

## Attributes of God: Similarities and Differences between Shia, Mu'tazilah, and Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah Schools

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**Abstract:** *The attributes of God remain a cornerstone of Islamic theology, underpinning the epistemological and doctrinal frameworks of its major schools: Shia, Mu'tazilah, and Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah. While all three schools rely on the Qur'an and Hadith as primary sources, their interpretations of divine attributes and their relationship to God's essence reveal distinct philosophical, theological, and spiritual approaches. This study aims to explore these divergences, providing a comparative analysis that bridges classical theological traditions and contemporary discourse. Using a conceptual and comparative methodology, this study analyzes the categorization of God's attributes by these schools. The Shia approach emphasizes symbolic dualism, categorizing attributes into affirmative (Tsubutiyyah) and negational (Salbiyyah) qualities to affirm divine perfection and transcendence. Mu'tazilah, prioritizing strict monotheism (tawhid), reject independent attributes and interpret them metaphorically to maintain God's unity. In contrast, Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah adopt a balanced framework, affirming the reality of God's attributes while maintaining His incomparability through their classification into obligatory, impossible, and permissible categories. The findings highlight the intellectual richness of Islamic theology and its capacity to address both classical and modern challenges. This research argues that theological diversity among these schools not only enriches inter-sectarian discourse but also offers inclusive frameworks to address contemporary ethical and metaphysical issues, such as social justice and interfaith dialogue. By integrating classical and modern perspectives, this study demonstrates the enduring relevance of Islamic theology in contributing to global theological and ethical discussions.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic theology, Shia, Mu'tazilah, Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah, divine attributes, tawhid.*

**Abstrak:** *Sifat-sifat Allah SWT tetap menjadi landasan teologi Islam, yang menopang kerangka epistemologis dan doktrinal dari aliran-aliran utamanya: Syiah, Mu'tazilah, dan*

*Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'ah. Meskipun ketiga aliran tersebut mengandalkan Al-Qur'an dan Hadits sebagai sumber utama, interpretasi mereka terhadap atribut-atribut ilahi dan hubungannya dengan esensi Tuhan menunjukkan pendekatan filosofis, teologis, dan spiritual yang berbeda. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi perbedaan-perbedaan ini, memberikan analisis komparatif yang menjembatani tradisi teologi klasik dan wacana kontemporer. Dengan menggunakan metodologi konseptual dan komparatif, penelitian ini menganalisis kategorisasi atribut-atribut Tuhan menurut aliran-aliran tersebut. Pendekatan Syiah menekankan dualisme simbolik, mengkategorikan atribut ke dalam sifat-sifat afirmatif (Tsubutiyah) dan negatif (Salbiyah) untuk menegaskan kesempurnaan dan transendensi Tuhan. Mu'tazilah, yang memprioritaskan monoteisme yang ketat (tauhid), menolak sifat-sifat yang berdiri sendiri dan menafsirkannya secara metaforis untuk mempertahankan kesatuan Tuhan. Sebaliknya, Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah mengadopsi kerangka kerja yang seimbang, menegaskan realitas sifat-sifat Tuhan sambil mempertahankan ketidakterbandingan-Nya melalui klasifikasi mereka ke dalam kategori wajib, mustahil, dan diizinkan. Temuan ini menyoroti kekayaan intelektual teologi Islam dan kapasitasnya untuk menjawab tantangan klasik dan modern. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa keragaman teologis di antara aliran-aliran ini tidak hanya memperkaya wacana antar-sekte, tetapi juga menawarkan kerangka kerja yang inklusif untuk menjawab isu-isu etika dan metafisika kontemporer, seperti keadilan sosial dan dialog antar-agama. Dengan mengintegrasikan perspektif klasik dan modern, studi ini menunjukkan relevansi teologi Islam yang abadi dalam memberikan kontribusi pada diskusi teologis dan etika global.*

**Kata kunci:** *Teologi Islam, Syiah, Mu'tazilah, Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah, sifat-sifat Allah SWT., tauhid.*

## **Introduction**

The attributes of Allah have been an issue in Islamic theology until now, with some stating that Allah has no attributes but His Substance, others stating that Allah has attributes and His Substance, and others asserting that Allah has attributes different from His creatures. There are even those who equate the nature of Allah to his creatures.

