

The Threat of Tajsim and Tasybih Thought to the Tanzih Principle of ASWJ and its Implications for the Cohesion of Muslim Society

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the phenomenon of tajsim and tasybih thought in modern society and its implications for the harmony of Muslim society from the perspective of Ahli Sunnah wal-Jamaah (ASWJ). Tajsim and tasybih refer to the tendency to liken Allah to creation, either through extreme literal interpretation or understanding not based on the discipline of aqidah (creedal) knowledge. This phenomenon is increasingly evident through the dissemination of digital content, unauthorized lectures, and religious debates on social media, which ultimately leads to creedal confusion, ideological disputes, and polarization within the Muslim community. From a social standpoint, the inclination towards this thought also fosters takfiri attitudes, a crisis of trust in religious institutions, and division between generations and study groups, thereby undermining the harmony of Muslim society. This study employs a qualitative methodology through document analysis and literature review. Primary sources include classical aqidah turath texts, which also serve as main references, alongside contemporary references including journal articles, fatwas, academic books, and reports from religious institutions. Data is analyzed using a literature review approach to identify patterns of tajsim and tasybih thought and their relationship with creedal and social tensions. The findings indicate that the ASWJ manhaj (approach), which emphasizes the principle of tanzih (transcendence) and moderation in its affirmation of Allah's attributes, is the most balanced approach in curbing extremist thought and ensuring social stability. This study asserts that a sound understanding of aqidah not only perfects faith but also serves as a crucial factor in preserving the unity and harmony of Muslim society.

Keywords: tajsim, tasybih, tanzih, harmony, extreme literal

INTRODUCTION

The phenomena of tajsim and tasybih have once again garnered attention in contemporary aqidah discourse with the emergence of a tendency among some groups to uphold the doctrine of literal understanding of Qur'anic texts without reference to the discipline of aqidah or kalam (theology) and the methodology of Ahli Sunnah wal-Jamaah (ASWJ) scholars. This thought not only undermines the principle of tanzih but also causes creedal confusion, theological disputes, and social tensions among Muslims. In the context of modern society, replete with digital information and the influence of unauthorized religious knowledge dissemination, tajsim and tasybih thought increasingly has the potential to penetrate public consciousness widely. Therefore, studying the threat of this thought to the principle of tanzih based on the ASWJ creedal understanding and its implications for the cohesion of Muslim society becomes increasingly important to ensure the continuity of sound creedal understanding and the preservation of social harmony.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on content analysis of various primary and secondary sources related to the phenomena of tajsim and tasybih in modern society. Primary sources include classical aqidah turath texts such as the works of al-Ash'ariyyah and other Usuluddin texts, as well as writings by authoritative Hanbali scholars who discuss the issue of tashbih from the perspective of Ahli Sunnah wal-Jamaah.

Secondary sources include contemporary scholarly works, journal articles, fatwas from religious institutions, research reports, and relevant digital content.

Initially, an inductive method was used to thoroughly examine the data with the aim of identifying themes, patterns, and key characteristics related to the forms of tajsim and tasybih tendencies emerging through social media, unauthorized lectures, and online religious discourse. The data obtained were analyzed to understand the relationship between these thought patterns and the symptoms of creedal confusion, ideological tensions, and social implications arising within the Muslim community.

Subsequently, a deductive method was applied to evaluate the identified findings by referring to the principles of Ahli Sunnah wal-Jamaah aqidah, particularly the concept of tanzih and its method of affirming Allah's attributes. This approach helped researchers assess the extent to which the arguments and approaches of groups inclined towards extreme literal understanding contradict the moderate ASWJ manhaj which is based on authoritative scholarly disciplines [14].

In addition, a comparative method was used to compare the arguments, methodologies, and attitudes of groups inclined towards tajsim and tasybih with the approach of ASWJ scholars from various schools of thought. This comparison allowed researchers to identify significant differences in epistemology, textual understanding, and evidential approaches, thereby helping to understand the elements that cause confusion, polarization, and creedal tension in society [15].

