from their own sources, neither does he refer to his own sources for what he ascribes to them, despite the Christian claim that faith in God's incarnation neither contradicts their firm belief in one God nor affects the purity of His incomparability.

Scholars of religion usually do not expect from theological sources a clean historical account of other religions and their concepts—not even of their own religion. However, in the case of involving other religions in theological discussions and debates, it is absolutely fair to demand accuracy, authentic information, and correct representation. The absence of this correct representation in many instances was behind the author's decision to take up this phenomenon for scholarly scrutiny. However, the author was convinced that it would be a difficult task to indulge in a full-fledged study of this phenomenon. This is because it would necessitate huge teamwork and lies beyond the limits of a single manuscript. Therefore, it was decided to stay restricted to a sample study and chose to look at the representation of Hinduism in *kalām* sources, with the hope that it would serve as an example that encourages young researchers to continue the work. This type of engagement with *kalām* sources can be an effective way of reviewing, renewing, and revitalizing the science of *kalām*, as well as being a real contribution to the development of knowledge in the field.

### 1.3. Scope of Study

It must be acknowledged first that this manuscript was not intended to be a full-fledged comprehensive critical analysis of the representation of Hinduism<sup>7</sup> in *kalām* sources in all of its aspects. On the contrary, the research was only an attempt to study a single issue—the issue of prophecy—as an example of the representations of Vedic religion (*Vaidika Dharma*) in *kalām* literature. Furthermore, it also assessed the scholarly value of these representations by examining the Hindu view on the issue. Known to the modern world by the Western nomenclature “Hinduism,” this religion was referred to in *kalām* literature as *al-Barāhimah*, or the religion of the Indians.<sup>8</sup> Whenever

<sup>6</sup> Aḥud al-Dīn al-Ījī, *Al-Mawāqif fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām* (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, n.d.), 274-5.

<sup>7</sup>The term "Hindu" derives from the Sanskrit *Sindhu* (the Indus River); it was used by Persian and later Arabic geographers to refer broadly to the peoples and religions of the Indian subcontinent. Muslim scholars and conquerors adopted this terminology when crossing the Indus River, often lumping the diverse array of Brahmanical traditions, philosophical schools (including materialist schools like *Cārvāka*), and other India-based religions such as Buddhism and Jainism under a single designation. This lumping together of vastly different traditions may have contributed to the misrepresentations discussed in this article. Modern scholarship recognizes "Hinduism" as encompassing tremendous internal diversity across *Śaiva*, *Vaiṣṇava*, and *Śākta* traditions, among others, each with distinct theological emphases. On this terminological history, see Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Will Sweetman, “Unity and Plurality: Hinduism and the Religions of India in Early European Scholarship,” *Religion* 31, no. 3 (2001): 209-224.

<sup>8</sup>On the etymology and usage of “Barahimah” in Arabic sources, see Sarah Stroumsa, “The Barāhima in Early Kalām,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 6 (1985): 229-41.

*kalām* scholars happened to discuss any matter of Muslim creed, they usually looked at the parallels in other religions and commented on them. Hinduism was one of those religions which Muslim theologians found necessary to engage with. Like other religions, Islam shares with Hinduism many concepts or ideas on which they converge, contrast, or contradict. In this way, one finds many references to Hinduism in *kalām* literature.

Despite the fact that there have been contacts with Hindus in many ways since the early times of Islam, and that a few reasonably good accounts of Hinduism were also known to the Muslim world, especially the one produced by Abū al-Rayhān al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048) in his monumental *Tahqīq mā li'l-Hind min maqūlah maqbūlah fī al-'aql aw mardhūlah*, the representation of this religion in *kalām* literature has been poor.<sup>9</sup> Though there is no evidence of deliberate distortion, there are undoubtedly misrepresentations, and seldom do they hit the point, to say the least.

## 2. Prophecy in Hinduism and *Kalām* Writings

At the very outset, the author stated that prophecy is an extremely foundational concept in Islam. It is no exaggeration to consider it as the heart of the creedal system of Islam. If *tawhīd* is taken to be the characteristic identification of Islam, it is the prophet who is the medium through whom God reveals the right belief and what it entails. It is not surprising, then, that Muslim theologians dedicated significant attention to this subject. The possibility of prophecy, the meaning of God sending prophets, the nature and characteristics of the prophet, and Muhammad (PBUH) being the last of the prophets—whereby it is concluded that there is no prophet after him—are the principal issues they discuss and try to articulate with reason. This is further supported by historical realities, scriptural reasoning, and accompanying miracles to the best of their ability. Revelation and reason come together in full force in articulating and defending it. There is nothing to wonder about—after all, it is theology, and it is always about articulation and defense. Each and every single constituent of the faith system would customarily be dealt with by these two methodological devices: articulation and defense.

Once they are done with articulation, they come to engage with what other religious belief systems might hold in contrast or contradiction to what Islamic creed holds. Muslim theological writings display different views regarding the Hinduism's attitude towards prophecy, many of which are inaccurate, according to the author's opinion. It is striking to note that Muslims, especially historians and experts of law, had in front of them a good amount of advanced material about Indian religions (Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism) even before the flourishing of the science of *kalām* and even before al-Bīrūnī's highly acclaimed scholarly account of India. However surprisingly, these materials did not find their way into theological writings. It is extremely puzzling and perplexing to see the encyclopedic al-Shahrastānī exhibit profound understanding of Vedic religion and Buddhism in his *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (Religions and Sects). While, when writing as a theologian, he goes uncritically with what the existing *kalām* writings say about Hindus without employing his own knowledge about Indian religions. His *al-Milal* was written towards the end of his career after all his theological writings, and he did not have the opportunity to revise them. What he says about the Hindu position regarding the notion of prophecy cannot come from someone who had all that high-level information about Indian religions.