The different views of Islamic theology regarding the attributes of God are recognized by Harun Nasution as whether there is a dispute regarding the issue of God having a nature or not. Attributes in the sense of something that has its own form, in addition to essence. Some schools say that there is, and others say that there is not.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the attributes of Allah, there are those who exaggerate their views because they are based on reason alone; some are sourced from revelation in determining it, and some even negate it. However, all of them agree that Allah is Almighty (*Qudrah*), Allah is Living (*Hayāt*), Allah is Will (*Irādah*), Allah is Knowledgeable (*‘Ilm*), Allah is Speaking (*Kalām*), and so on. All of these indicate the nature of Allah, the Glorious, because Allah

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<sup>1</sup> Harun ; Nasution, *Muhammad Abduh dan Teologi Rasional Mu'tazilah*, 1st ed. (Jakarta: UI Press, 1987), 71.

characterizes them with his glory and majesty. Allah also attributes His creatures to His attributes, but the essence is different from Allah as the Creator and humans as His creatures.

God is good, so his creatures must be good but do not become God because humans are not God but weak and mortal creatures. God also has the power to create the heavens and the earth and everything in them, humans can also create but their creation is limited. Allah also has the will, humans can will, but their will is limited; Allah is All-Hearing and All-Knowing, humans also have hearing and knowledge, but are limited. Allah is all-knowing and all-hearing.

Therefore, Allah describes Himself and his creatures with His attributes, but they are different and limited to His creatures. The attributes of Allah as the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth are true, and the attributes of the creatures are also true, so there is no comparison or compatibility between the attributes of Allah the Creator in accordance with His Essence and the attributes of the creatures in accordance with their weaknesses and limitations. The two attributes are as distinct as the difference between the substance of Allah and that of His creatures.<sup>2</sup>

Allah and His creatures are different, but there are those who equate them, such as the Karamiyah sect whose figure is Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Karam, in which Allah has a very excessive nature because it equates God with creatures and recognizes God has limbs like humans.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Jaham Ibnu Shafwan, as the founder of the Jabariyah sect, states that creatures cannot have the same nature as Allah, and if it happens, it means equating Allah with His creatures. He rejected the state of Allah as All-Living and All-Knowing, but recognized the state of Allah as All-Powerful. Allah acts and creates because creatures do not have power.<sup>4</sup>

This includes Washil ibn Atha who rejected the attributes of God, such as knowledge, qudrat, iradah and hayat because it is impossible for there to be two Gods who are eternal and eternal. Whoever admits the existence of the qadim attribute in Allah's substance then admits the existence of two Gods.<sup>5</sup> The Salaf, on the other hand, follow in the footsteps of Hadith experts and previous Salaf scholars such as Imam Malik ibn Anas and Muqadil ibn

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<sup>2</sup> Syaikh Muhammad Al-Amin Asy-Syinqithi, *Asma dan Sifat Allah (Manhaj wa Dirasat li Ayatil Asma wa Shifat)*, trans. Nur Muhammad Ihsan, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Pustaka Imam As-Syafii, 2022), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Asy-Syahrastani, *Aliran-Aliran Teologi Dalam Sejarah Umat Manusia (Al-Milal wa Nihal)*, trans. Aswadi Syukur (Surabaya: Bina Ilmu, 2005), 95.

<sup>4</sup> Asy-Syahrastani, *Aliran-Aliran Teologi Dalam Sejarah Umat Manusia (Al-Milal wa Nihal)*, 71.

<sup>5</sup> Asy-Syahrastani, *Aliran-Aliran Teologi Dalam Sejarah Umat Manusia (Al-Milal wa Nihal)*, 40.