Through this combination of inductive, deductive, and comparative methods, the study is able to produce a comprehensive, empirical, and balanced analysis in evaluating the phenomena of tajsim and tasybih thought in contemporary Muslim society and affirming the primacy of the ASWJ manhaj as the foundation for preserving aqidah and social harmony.

Tajsim and Tasybih Thought: Definition, Modern Forms, and Implications

The emergence of groups that contradict the understanding of Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah teachings is growing, forming different patterns of thought and ideological approaches. Among the groups that have existed since the era of the salaf are those who liken the essence of Allah SWT, His attributes, and His actions to creation. It is known among students of knowledge and academic researchers to present proofs and explanations from authoritative scholars to refute all propaganda and tajsim and tasybih thought. Even during the time of Saidina Umar R.A, syubhah (ambiguity) and confusion regarding the aqidah of Muslims had already arisen. It is said that in the era of Saidina Umar R.A, there were already those who presented mutasyābihāt verses related to Allah SWT's attribute of Istiwa' based on the Qur'an. Those who take mutasyabihat verses and peddle them as a source of ambiguity are called musyabbihat [11].

According to Badruddin Jamaah (2010), the definition of tasybih in terminology is a belief that leads to elements of similarity and resemblance between the essence of Allah SWT and human beings, whether that similarity is in the essence, attributes, or actions of Allah SWT. As for the musyabbihat group, they are those who liken or resemble the essence of Allah SWT to anything other than Him (creation) or liken all of Allah SWT's attributes to all attributes of anything other than Him (creation) [2].

The musyabbihat and mujassimah (anthropomorphists) groups certainly do not follow the path and means of the scholars who elucidated the understanding of mutasyabihat verses. The fikrah (idea) and thought of these groups adopt a literal understanding of Qur'anic verses, clearly affirming the attributes of creation to the essence of Allah SWT [12].

The long history of debate regarding tajsim (corporealization) and tasybih (likening) in Islamic aqidah is an intellectual battlefield fraught with tension. Al-Ash'ari, in Maqalat al-Islamiyyin (1980), for instance, meticulously recorded various views of early Muslims on the attributes of God, including those who leaned towards a literal interpretation of the verses of attributes, leading to anthropomorphic implications. However, his notes were more descriptive than a critical analysis of the suitability of these views with the principle of tauhid tanzih in depth. On the other hand, kalam scholars like al-Maturidi and al-Ghazali (1998) vehemently rejected any form of tasybih and tajsim, considering them serious deviations from the understanding of a Pure God, but

they addressed these in the context of polemics with older schools of thought, not the threats sown by communication technology. This raises a big question: are their classical arguments still fully relevant without any methodological adaptation? It is unlikely. Modern scholars, meanwhile, are often trapped in repetition. For example, Abdul Jabbar al-Rifa'i (2000), when discussing this issue, tends to justify the views of certain schools of thought without truly challenging the underlying thinking that leads to this problem, and sometimes even justifies literal views that can lead to erroneous understandings. This is very disappointing. Works such as *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology* (Timbal, 2016) attempt to reframe kalam discussions, but in chapters touching on the attributes of God, it still does not provide a sufficient framework to understand how tajsīm and tasybīh have migrated from ancient texts into the untrained public mind. There is a significant lack in connecting these complex theological debates with the daily realities faced by contemporary Muslims, especially in the use of social media. Views such as those put forth by Ibn Taymiyyah (1993) regarding the attributes of God, which greatly influenced modern Salafī movements, are often misinterpreted as an endorsement of extreme literal interpretations, whereas his intention was to reject excessive ta'wīl (allegorical interpretation). Ironically, many of his followers today cannot distinguish between the affirmation of attributes bilā kayfa (without asking how) and clear tajsīm. This is a major error. Newer works, such as by Shaharuddin (2020), touch on the threat of religious relativism, but do not directly link it to how this misunderstanding of God's attributes contributes to creedal confusion. They see the symptoms but fail to trace the deeper causes. In fact, some argue that this debate is merely a historical remnant, a shallow and dangerous view, as it ignores that the seeds of old thoughts are still sprouting in new forms, perhaps more subtle, more difficult to detect. It is important to understand that tajsīm is no longer just in the form of statues or carvings of God, but can be in the form of imaginations formed from overly literal descriptions. Discussions on tasybīh are also not limited to direct comparisons, but also the implications of overly anthropomorphic religious narratives. Therefore, we need to move beyond traditional defensive debates and begin analyzing how these ideologies are reconstructed in contemporary contexts, especially on digital platforms. Otherwise, we will continue to witness the silent collapse of aqīdah before our eyes.