## 3. Hindu Position as Reported in *Kalām* Tradition

Let us first explore the statements of some of the most prominent Muslim theologians stating the Hindu position on prophecy.

Al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), one of the greatest Ash'arī theologians, categorically states that "the

<sup>9</sup>Abū al-Rayhān al-Bīrūnī, *Tahqīq mā li'l-Hind min maqūlah maqbūlah fī al-'aql aw mardhūlah*, ed. Edward Sachau as *Alberuni's India*, 2 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, 1910).

*Barāhimah* deny prophetic missions and reject them as not being rational. They consider it impossible that a human being was sent as an apostle.<sup>10</sup> He reiterated this in his *Luma' al-Adillah*.<sup>11</sup> Al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936), before him, ascribed to the *Barāhimah* that they deny prophecy.<sup>12</sup> 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1038), another prominent *Sunnī* theologian, said that, "the *Barāhimah* deny messengers."<sup>13</sup> The same is stated by the famous Mu'tazilī theologian al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025).<sup>14</sup> Hindus, according to al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in his book *al-Iqtisād fī al-I'tiqād*, reject the principle of prophets and reiterate the same in his *Faḍā'ih al-Bāṭiniyya*, where he says that all Hindus deny the sending of prophets.<sup>15</sup> Al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 471/1078) expresses the same view. While discussing the ideas of the Mu'tazilite theologian al-Nazzām, al-Isfarāyīnī says: "Al-Nazzām was secretly leaning towards the Hindu view of denying all prophets."<sup>16</sup> Ibn Khumayr (d. 614/1217) confirms the same views for the *Barāhimah* in his work as well.<sup>17</sup> Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) believes that this is the stance of the Hindus.<sup>18</sup> Al-Shahrastānī claims that the Hindus (*Barāhimah*) deny prophecy completely, and they consider it impossible.<sup>19</sup> Al-Taftāzānī (d. 791/1389) states that the *Barāhimah* and *Samaniyya* (Buddhists) say it is impossible to send prophets.<sup>20</sup> Almost the same is what Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) believes, saying they deny prophecy.<sup>21</sup> Many other theologians follow the same line of thinking about the Hindu attitude.

There are, however, some scholars of *kalām* who have more detailed opinions regarding the

<sup>10</sup> Aīmām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, *A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief: Kitāb al-Irshād ilā Qawā'it al-Adillah fī Uṣūl al-I'tiqād*, trans. Paul E. Walker, rev. Muhammad S. Eissa (Reading, UK: Garnet, 2000), 165.

<sup>11</sup> Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, *Luma' al-Adillah fī Qawā'id 'Aqā'id Ahl al-Sunnah wa-al-Jamā'ah*, ed. Fawqīyya Ḥusayn Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Khuḍayrī (Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah lil-Ta'lif wa-al-Tarjamah, 1965), 123.

<sup>12</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *Risālah ilā Ahl al-Thaḡhr bi-Bāb al-Abwāb*, ed. and studied by 'Abd Allāh Shākir Muḥammad al-Junaydī (Al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah: 'Imādāt al-Baḥth al-'Ilmī, al-Jāmi'ah al-Islāmiyyah, 1413 AH/1993 CE), 79, <https://usul.ai/en/t/risala-ila-ahl-thughr/26>.

<sup>13</sup> 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, ed. Lajnat Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1982), 348.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, ed. 'Abd al-Karīm 'Uthmān (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1965), 563.

<sup>15</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iqtisād fī al-I'tiqād*, with marginal notes by 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Khalīlī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1424 AH/2004 CE), 134. Also see his *Faḍā'ih al-Bāṭiniyyah*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Kuwait: Mu'assasat Dār al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, n.d.), 115.

<sup>16</sup> Abū al-Muẓaffar Tāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Isfarāyīnī, *Al-Tabṣīr fī al-Dīn wa-Tamyīz al-Firqaq al-Nājiyyah 'an al-Firaq al-Hālikīn*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt (Lebanon: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1403 AH/1983 CE), 72.

<sup>17</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Sabṭī al-Umawī, known as Ibn Khumayr, *Tanzīh al-Anbiyā' 'ammā Nusiba Ilayhim Ḥuthālat al-Aghbiyā'*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍwān al-Dāyah (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir, 1st ed., 1411 AH/1990 CE), 41.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa-l-Ahwā' wa-l-Niḥal* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī), vol. 3, 124.

<sup>19</sup> Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Shahrastānī, *Al-Milal wa-l-Niḥal* (Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Halabī), vols. 2, 118. Also see his *Nihāyat al-Iqdām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazyadī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 233.

<sup>20</sup> Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd ibn 'Umar al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Rayāḥīn, 1438 AH/2017 CE), 212.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Dar' Ta'arūḍ al-'Aql wa-al-Naql*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 2nd ed., 10 vols. (Riyadh: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyyah, 1411 AH/1991 CE), vol. 7, 64.