Sulaiman, who believe in what is stated in the *mutasyabihat* Qur'an and As-Sunnah, but do not interpret them because they believe that Allah is not the same as creatures. Allah is the creator of all creatures and He is the one who governs them. It is not permissible to covet the attributes of Allah because it is possible to interpret a verse to mean something other than what Allah meant and thus fall into misdirection.<sup>6</sup>

The study of God's attributes is central to Islamic theology, forming the epistemological and doctrinal foundations of various existing theological traditions. These attributes, which include God's omnipotence, wisdom, compassion, and justice, become conceptual abstractions and serve as foundational principles in ethics and spiritual practice. The three main schools of Islam—Shia, Mu'tazilah, and Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah—developed different approaches to understanding these traits, resulting in significant similarities and profound differences. This diversity reflects the intellectual property of Islamic thought and the challenge of reconciling divine transcendence with the limitations of human understanding.<sup>7</sup> In Shia theology, divine justice (*'Adl*) and the concept of Imamah are the main focus. God's attributes are important in creating the moral order and human responsibility within the cosmic framework.

In contrast, Mu'tazilah, often called the Islamic rationalists, emphasizes the principle of the oneness of God (*Tawhīd*). Their approach avoids a literal interpretation of God's attributes to avoid anthropomorphism, thus preserving His transcendence.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the

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<sup>6</sup> Asy-Syahrestani, *Aliran-Aliran Teologi Dalam Sejarah Umat Manusia (Al-Milal wa Nihal)*, 88–89.

<sup>7</sup> R. Awang and R. Abdul-Rahim, “Antropomorfisme dalam teologi Islam,” *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah* 7, no. 2 (2017): 129; J. Hoffman and G.S. Rosenkrantz, *The Divine Attributes, The Divine Attrib.*, *The Divine Attributes* (wiley, 2008), <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84948122828&doi=10.1002%2f9780470693438&partnerID=40&md5=fc5b4d6ded6b5d880537d75ba734912b>; J. Liu, M.R. Mahmoudi, and A. Abasalizadeh, “Statistical Analysis about the God’s Traits in Quran,” *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 35, no. 3 (2020): 615; M. Wahba, “The Concept of the Good in Islamic Philosophy,” in *A Companion to World Philos.* (Wiley Blackwell, 2008), 484, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85051925324&doi=10.1002%2f9781405164566.ch36&partnerID=40&md5=ccd2bd45c10bc5b6eeb014b44bf7a558>.

<sup>8</sup> A.Y. Alkhalafi, “Abū Al-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf on Divine Simplicity,” in *The Attributes of God in Islamic Thought: Contemplating Allah* (Taylor and Francis, 2024), 93–106, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85201876257&doi=10.4324%2f9781003438106-7&partnerID=40&md5=3c22732e8b856e9c93d24a7e6305ef3b>; N. El-Bizri, “God: Essence and Attributes,” in *The Camb. Companion to: Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 121–140, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84883265237&doi=10.1017%2fCCOL9780521780582.007&partnerID=40&md5=1cb3d48d6712447a9d4c9e55e35076c1>; A. Dodds, “How Do Conceptions of Allah’s Being in Islam Compare with Those of God’s Being in Christianity?,” *Evangelical Quarterly: An International Review of Bible and Theology* 90, no. 1 (2019): 38.

Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'ah, especially through the Ash'ari and Maturidi traditions, seeks to balance the affirmation of God's attributes and the doctrine of His inequality (*Tanzīh*).<sup>9</sup>

A dynamic environment of philosophical, ethical, and legal discourse enriches this evolution of theological interpretation. Figures such as Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf in Mu'tazilah, al-Ash'ari, and al-Maturidi in the Sunni tradition, as well as prominent Shia scholars, have made great contributions to Islam's understanding of God's nature and its impact on social norms and human actions.<sup>10</sup> Modern studies continue to investigate this classical position, offering new perspectives on how God's attributes intersect with contemporary issues such as morality, social agency, and metaphysics.<sup>11</sup>

Contemporary theological analysis has also integrated a cross-disciplinary approach to connect classical thought about God's attributes with modern discourse. For example, statistical research on God's attributes in the Qur'an reveals an analytical approach to sacred texts.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, philosophical perspectives on the essence and nature of God are also constantly evolving, as reflected in the works of Wahba and El-Bizri.<sup>13</sup> For example,