The Principle of Tanzīh from the Perspective of Ahli Sunnah Wal-Jamaah

The primary and crucial framework in exploring the studies and understanding of the Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah manhaj is the concept and knowledge of tanzīh or taqdis. The main key to avoiding various beliefs and ideologies brought by the musyabbihat or mujassimah groups is through sound faith accompanied by authoritative theological presentations related to tanzīh [4].

According to Badruddin Jamaah (2010), the discussion of tanzīh is a very important discussion and it is the main goal in the discussion of aqīdah knowledge, as well as to achieve the true objective of tauhid (monotheism). A great connection exists between tanzīh and the affirmation of Allah SWT's obligatory attributes, whether through muḥkamāt (clear) or mutasyābihāt (ambiguous) texts. In his book titled, "At-Tanzīh fī Ibtāl Ḥujaj at-Tashbīh," he states that the purpose of aqīdah knowledge is to convey some of these tauhid discussions to tanzīh, or to purify Allah SWT from all attributes of imperfection, because aqīdah and Usuluddin (principles of religion) are built upon tanzīh [1].

A great mujaddid (revivalist) in systematizing the study and theology of aqīdah, Imam Abū Ḥasan al-Ash'arī himself clearly stated that the aqīdah held from the time of the salaf until now never attributes the qualities of creation, as understood by human intellect, to be affirmed for the essence of Allah SWT, nor His attributes or actions [2]. This was followed by generations of his students who carried and defended the aqīdah and belief that Allah SWT does not resemble His essence, attributes, or actions with creation, such as Abū Ḥasan al-Bāhilī (d. 370H), Imām Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403H), Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī (d. 475H), and so forth.

Imam Abū Ḥasan al-Ash'arī's work, *al-Luma' fī al-Radd 'alā Ahl al-Zaygh wa al-Bida'*, is one of al-Ash'arī's great works in stating that the essence of Allah SWT does not resemble creation. Al-Ash'arī's denial and rejection of the resemblance of Allah SWT's essence to all His created beings clearly state that Allah SWT is not a body, does not have a physical form, is not long, and is not composed. It is clear here that the principle of tanzīh is the most important element built upon aqīdah or usuluddin knowledge, as manifested by al-Ash'arī. Thus, al-Ash'arī's statement indicating the impossibility of Allah SWT's essence resembling any creation is further elaborated by saying:

مَا مَرَّ آيَفًا هُوَ الْبَرُّ هَانُ عَلَى الْوَحْدَةِ بِمَعْنَى عَدَمِ التَّعَدُّدِ فِي الْإِلَهَةِ، لَّ الْوَحْدَةُ بِمَعْنَى عَدَمِ التَّرْكِيبِ فِي الذَّاتِ

Meaning: “What was mentioned in the previous discussion (tanzīh) is clear proof of Allah SWT’s oneness, in the sense of no multiplicity in divinity, not oneness in the sense of no composition (substance) in Allah SWT’s essence” [8].

Among those at the forefront of conveying the aqidah of Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah was also Imām Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, a second-generation student of Imam Abū Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, who authored many books discussing Allah SWT’s glorious attributes not resembling creation, even if such resemblance arose from human intellect. Al-Bāqillānī established his stance by adopting the approach and theology upheld by al-Ash‘arī, stating that the group known as Anthropomorphists (musyabbihah / mujassimah) is one of the causes of the perpetual polemic or unending aqidah issues within Muslim society. The theology presented by al-Bāqillānī emphasizes moderation or a middle manhaj to respond to and provide arguments related to that ideology. This directly demonstrates a consistent scholarly and rational argumentation style practiced between the Mu‘tazilah and Anthropomorphists [3].