Hindu view. Al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), for instance, refers to three distinct positions among Hindus and says:

The *Barāhimah* are divided among themselves into two opinions. Among them is a group who denied the messengers and claimed that it is not permissible according to the wisdom and attributes of the Creator to send a messenger to His creation, and that there is no basis on the messenger's part that justifies receiving the message from the Creator. The other group said that God did not send a messenger to His creation except Adam, and they denied every claimant to prophecy other than him. Yet another group from among them said that God sent no one other than Abraham alone, and they denied the prophecy of anyone other than him. This is a summary of their opinion.<sup>22</sup>

Al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233) held the same view.<sup>23</sup> ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī affirmed this position as well.<sup>24</sup> However, al-Ījī, in another place in the same book, groups the *Barāhimah* among those who do not acknowledge prophecy and says the following:

A person is either one who acknowledges the prophecy of Muhammad (peace be upon him) or not. The second category either acknowledges prophecy in general—and they are the Jews, the Christians, and others like the Magians—or does not acknowledge it at all. The latter either acknowledges the Omnipotent and All-Choosing God, and they are the *Barāhimah*, or does not, and they are the materialists (*dahriyya*).<sup>25</sup>

In light of the above, it can be seen that the *kalām* scholars mainly hold three different opinions as follows:

- The majority hold that the Hindus absolutely deny prophecy; they consider it an act of absurdity that contradicts God's wisdom.
- They do not deny the principle of prophecy, nor do they deny the principle of God sending messengers. However, God has sent only one messenger, that is, Adam.
- They do not deny the principle of prophecy, nor do they deny the principle of God sending messengers but God has sent only one messenger, that is, Abraham.

The second and third opinions are not so popular among the scholars of *kalām*, though they are ascribed to prominent individual scholars, such as al-Bāqillānī, al-Āmidī, and al-Ījī. Those who believe in the exclusive prophecy of Adam or Abraham do not deny the principle of prophecy in religion. Since the first opinion, which claims that Hindus outright deny prophecy, is the one held by the majority of Muslim theologians, it will be treated as the representative opinion of *kalām* scholars. It will be explained whether this opinion is tenable in light of Hindu faith and textual evidence.

#### 4. Critiquing the View of Theologians: Hindu Textual Evidence

Ascribing denial of prophecy to the Hindus (*Barāhimah*) does not find any support in Brahmanical literature as far as the author's readings go – neither *śruti* nor *smṛti*. The two basic

<sup>22</sup>Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Tamhīd*, ed. Richard J. McCarthy (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya, 1957), 104.

<sup>23</sup>Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī, *Ghāyat al-Marām fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, ed. Ḥasan Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Laṭīf (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A‘lā li-l-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1391 AH/1971 CE), 318, <https://search.worldcat.org/title/993746504>.

<sup>24</sup>‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī, *Al-Mawāqif fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Umayrah, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1997), vol. 3, 353.

<sup>25</sup>Al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8 vols. (Istanbul: al-Maṭba‘ah al-‘Āmirah, 1292 AH), vol. 2, 458.

classifications of the sacred literature of Vedic religions have no direct or indirect reference to this claim. On the contrary, Hindu sages, ancient and modern, confirm the opposite. Hindus not only believe in prophecy but also believe that their religion is based on revelation and prophets. This is vividly entrenched in Hindu (Vedic) tradition. Patañjali, the author of the *Yoga Sāstra* text in the ancient past, and Swami Sharvananda, one of the most celebrated Hindu sage of the modern period who has written extensively on Vedic teachings, declare the revelational basis of Vedic religion in unequivocal terms.<sup>26</sup> This is what the current study highlights by referring to three foundational concepts in this religion: *Veda* and the Vedic literature, the concept of *avatāra*, and the concept of *ṛṣi*.

#### 4.1. *Veda* and the Vedic Literature

*Veda* is one of the foundational terms in Hinduism because it refers to the most sacred texts on which this religion stands. No words can describe the place of the *Veda* in Hinduism better than Swami Sharvananda's:

The Hindus trace the original source of their cultural life to the Vedas, which they hold to be divine truth revealed from time to time to the *ṛṣis* (seers) in their supranormal consciousness. Their religion, philosophy, ritualistic practices, civic conduct, and even social relations are guided by certain codes which are known as *smṛtis*, but all of them are based upon the sacred sanction of Vedic authority. Even the *Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas* are to be read as commentaries on the sacred Vedas. Manu, the greatest lawgiver of India, has explicitly stated that these should be considered as an elaboration of the Vedas. It is a recognized rule of procedure that whenever there seems to be a difference between *Śruti* (the Vedas) and the *Smṛti*, the *Śruti* has to be upheld as the supreme authority and the *Smṛti* has to be interpreted in consonance with it. No school of philosophy will be recognized as orthodox if it is not supported by the authority of the Vedas. The whole life of a Hindu, from conception up to the last funeral rite, has to be sanctified by the recitation of Vedic *mantras* (sacred texts).<sup>27</sup>

From this quotation, not only the place of the *Vedas* in Hinduism is understood but something very important is also known about the *Veda*'s nature: that they are divine truths revealed from time to time to *ṛṣis* in their supranormal consciousness.

The Vedic texts themselves affirm this revelational character. In the *R̥gveda*, the *ṛṣis* are described as those who "saw" (*draṣṭārah*) the divine *mantras*, "The *ṛṣis* are the seers of the *mantras*."<sup>28</sup> The *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* explicitly declares the divine origin of the *Vedas*, stating that the sacred knowledge was, "breathed forth" (*niśvasita*) by the Supreme Being. "From this great Being were breathed forth the *R̥gveda*, the *Yajurveda*, the *Sāmaveda*, the *Atharvaveda*, *itihāsa*, and *Purāṇas*."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Swami Sharvananda, "The Vedas and Their Religious Teachings," in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 1, ed. Suniti Kumar Chatterji et al., intro. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission, Institute of Culture, 1958), 182;

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>This is a traditional characterization found in Vedic hermeneutical literature. For more discussions, see Jan Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets* (The Hague: Mouton, 1963), 40–42; for an alternative view of the Vedas see Frits Staal, *Discovering the Vedas: Origins, Mantras, Rituals, Insights* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008), <https://www.penguin.co.in/book/discovering-the-vedas/>.