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<sup>9</sup> A. Brodersen, "Nūr Al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī and the Divine Attributes: Māturīdī Kalām in a Nutshell," in *The Attributes of God in Islamic Thought: Contemplating Allah* (Taylor and Francis, 2024), 130, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85201904040&doi=10.4324%2f9781003438106-9&partnerID=40&md5=43ed0087c6ef7e47c8d74cc7e1c8932d>; M.H. Kamarzaman et al., "Translation of al-luma' and discussion of ru'yah allah according to al-ash'ari," *Afkar* 22, no. 1 (2020): 1; H. Topal and E. Baş, "Risāl of Sheikh Hāmid Kirimī Named "Tafsīru Āyah 'Al-Rahmānu 'Ala'l-'Arshi'shawā," *Hitit Theology Journal* 20, no. 1 (2021): 195.

<sup>10</sup> Alkhelaifi, "Abū Al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf on Divine Simplicity"; A. Dhanani, "Is There an Elephant in Our Presence That We Cannot See?: A Deep Dive into Bahshamiyya Attributes Discourses," in *The Attributes of God in Islamic Thought: Contemplating Allah* (Taylor and Francis, 2024), 152, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85201870233&doi=10.4324%2f9781003438106-10&partnerID=40&md5=1dbbaa0e68857c7ea5a0397a3fb870e>; N. Spannaus, "Ṣihāb Al-Dīn al-Margānī on the Divine Attributes: A Study in Kalām in the 19th Century," *Arabica* 62, no. 1 (2015): 74.

<sup>11</sup> F. Alshehri, S. Kauser, and M. Fotaki, "Muslims' View of God as a Predictor of Ethical Behaviour in Organisations: Scale Development and Validation," *Journal of Business Ethics* 158, no. 4 (2019): 1009; M.F. Arslan, "A Better Argument for Tawhīd?: Philosophical Discussions of Divine Attributes in the Sharḥ Al-'aqāid Tradition," *Sophia* (2024), <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85196524230&doi=10.1007%2fs11841-024-01018-w&partnerID=40&md5=8765c48e571d5d40f9745fcc6cd6abeb>; I. Lindstedt, "'The Scripture Is an Instantiation of Divine Discourse' Mullā Sadrā's Notions on God's Speech (Kalām Allāh) and the Koran," *Studia Islamica* 119, no. 1 (2024): 97.

<sup>12</sup> Liu, Mahmoudi, and Abasalizadeh, "Statistical Analysis about the God's Traits in Quran," 615.

<sup>13</sup> Wahba, "The Concept of the Good in Islamic Philosophy"; Arslan, "A Better Argument for Tawhīd?: Philosophical Discussions of Divine Attributes in the Sharḥ Al-'aqāid Tradition"; J.P. Deetlefs, "Divine Attributes in a Trinitarian Key," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022), <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85139822786&doi=10.4102%2fve.v43i1.2665&partnerID=40&md5=a2fcf769de97b3d5ef5fd517eff410fa>; M. Khalilzand, *The Attributes of God in Islamic Thought: Contemplating Allah, The Attributes of God in Islamic Thought: Contemplating Allah*, The Attributes of God in Islamic Thought: Contemplating Allah (Taylor and Francis, 2024), <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85201907892&doi=10.4324%2f9781003438106&partnerID=40&md5=2a427eac42cbf829a7ee3b8adb8c3a75>.

statistical research on God's attributes in the Qur'an reveals an analytical approach to sacred texts.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, this study aims to identify and explain the similarities and differences in conceptualizing God's attributes among these schools. In addition, the study aims to explore the relevance of classical theological debates in answering modern ethical and existential challenges and highlight the importance of classical Islamic theology as a dynamic resource for contemporary discourse and interfaith dialogue.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Shia on the Attributes of Allah**

The nature of Allah is included in the discussion of *At-Tauhid* as the first Shia pillar of faith regarding belief in the Oneness of Allah because Allah is one and has no partner in the creation of the world. Allah is the executor of all the affairs of this world and apart from Him there is no creator and giver. So, all things from the great to the small are the creation of Allah. In His creation, He needs no help.<sup>15</sup>