The concept of tanzīh was also brought forth by Imām Ḥujjat al-Islām Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 505 H), in his aqidah text, Qawā‘id al-‘Aqā‘id. Al-Ghazālī authored a book with a specific topic dedicated solely to discussing tanzīh. Al-Ghazālī’s clear statement in his aqidah text is:

وَلَّ فِي قَبُولٍ وَأَنَّهُ لَيْسَ بِجِسْمٍ مُّصَوَّرٍ، وَلَ جَوْهَرٍ مَّحْدُودٍ مُّقَدَّرٍ، وَأَنَّهُ لَ يُمَاتِلُ الْأَجْسَامَ، لَ فِي التَّقْدِيرِ
النَّفْسَامِ وَأَنَّهُ لَيْسَ بِجَوْهَرٍ

Meaning: “And indeed, Allah SWT is not a body that can be depicted, nor is He a limited, measured substance, and Allah SWT does not resemble bodies (creation), neither in measurement nor in accepting division of Allah SWT’s essence, because indeed Allah SWT is not a substance (creation)” [5].

And this statement of al-Ghazālī was expounded upon by Abu al-‘Abbās Ahmad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Isa al-Burnusi al-Fāsi al-Zarrūq (d. 899H), in his commentary on the text Qawā‘id al-‘Aqā‘id, Ighthiṇām Fawā‘id fī Sharḥ Qawā‘id al-‘Aqā‘id, explaining that the essence of Allah SWT is not a created body, and not a created substance, because anything composed of more than one essence or more is called a body or substance (creation). An essence that accepts assembly and separation is a characteristic of creation, which is hadith (originated) and created by Allah SWT [6].

Al-Ghazālī also emphasized the aqidah understanding based on the Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah manhaj by further clarifying his stance on the purification of Allah SWT’s essence from resembling any creation. The methodology and approach brought by al-Ghazālī in his work, al-Iqtiṣād fī al-I‘tiqād, is through the introduction of the study of the 20 attributes. In the discussion of Allah SWT’s attribute of mukhalafatuhu li al-ḥawādith (His dissimilarity to created things), al-Ghazālī states that jawhar (substance/creation) is characterized by mutahayyiz, meaning it requires a place or space for a jawhar. The theology and assessment of scholars accept this through sound rational understanding (ta‘aqqul al-‘akal) by stating that all bodies or jawhar (creation) have a place and occupy space [7]. The theology or manhaj presented by al-Ghazālī also shows a clear and moderate aqidah lineage, which is clearly observed by students of knowledge and academic researchers in evaluating the aqidah of Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah [16].

According to Hilmi Marjurit (2018), the same view and explanation regarding the discussion of tajsim were clearly rejected by al-Ghazālī himself in his works, al-Iqtiṣād fī al-I‘tiqād and Qawā‘id al-‘Aqā‘id. Both books clearly state the rejection of tajsim concerning Allah SWT’s essence, attributes, and actions from being likened to creation. Al-Ghazālī’s statement also clearly indicates that the combination of two jawhar forming a jisim (body) can certainly be judged as mutahayyiz (occupying space) and requiring a place [6], [7].

For academic and scholarly studies, tanzīh becomes a topic of extensive discussion, examining every word of the scholars through various usuluddin texts. The core of the discussion that marks a shift in the views and thoughts of Muslim society lies in the understanding of Qur’anic verses or texts that are mutasyābihāt. Taking

understanding directly from sacred texts without consulting the words and explanations of authoritative Usuluddin scholars leads to a literal understanding of Qur'anic verses or the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad SAW becoming common practice, subsequently posing a risk of misinterpretation and deviation from the true meaning. The findings and capacity present in the general public in no way demonstrate intellectual capability in thinking from an Islamic theological perspective, to the extent that they are influenced by the ideological approaches initiated by the musyabbihat or anthropomorphic groups [9].