<sup>29</sup>Bhagavadgītā, in *The Bhagavadgītā with the Sanatsugâtīya and the Anugītā*, trans. Kāshināth Trimbak Telang, ed. F. Max Müller, *The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 8 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882), 111.

The term *Veda*, “comes from the Sanskrit root *vid*, to know, and the word *Veda* implies divine knowledge. They are said to be *Śruti*, or texts divinely revealed to the ancient *ṛsis* and the sages.”<sup>30</sup> As Swami Sharvananda states, “The word ‘*veda*’ literally means knowledge and supreme knowledge too. However, secondarily it is applied to the Vedic literature, comprising *Samhitās*, *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas*, and *Upaniṣads*. These books are considered to be direct revelations from God, embodying the supreme truth that could not be gained by any effort of the human mind. So, they are regarded as *apauruṣeya*, that is, not of human origin.”<sup>31</sup>

As it can be seen in Swami Sharvananda's statement, Vedic literature is a popular term in the religion. Furthermore, whenever the term *Veda* is pronounced without any qualification or connecting it to any specific form of the *Vedas*, such as, for instance, *Ṛgveda* or *Sāmaveda*, it always means the Vedic literature or the Vedic books in their collectivity, which comprise four types of sacred texts. These include *Rg*, *Yajur*, *Sāma*, and *Atharva*, each one of which is divided usually into four categories: the *saṃhitās*, *brāhmaṇas*, *āraṇyakas*, and *upaniṣads*. There are different ways of classifying the Vedic books among Hindus. However, it suffices here to know that all sacred texts of this religion are classified into two main categories: *śruti*, which means revelation, and *smṛti*, which denotes the secondary, man-made traditions. This second category includes all traditional historical writings and epics, such as *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, and other popularly known works. While all these are sacred and treated with the same respect, the collection of books called the four *Vedas* with their fourfold categories enjoy the status of being *śruti*—witnessed and heard directly from God. This outright dismisses the claims of the Muslim theologians that Hindus deny revelation and prophecy.

#### 4.2. Concept of *Avatāra*

A second important theological concept in Hinduism is the concept of *avatār* or *avatāra*, loosely and famously translated as incarnation—divine incarnation. The concept plays a central role in Hinduism, especially the *Vaiṣṇava* tradition. This concept is a very clear expression of the principle of prophecy and the idea that prophets are being sent by God whenever there is a need for that. Of course, one cannot expect that each religion must use the same language or terminology to recognize the concept. Hinduism is the oldest organized religion that we have today, and it has its own lexicon through which it explains its concepts and ideas.

It can be understood from the Jewish tradition that there are many terms to refer to the prophet(s).<sup>32</sup> We also know as Muslims that Christianity is a revealed religion, and its prophet is Jesus, who was sent by God to the Jewish community to guide the lost sheep of Israel. Eventually, as a result of what followed the conversion of the Jewish Saul to Christianity to become the famous St. Paul, Jesus ceased to be a prophet and became the God incarnate, the son of God, and the second hypostasis of the Trinity. However, we as Muslims know that Jesus was a prophet, and all these later developed constructions represent alternative theological formulations that diverged from the original idea of prophecy under the influence of paganism. This is an observable phenomenon in world religions before Islam: many of their fundamental creedal notions underwent interpretive development under the influence of many factors, peculiar to their time. In Hinduism too, from an

<sup>30</sup>Roshen Dalal, *The Penguin Dictionary of Religion in India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2006), 497–98.

<sup>31</sup>Swami Sharvananda, “The Vedas and Their Religious Teachings,” in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, 182.

<sup>32</sup>Hasan Zāzā, *Ittijāhāt fī al-fikr al-yahūdī*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus; 1987); essay two, 55–94 being an Arabic translation of M.S. Seigel's “Le-Toledot ha-Nevi'im be-Yisra'el” in Ephraim Levine, Isidore Epstein, and Cecil Roth, *Essays in Honour of the Very Rev. Dr. J. H. Hertz, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire, on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday, September 25, 1942 (5703)* (London: E. Golston, 1944).

Islamic theological perspective, certain concepts appear to have undergone interpretive evolution that departed from earlier monotheistic formulations. Al-Bīrūnī refers to one of them when he explains the term *deva/devas*, which comes from the root *div*, meaning literally "to shine," and is similar in its origin to the Latin *deus*. All multiple gods of Hindus are *devas*. In practical terms, they denote the secondary gods, each one of whom is identified with one or more divine functions, as if they were secondary gods or the divine agencies to carry out the divine plan in the created world. Al-Bīrūnī says this is the distortion of the concept of angels.<sup>33</sup> In the same way, there are many concepts that are either misrepresented or remain a subject of scholarly interpretation. Islamic revelation, of which the Qur'ān is the supreme manifestation—because Allāh has guaranteed the protection of its revelation—remained impervious to changes and distortions.

Coming back to prophecy, the Hindu idea of *avatār* or divine incarnation also seems parallel, the notion of prophecy, however, is expressed in a different theological framework and terminology. It can be inferred from the Bhagavad Gītā, the most read sacred book of Hindus. In the battlefield, Lord Kṛṣṇa takes human form and comes to help Arjuna. During the long discourse, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna: "When goodness grows weak, when evil increases, I make myself a body. In every age I come back to deliver the holy, to destroy the sin of the sinner, to establish righteousness."<sup>34</sup>

This passage clearly articulates the principle that the divine descends periodically to guide humanity and restore righteousness—a function remarkably similar to the prophetic mission in Abrahamic traditions.