Allah's creation is perfect and greatest because the perfection and doubtlessness of Allah's attributes belong to Himself as the possessor of all the attributes of perfection and show Himself to be free from all deficiencies. Besides, Allah is absolutely free from any need and is able to fulfill all the needs of anyone in need.<sup>16</sup>

Allah has the greatest attributes and names because Allah is the All-Living, All-Knowing, All-Seeing, All-Hearing, All-Powerful, All-Creator, All-Powerful, All-Willing and so on. All of these are attributes of Allah, the Highest, who has the nature of perfection and His Most Sacred Essence is free from all deficiencies. If He had a deficiency, He would have a need, so there must be a God who is greater than Him.<sup>17</sup>

Allah's Attributes and Substance are not separate from each other because the monotheism of His Substance is to deny the existence of anything like Allah, while the monotheism of Attributes is to deny the existence of plurality in His Substance. Allah has everything that indicates perfection, might, and beauty, but His attributes have no aspect that

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<sup>14</sup> Liu, Mahmoudi, and Abasalizadeh, "Statistical Analysis about the God's Traits in Quran," 615.

<sup>15</sup> Ibrahim Amini, *Homed Bayat Bedonand (Semua Perlu Tahu)*, trans. Faruq Dhiya (Jakarta: Al-Huda, 2006), 55.

<sup>16</sup> Allamah Sayyid Muhammadiyah Husain Thabathabai, *Inilah Islam Upaya Memahami Seluruh Konsep Islam Secara Mudah (Islamic Teachings An Overview)*, trans. Ahsin Mohammad (Jakarta: Pustaka Hidayah, 1992), 59.

<sup>17</sup> Murtadha Muthahhari and Ilyas Haasan, *Manusia dan Alam Semesta (Man and Universe)*, 2nd ed. (Jakarta: Lentera Basritama, 2002), 64.

is completely separate from Him. Therefore, the attributes of Allah as a whole are divided into two parts, namely the attributes of *tsubutiah* or *jamal* and the attributes of *salbiyah* or *jalal* according to the Shia.<sup>18</sup>

*First*, the Attribute of *Tsubutiah* or *Jamal* is indicative of Allah's attributes of perfection (*kamaliah*), majesty (*jamaliah*) and all of them are permanent (*tsabit*) for His substance. The perfection and majesty of Allah's attributes, such as *qudrah*, knowledge, life, *iradah*, *bashar*, *sama'*, *qadim*, *kalam*.<sup>19</sup> *Secondly*, the attributes of *Salbiyah* or *Jalal* are the attributes of Allah that have no flaws and blemishes because Allah is a perfect substance and has no flaws and blemishes at all. Any attribute that is a shortcoming for Allah must be denied from Allah.<sup>20</sup>

### **Mu'tazilah on the Attributes of God**

The nature of God is part of the discussion of *At-Tauhid* as the first pillar of the Mu'tazilah faith regarding belief in the Oneness of God which is pure and clean away from similarities with His creatures so that the Mu'tazilah negates the attributes of God, namely the attributes that have their own form outside the substance of God. Not knowing the existence of God's attributes that are counted and can become partners with Him.

The Mu'tazilah did not recognize the existence of God's attributes because they saw some of what other groups called God's essence and some others as God's deeds so that the Mu'tazilah wanted to keep the purity of God's Oneness holy and remain One. God is attributed with *ahad*, meaning that God is the only one and there is no one like Him, a Substance that has properties like this cannot but be *qadim*.<sup>21</sup>

All that is described does not mean that God is not given properties by Mu'tazilah, God for them remains Omniscient, Omnipotent, Living, Hearing, Seeing and so on. But all of that, cannot be separated by His substance because those attributes are the essence of God.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, according to theme there are three parts regarding God's attributes.