These groups continuously pursue an agenda and thought that contradicts the Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah manhaj in understanding mutasyābihāt verses. The primary doctrine and principle of anthropomorphic groups is to approach any text or sacred text literally. The conclusions and meanings established without the involvement of any rational arguments lead to a narrow understanding that is easily distorted, because sacred texts are read superficially without examining the linguistic context, mafhum (implied meaning), and interpretive methods developed by authoritative scholars. Such a literal approach also opens the door to interpretations that liken Allah's attributes to creation, which clearly contradicts the principles of tanzīh and tauhid of Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah [3], [9].

Imām Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 H), whose real name was Abū'l-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Jawzī, authored a specific book to refute this ideology and tasybih thought, including tajsīm concerning Allah SWT's essence. According to al-Jawzī in his book, *Daf'u Syubhah at-Tashbīh bi Akkaffī at-Tanzīh*, the understanding of the people of bid'ah (innovation) regarding the names or attributes of Allah SWT literally (zahir) through sacred texts seems to be unaware that some Qur'anic verses and Hadith cannot be understood directly without checking meanings that suggest resemblance of Allah SWT's essence with any hadith (created) attributes. A sound and healthy rational foundation here is the main key to approaching Qur'anic and Hadith texts categorized as mutasyabihat texts [10].

The Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah Approach in Addressing Tajsīm and Tasybih Thought to Preserve Social Cohesion

The Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah approach to confronting tajsīm and tasybih is not merely a dogmatic rejection, but a multi-layered theological strategy aimed at preserving the purity of aqidah and, by extension, social integrity.

This understanding is threatening. The first clear concept is the affirmation of absolute tanzīh for Allah SWT; this is the core principle. Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah firmly states that Allah does not resemble anything of His creation, far from all attributes of imperfection, corporeality, or limitations of space and time, as affirmed in the words of Allah (Surah Asy-Syura: 11), "There is nothing like unto Him." This serves as the main bulwark against tajsīm thought, which literally imagines God having body parts or physical dimensions, a thought that often causes confusion and degrades the divine majesty in the minds of adherents [17].

The impact on faith is severe. Second, Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah offers two main methods in dealing with mutasyabihat verses related to the attributes of God, namely tafwīdh or takwīl mufasssal. Tafwīdh means entrusting the full meaning of the verse to Allah, without attempting to discuss its reality or provide a definitive interpretation. It is a safe path [14].

Meanwhile, takwīl mufasssal involves interpreting the meaning in a way that is befitting of Allah's majesty and does not contradict the principle of tanzīh, such as interpreting 'the Hand of Allah' as 'the Power of Allah' or 'the Mercy of Allah'. Both these approaches, though differing in methodology, are united in their goal of preventing the Ummah from falling into tasybih, which is likening Allah to His creation, an act that carries very dangerous creedal implications. It is an art of interpretation. Third, the emphasis of Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah on the unity of the Ummah is another aspect that cannot be underestimated. Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah scholars consistently urge that differences in interpretation on secondary aqidah issues should not cause major divisions in society. They argue that overly harsh and judgmental theological debates will only create groups that accuse each other, which ultimately undermines the integrity of the Muslim Ummah. This moderate approach is crucial. This is completely different from the tajsīm and tasybih groups, who tend to severely condemn anyone who disagrees with their literal interpretations, often excommunicating or declaring others as innovators, which is the fastest recipe for social and religious anarchy. It burns bridges. Clearly, the ASWJ framework is not just a doctrine; it is a well-established social philosophy. It is a guide for life [15], [20].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, tajsīm and tasybīh thought constitutes a serious theological threat because it corrupts the purity of aqidah and undermines the principle of tanzīh, which is the foundational approach of Ahli Sunnah waJamā‘ah in understanding the attributes of Allah SWT. The tendency to liken Allah to creation not only violates the discipline of usuluddin but also opens the door to extreme, rigid religious understandings that can easily trigger disputes within Muslim society [19].

In the Malaysian context, the spread of this thought through digital media, unauthorized lectures, and religious discourse without scholarly discipline has contributed to creedal confusion and polarization among Muslims. Therefore, the ASWJ manhaj, based on tanzīh, moderation, and balance, serves as the most effective intellectual framework for preserving theological integrity, preventing division, and ensuring the continued harmony and cohesion of Muslim society.

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