It is quite normal in Hindu religion to believe in *avatār* or God incarnation—or incarnated God in a metaphorical sense—and to apply this term to all extraordinary people who are thought to be in special proximity with God and chosen to proclaim His revelation to mankind. Since Hindus are accustomed to calling sacred persons or godly men as gods, it can be safely assumed that the idea of *avatāra* is just a distortion of the concept of prophet itself. As a matter of fact, Hindus enjoy a lot of freedom in applying the terms of the divine realm to people of extraordinary spiritual excellence, and the prophets are the most spiritually excelled human beings, the most closely connected to God, the Absolute One. The author has personally encountered many Hindus referring to Muslim saints as *deva*. He states when he asked one of them what he meant by calling him *deva*, he said, "He is a man of supreme spiritual state and gifted by God." When they see a prophet—a person being sent by the Almighty God with revelation to guide humans and to proclaim in the name of God and performs miracles also in the name of God—it is easy to understand how easy it is to bestow upon him the title of "*avatāra* of God," without it becoming a blasphemous act. Furthermore, to conclude that *avatāra* means, first and foremost, prophet, and it must not be taken literally, for the Hindu religion categorically preaches faith in one God who is eternal and beyond time and space.

It is interesting to note that the term *avatāra* denotes originally "being born." In this context, it means "God incarnation" in a metaphorical sense. The concept of *avatāra* is one of the major concepts in Hindu religion. The famous *Vaiṣṇava* sect of Hindus believes in numerous *avatāras* and in ten major *avatāras*, the last of which would be the Kalki *avatāra*. It is also a concept that the Bhagavad Gītā elaborates. On the basis of the comparison between the characteristics of Kalki and those of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), many Indian Muslim writings confirm that Kalki of the

<sup>33</sup> Abū al-Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq mā li'l-Hind min Maqūlah Maqbūlah fī al-'Aql aw Mardhūlah*, ed. Edward Sachau as *Alberuni's India*, 2 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, 1910), 1:33-39.

<sup>34</sup> *Bhagavad-Gita: The Song of God*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, intro. Aldous Huxley (New York: New American Library, Mentor Book, 1954), 4: 7-8, 50. The preceding verse, i.e. 4: 6 emphasizes God's transcendence and absolute oneness in terms that resonate well with Islamic monotheism: "I am the birthless, the deathless, Lord of all that breathes, I seem to be born, it is only seeming, Only my Maya" This verse seems to parallel the Quranic emphasis in Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ (112:3): *lam yalid wa-lam yūlad* (He neither begets nor is begotten).

Hindus refers to Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH).<sup>35</sup>

Another important factor worth mentioning here in the context of enhancing the revelational origin of the *Vedas*—and hence the revelational characteristic of Hinduism—is the predictions and sometimes detailed statements about Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) found in the books of the *Vedas* and other sacred literature, such as the *Purāṇas*, which belong to the category of *smṛti*. The most striking reference is the one found in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa. There are different opinions among scholars, both Hindus and Muslims, in interpreting some of these texts and their dating. However, there is no disagreement about the core idea of prophets and *avatāras*: that they constitute a pillar of Hinduism and its cosmological doctrines.<sup>36</sup>

### 4.3. Addressing the *Mīmāṃsā* Objection

One might object that the *Mīmāṃsā* school of Hindu philosophy—one of the six orthodox (*āstika*) schools—explicitly rejects the notion of divine authorship of the *Vedas*. The *Mīmāṃsā* philosophers argue that the *Vedas* are *apauruṣeya* and eternal, requiring no divine author or revealer. They maintain that Vedic injunctions (*vidhi*) possess intrinsic authority independent of any divine initiator, whether God (*īśvara*) or prophet. This position, if taken at face value, would seem to support the *kalām* scholars' claim that Hindus deny prophecy.<sup>37</sup>

However, this objection fails to appreciate the complexity and diversity within Hindu philosophical traditions. Firstly, the *Mīmāṃsā* represents only one school among six orthodox *darśanas* (systems of philosophy), and even within orthodox Hinduism, the *Vedānta*, *Nyāya*, Yoga, and *Sāṃkhya* schools maintain varying degrees of theistic interpretation of Vedic authority. The *Vedānta* school, particularly in its various commentarial traditions (Śaṅkara's *Advaita*, Rāmānuja's *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, and Madhva's *Dvaita*), affirms that *Brahman* is the ultimate source of Vedic wisdom, even if the *Vedas* themselves are eternal. Secondly, and more importantly, the *Mīmāṃsā* denial of a personal divine author does not constitute a denial of revelation or prophecy as understood in the broader Hindu tradition. The *Mīmāṃsā* school does not deny that the Vedic *mantras* were “seen” by *ṛṣis*, nor does it reject the special spiritual status of these seers. Their philosophical position concerns the metaphysics of linguistic meaning and scriptural authority, not the phenomenology of how humans receive sacred knowledge. The *ṛṣis* remain, even in *Mīmāṃsā* thought, the human conduits through whom eternal Vedic truth became manifest in the world. Thus, the *Mīmāṃsā* position represents a sophisticated philosophical stance on the nature of scriptural authority rather than a denial of the prophetic principle that *kalām* sources attribute to all Hindus indiscriminately.