*First*, the attributes that constitute God's essence or *zatihah* are inseparable from His substance. God is omnipotent and capable of realizing actions without hindrance. God is

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<sup>18</sup> Muthahhari and Haasan, *Manusia dan Alam Semesta (Man and Universe)*, 71; Amini, *Homed Bayat Bedonand (Semua Perlu Tahu)*, 34–35; Muhammad Ridha al-Muzhaffar, *Ideologi Syiah Imamiyah*, trans. M. Ridha Assegaf (Pekalongan: al-Muammal, 2005), 28–31.

<sup>19</sup> Amini, *Homed Bayat Bedonand (Semua Perlu Tahu)*, 28–31; al-Muzhaffar, *Ideologi Syiah Imamiyah*, 28–29.

<sup>20</sup> Amini, *Homed Bayat Bedonand (Semua Perlu Tahu)*, 46.

<sup>21</sup> Ya'kub Matondang, *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Kalam Menurut Al-Qadhi Abdul Jabbar* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1989), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam Aliran Sejarah Analisa Perbandingan* (Jakarta: UI Press, 2015), 54.

powerful because of His substance, not because of an 'illah or changing cause.<sup>23</sup> In fact, He is powerful over things that have not yet happened and things that will happen. Allah is *qadim* because of the attributes specific to His substance, Allah is omniscient by His substance, Allah is omnipresent by His substance, Allah is omnipotent by His substance.<sup>24</sup>

This means that there is no attribute but only His substance because Wasil ibn Atha rejected the existence of Allah's attributes such as *'ilm*, *qudrah*, *iradah* and *hayah*. According to Washil, If a person admits that there is a substance of Allah and an attribute of Allah, then he believes that there are two Gods.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the attributes that exist in the Qur'an are interpreted as names for Allah and not attributes. Because they deny the attribute of speech for Allah, they deny that Allah speaks as explained in Q.S. An-Nisa (4): 163.<sup>26</sup>

*Second*, the attributes that are God's actions or fi'liyah attributes are God's actions that have a relationship between God and His creatures, such as the will (*iradah*), the word (*kalam*), justice (*al-'adl*) and so on. God does justice and does not do wrong because God is good, God does not do bad and God does not lie. Therefore, the Mu'tazilah say that it is obligatory for God to bring good, even the best for humans.<sup>27</sup>

*Third*, the attributes that are God's form or physical attributes are a description of the existence of physical attributes for God because in the Qur'an there are verses that indicate material *jism* (bodies), such as *wajhun* (face), *yadun* (hands), *ainun* (eyes), *'arsh*. All these words, according to Al-Qadhi Abdul Jabbar that there are some properties that are the same between the creature and God, but the similarity is only in the name while the essence is clearly different. Therefore, it is necessary to interpret the verses metaphorically, if understood according to the external meaning, the assumption will arise that God is a material body (*jism*) in which case it is impossible.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, God has a face, eyes, hands, God is on the *'arsh*, and God comes. All verses that indicate God's physical attributes are not the same as His creatures, so it is necessary to interpret the verse, such as *yamin* or right hand in Surah Al-Zumar (39): 7, interpreted with strength and power. *A'yun* or eye in Surah At-Thur (52): 48, interpreted with observation

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<sup>23</sup> Matondang, *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Kalam Menurut Al-Qadhi Abdul Jabbar*, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Asy-Syahrastani, *Aliran-Aliran Teologi Dalam Sejarah Umat Manusia (Al-Milal wa Nihal)*, 38.

<sup>25</sup> Asy-Syahrastani, *Aliran-Aliran Teologi Dalam Sejarah Umat Manusia (Al-Milal wa Nihal)*, 40.

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Abu Zahrah, *Sejarah Aliran-Aliran Dalam Islam Bidang Politik Dan Aqidah (Tārikh al-Mazāhib al-Islāmiyyah Fī al-Siyāsah Wa al-Aqā'id)*, trans. Shobahussurur, 1st ed. (Ponorogo: Trimurti, 1991), 172.

<sup>27</sup> Nasution, *Teologi Islam Aliran Sejarah Analisa Perbandingan*, 54–55.