## 5. Explaining the Misrepresentation

In light of the above discussions, it can be safely concluded that the statement in Muslim *kalām* tradition that Hindus or *Barāhimah* do not believe in prophecy—on the contrary, they deny this and consider it an act of absurdity—cannot be entertained. There is no evidence for such a sweeping statement, which contradicts the nature of Hinduism, which its adherents firmly believe to be based

<sup>35</sup>Ved Prakash Upadhyai, *Kalki Avtar and Mohammed Saheb (PBUH)*, trans. Moulana Ghulam Nabi Shah Naqshbandi (N.p.: Saaraswath Vedanth Prakash Sangh, n.d.).

<sup>36</sup>*Bhaviṣya Puran*, *Prati Sarg Parv* III, Kanda 3, Adyaya 3, śloka 5–8. For a full treatment of this topic, see Abdul Haq Vidyarthi, *Muhammad in World Scriptures*, vol. 1 (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2006), 27–97; Ved Prakash Upadhyai, *Kalki Avtar and Mohammed Saheb*, trans. Moulana Ghulam Nabi Shah Naqshbandi (Saaraswath Vedanth Prakash Sangh, n.d.); Muhammad Modassir Ali, “Revelation in Hinduism: A Muslim Reading,” *Al-Baṣīrah* 4, no.8 (2015): 31–48; Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 483–485.

<sup>37</sup>*Mīmāṃsā* position, see Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, 2 vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), 2: 387–392.

on revelation from God to those human agents whom Hindus and their traditions call *ṛṣis* and *mahā-ṛṣis*. It is clear from the discussions that the very concept of *avatāra* and its authoritative definition in Hindu sacred texts, particularly in the Bhagavad Gītā, leave no room for charging the *Barāhimah* or followers of *Vaidika Dharma* or Hinduism with the untenable view of denial of prophecy. There is no doubt that the Hindu tradition employs different terms—*ṛṣi* or *avatāra* instead of the term “prophet.” However, the definition and description of these terms, when studied and analyzed closely, convince us that they can only be translated as prophet, for they do not mean anything other than that.

A question might arise here, or can be expected to arise: How do we account for this significant mistake occurring in *kalām* writings, given all those great luminaries of Islamic thinking who have been geographically close to India and have had chances of interacting with Indians? Among them are scholars who have dedicated themselves to the study of other religions and wrote volumes about them. It is a genuine question and needs further historical investigation. In the lines to follow, some possible explanations have been given:

### 5.1. Nature of *Kalām* as Dialectical Theology

An important contextual factor that must be considered is the nature of *kalām* itself as a discipline. *Kalām* is fundamentally ‘ilm *al-jadal*, not ‘ilm *al-adyān* comparative theology in the modern sense. The purpose of *kalām* is not descriptive or ethnographic; it is defensive and polemical. As Ibn Khaldūn's definition makes clear, *kalām* involves “arguing with logical proofs in defense of the articles of faith and refuting innovators.”<sup>38</sup>

The *mutakallimūn* were not primarily concerned with providing accurate, sympathetic representations of other religious traditions for their own sake. Rather, they engaged with other religions insofar as those religions presented contrasting or contradicting positions that needed to be refuted to defend Islamic orthodoxy. This genre expectation meant that *kalām* scholars often relied on simplified, schematic representations of opposing views what might be called “dialectical constructs” rather than nuanced ethnographic descriptions. The representation of the *Barāhimah* as “deniers of prophecy” may have functioned as such a dialectical construct: a clear, stark contrast to Islam's emphasis on prophethood that served the argumentative purposes of *kalām* discourse.

This is not to excuse inaccuracy, rather to explain it within its genre conventions. It is worth noting that when the same scholars, such as al-Shahrastānī, wrote in the *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* genre rather than in *kalām* proper, they often provided far more accurate and detailed accounts. Al-Shahrastānī's *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* demonstrates considerably more sophistication in its treatment of Indian religions than his purely theological works. This seems to suggest that genre expectations and disciplinary purposes shaped how information was gathered, processed, and presented.

### 5.2. Case of al-Bīrūnī: Available but Unutilized Knowledge

The case of Abū al-Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī is particularly instructive and perplexing. Al-Bīrūnī spent years in the Indian subcontinent, learned Sanskrit, consulted directly with Hindu scholars, and produced his monumental *Tahqīq mā li al-Hind*—a work of extraordinary accuracy and sophistication in its representation of Hindu beliefs and practices. Al-Bīrūnī explicitly discusses the *Vedas*, their revelational statuses, and the role of the *ṛṣis* as receivers of divine knowledge. He demonstrates clear awareness that Hindus believe in divine revelation and sacred figures who transmit that revelation to

<sup>38</sup>Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 3:34.

humanity.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, al-Bīrūnī's work seems to have had minimal impact on subsequent *kalām* literature. Theologians writing after him—including al-Shahrastānī, who lived nearly a century later—continued to attribute to Hindus the denial of prophecy, apparently uninfluenced by al-Bīrūnī's more accurate account. This raises the question: Why did *kalām* scholars not consult or incorporate al-Bīrūnī's findings?

The answer likely lies, again, in disciplinary boundaries and genre expectations. Al-Bīrūnī's work was primarily historical, geographical, and scientific—not theological. It belonged to the tradition of *ʿilm al-juġhrāfiyā* (geography) and *akhbār al-buldān* (accounts of regions), not *ʿilm al-kalām*. *Mutakallimūn* may have viewed it as irrelevant to their dialectical purposes, or they may simply have continued to draw from earlier *kalām* sources without feeling the need to consult ethnographic literature representing a methodological limitation in classical *kalām* scholarship.

### 5.3. *Cārvāka* Hypothesis: Encounter with Heterodox Materialism

A third possible explanation and particularly compelling is that Muslim theologians may have encountered the heterodox school of Indian philosophy known as *Cārvāka* (also called *Lokāyata*) and mistakenly attributed its views to mainstream Hinduism. In Hinduism, there are many schools of philosophy, and the Hindu tradition considers six of them as *āstika* as mentioned earlier. The orthodoxy and heterodoxy are determined according to a criterion upheld by the Brahmanical tradition, according to which the denial of the *Vedas* and/or revolting against the authority of the Brahmins, or any teaching that does not conform to the Vedic tradition, is considered heterodox (*nāstika*).

Along with those six orthodox schools, there were others considered heterodox. One of them is the school known as *Cārvāka* after its founder. It is also said that the term is a generic name for any materialistic philosophy. The school is also known as *Lokāyata* (materialistic). Professor Ramkrishna Bhattacharya states that this is the only school of materialistic nature in the history of Indian philosophy and has been a popular trend in India, especially in the eighth century, when Jayarāśi Bhaṭṭa wrote his text called *Tattvopaplavasīmha* (The Lion That Devours All Categories), explaining the ideas of this philosophy and criticizing all religious philosophies as false.<sup>40</sup>

Epistemologically upholding sense perception (*pratyakṣa*) as the only valid means (*pramāṇa*) of gaining knowledge, the *Cārvāka* school teaches extreme materialism: matter (*bhūta*) is the only reality; there is no soul (*ātman*), no gods, demons, or superior beings; the goal of life is pleasure (*kāma*) to the extent that it can be compared with hedonism in the West. It stood against the *Vedas* and religious practices, both areas of Brahmanical dominance. This means it unequivocally denies revelation, *avatāra*, *ṛṣi*, and all related tenets of Brahmanical religion. The *Cārvāka* explicitly rejected the authority of the *Vedas*, denied the existence of an afterlife, and dismissed religious rituals as the invention of clever Brahmins seeking to maintain their social privileges.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Abū al-Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq mā li'l-Hind*, ed. Edward Sachau as *Alberuni's India*, 1: 27-32.

<sup>40</sup>Ramkrishna Bhattacharya, *Studies on the Carvaka/Lokayata* (London: Anthem Press, 2011), 26, <https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9780857289926>; On Jayarāśi Bhaṭṭa, see Eli Franco, *Perception, Knowledge and Disbelief: A Study of Jayarāśi's Scepticism*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1987).

<sup>41</sup>On *Cārvāka* epistemology and metaphysics, see Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1959); also Dale Riepe, *The Naturalistic Tradition in Indian Thought* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1961), 53–78.

The possibility of Muslim theologians coming to know this school—which was prominent during the heyday of classical *kalām*—and mistaking it and its tenets for Hindu religion and philosophy is a strong one and could have been the reason behind this serious misrepresentation. The author personally felt this should have been the case due to the reports concerning the presence of Indian scholars in Baghdad, who are mentioned by denomination only as *Samana* or *Śramaṇa*. This was a generic name for all those who rejected the Vedic-Brahmanical authority, including Buddhists, Jains, and possibly *Cārvākas*. It is quite possible that the *Samana* scholar whom Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal is reported to have met belonged to this materialist school of *Cārvāka*, or at least represented heterodox views that were then mistakenly generalized to all of Indian religion.

#### 5.4. Limited Access to Reliable Sources

A fourth factor is simply the limitation of sources available to early *mutakallimūn*. Before al-Bīrūnī, and even after him for those who did not consult his work, Muslim scholars probably had limited direct access to Hindu sacred texts or to well-informed Hindu scholars and practitioners of faith. Information was often secondhand, filtered through intermediaries, or based on encounters with heterodox groups or non-representative individuals. In the absence of systematic study of Sanskrit sources and direct engagement with orthodox Brahmanical scholars, misunderstandings and oversimplifications were perhaps inevitable.

Moreover, the very term *Barāhimah*, while generally referring to Brahmins or Brahmanical religion, may have been used imprecisely by different authors to refer to different groups—sometimes orthodox Hindus, sometimes Buddhists, sometimes materialists, sometimes a generalized category of “Indian religions.” This terminological imprecision could have contributed to confusion and inaccurate representations.<sup>42</sup>

If these possibilities are not maintained, it would be difficult to provide a convincing answer to this serious misrepresentation of Hinduism in *kalām* writings, especially those of the classical and medieval periods. Here, the author recommended that a serious scholarly revision of this and many other ideas ascribed to Hinduism—and to other religions for that matter—in the *kalām* tradition should take place. Such a revision, if undertaken, can be a great contribution to reviving the science of *kalām*. Our modern context, with its unprecedented achievements in information technology (IT) and intercultural dialogue, provides the best opportunity to take up this responsibility in the best way possible.

### 6. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that the widespread representation in classical *kalām* literature—that *Barāhimah* deny prophecy and reject divine revelation—is essentially untenable and unsupported by Hindu sacred texts. Through systematic examination of both *kalām* sources and Hindu textual evidence, several conclusions emerge.

Firstly, that misrepresentation was pervasive across theological schools and centuries. From al-Ash‘arī to al-Taftāzānī, Sunnī, and Mu‘tazilī theologians alike attributed an outright denial of the possibility and rationality of prophecy to the *Barāhimah*. Some scholars, such as al-Bāqillānī, al-Āmidī, and al-Ījī, offered more nuanced positions, suggesting that Hindus accepted only the prophecy of Adam or Abraham while rejecting all others. Yet, even these more detailed accounts fail to capture the actual Hindu position. The majority view—that Hindus categorically deny prophecy as rationally

<sup>42</sup> On the imprecise usage of “Barahimah,” in Arabic sources, see Sarah Stroumsa, “The Barāhima in Early Kalām,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 6 (1985): 229–41; Elizabeth G. Price, *The Barāhima’s Dilemma: Ibn al-Rāwandī’s Kitāb al-Zumurrud and the Epistemological Turn in the Debate on Prophecy*, Islam – Thought, Culture, and Society 13 (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2024).

impossible—became the standard representation in *kalām* discourse.

Secondly, Hindu sacred texts categorically affirm, rather than deny, the principles of divine revelation and prophetic mediation. The *Vedas* are understood as *śruti*, divine truths “heard” by the *ṛṣis* in supranormal states of consciousness and transmitted to humanity. The R̥gveda, *Upaniṣads*, and Brahmanical tradition consistently describe the *ṛṣis* as *mantra-draṣṭāraḥ* (seers of sacred utterances), not as human authors or philosophers inventing doctrine. The Br̥hadāraṇyaka *Upaniṣad* explicitly states that the *Vedas* were “breathed forth” (*niśvasita*) by the Supreme Being. The Bhagavad Gītā articulates a doctrine of periodic divine manifestation for the restoration of righteousness, a function remarkably parallel to the prophetic mission in Abrahamic traditions. While Hindu tradition employs different terminology (*ṛṣi*, *avatāra*) than the Islamic concept of *nabī* (prophet), the underlying structure is strikingly similar: divinely-chosen figures who receive and transmit sacred knowledge to guide humanity.

Thirdly, the *Mīmāṃsā* philosophical objection—that the *Vedas* are eternal and *apauruṣeya*—does not constitute a denial of prophecy in the broader Hindu context. The *Mīmāṃsā* school represents one *darsana* among six orthodox schools, and its sophisticated metaphysical position on scriptural authority should not be confused with a carpet rejection of revelation or prophetic figures. Even *Mīmāṃsā* thinkers acknowledge that *ṛṣis* “saw” the eternal *mantras* and made them accessible to humanity. The diversity of Hindu philosophical schools demonstrates that no single position can be attributed to “Hinduism” as a whole.

Fourthly, the misrepresentation in *kalām* literature can be explained through multiple, intersecting factors. The nature of *kalām* as *‘ilm al-jadal* rather than *‘ilm al-adyān* meant that *mutakallimūn* probably prioritized polemical efficacy over ethnographic accuracy. The striking case of al-Bīrūnī, whose *Tahqīq mā li al-Hind* provided accurate information about Hindu beliefs yet remained unutilized by subsequent *kalām* scholars, reveals the disciplinary boundaries that prevented correction of these misrepresentations. The possibility that early Muslim theologians encountered the heterodox *Cārvāka/Lokāyata* school of Indian materialism and mistakenly generalized its rejection of the *Vedas* and religious authority to all of Hinduism remains quite plausible. The generic use of terms, such as *Samana* or *Śramaṇa* for various Indian scholars and practitioners—which could refer to Buddhists, Jains, *Cārvākas*, or other non-Brahmanical groups—probably contributed to the confusion. Finally, limited access to reliable sources and Sanskrit texts before widespread translation efforts meant that early *mutakallimūn* relied on secondhand information and oversimplified schemas.

The methodology employed here—taking a single doctrinal issue (prophecy) as a case study for assessing *kalām* representations of one religion (Hinduism)—could be extended to a systematic reassessment of how *kalām* literature represents other aspects of Hinduism (cosmology, salvation, axiology) as well as other religious traditions (Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism). This constitutes a significant contribution to Islamic intellectual history and comparative theology. Such work would not diminish the value of *kalām* as a discipline; rather, it would clarify the genre conventions, historical limitations, and methodological assumptions of classical theological discourse. Moreover, it would enable contemporary scholars to engage with the *kalām* heritage more critically, yet constructively.

The project of reviving and renewing *‘ilm al-kalām* for the contemporary period must include a commitment to accuracy in representing other religious traditions. Our modern context, with unprecedented access to primary sources in multiple languages, critical editions of classical texts, and opportunities for direct interfaith dialogue, provides tools that classical *mutakallimūn* would rarely have possessed. We honour the intellectual legacy of al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazālī, and al-Shahrastānī while also acknowledging and correcting the limitations of their representations. This is not a betrayal of tradition, rather its responsible renewal.

The case of Hindu attitudes towards prophecy demonstrates that careful, text-based study of

other religions can reveal commonalities that polemical discourse tends to obscure. Hindus and Muslims both affirm divine revelation, sacred intermediaries between God and humanity, and the periodic renewal of religious guidance. These shared commitments do not blur real theological differences, rather provide a foundation for mutual understanding and respectful dialogue. A renewed *kalām* scholarship, committed to accurate representation and rigorous scholarship, can contribute to both intellectual excellence and interreligious harmony—goals in sync with the highest aspirations of the Islamic scholarly tradition.<sup>43</sup>

#### Author Contribution

**Dheen Mohamed Mohamed Meerasahib:** sole author

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The author of the manuscript has no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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The data associated with this study is freely available in the form of books and articles

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<sup>43</sup>On the contemporary renewal of *kalām* scholarship, see Haslina Ibrahim, *Kalam and its Relevance in Muslim Scholarship of Religion: An Integrated Approach* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2023).

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