<sup>28</sup> Matondang, *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Kalam Menurut Al-Qadhi Abdul Jabbar*, 26.

and knowledge, *yad* (hand) in Surah Al-Isra (17): 29, interpreted with the prohibition of miserliness and waste and invites to do good. *Wajhu* in Surah Al-Qashash (28): 88, is interpreted as the substance of Allah. Including *wajhu* in Surah Ar-Rahman (55): 27, interpreted not as the face of God but the substance of God, '*Arsh* in Surah Thaha (20): 5, interpreted with God controls and determines the '*arsh* because the '*arsh* is God's creation and *istawa*' in Surah Ar-Rahman (55): 27, is interpreted as ruling and determining.<sup>29</sup>

### **Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'ah on the Attributes of Allah**

The attributes of Allah are included in the discussion of the pillars of faith of Ahlu Sunnah Wal jama'ah, the first of which is faith in Allah because Allah created the heavens and the earth and their contents. Allah also made human beings, both male and female and made them in pairs so that they have offspring and happiness. Allah also made other creatures and made various objects and plants. All of this is proof that Allah is the Almighty and the Most Willing.

Allah's Power and Will are infinite, perfect and glorious because Allah is the Perfect Substance, the Holy Substance and the High Substance. Allah is the All-Living, All-Powerful and Mighty. Allah knows no limitations and weaknesses, is sleepless, never sleeps and is not touched by mortality or death. Allah knows all forms of knowledge because it all comes from Him. Allah wills everything that exists, organizes all events and nothing will happen in nature, whether big or small, many or few, good or bad, harm or benefit, believer or disbeliever but based on His *qadha*' and *qadar*.<sup>30</sup>

Allah is the All-Hearing and All-Seeing and nothing escapes His hearing and sight, even if it is hidden, but it does not escape His sight and hearing. Allah is the One Who speaks, commands, forbids, and makes with His Word, which is *qadim*, *azali* and independent. His Word is not similar to the language of His creatures, not in the form of letters that are cut off due to oral movements. Allah also spoke to the Prophets and Messengers through the Torah, Zabur, Injil and Qur'an. All these Books were revealed to Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad. As the Qur'an is a Book that can be recited orally,

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<sup>29</sup> Matondang, *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Kalam Menurut Al-Qadhi Abdul Jabbar*, 27–31.

<sup>30</sup> Imam al-Ghazali, *Transendensi Ilahi Dasar-Dasar Aqidah dan Bahaya Sophisme (Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id fī Tawhīd al-Madnūn alā Ghair Ahlih Iljam al-Awwam an-Ilmi al-Kalam)*, trans. Masyhur Abadi (Surabaya: Pustaka Progressif, 1999), 26–27.

written in the form of a *mushaf* and preserved in the heart and is *qadim* which stands with His Substance.<sup>31</sup>

From the expression above, Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah agree that Allah has properties and His substance that cannot be separated. Iman Al-Ash'ari established the existence of the attributes found in the Qur'an and Sunnah. It stipulates that these attributes are compatible with Allah's substance but do not resemble the attributes of creatures. His hearing is not like the hearing of creatures, His sight is not like the sight of creatures and His speech is not like the speech of creatures.

Likewise, Imam Al-Baqillani revealed that God has properties, both the nature of the substance and the nature of the *fi'il*. Substance properties are the properties of God which are identified with the properties of *al-Hayat* (Life), *al-'Ilm* (knowledge), *al-Qudrah* (power), *al-Sama'* (Hearing), *al-Başar* (seeing), *al-Irādah* (willing), *al-Baqā'* (eternal), *al-Ridha'* (reliance), *al-Ghaḍab* (anger), *al-Idārah* (Watching). While the nature of *fi'il* is the properties of God that can be felt by his creatures, namely *al-Khāliq* (creator), *al-Rāziq* (giver of sustenance), *al-Ādil* (giver of Fair), *al-Iḥsān* (giver of Good), *al-Tafaḍul* (Giver of advantages), *al-In'ām* (giver of favors), *al-Shawāb* (giver of rewards), *al-Hashir* (gathering people on the day of *Mahshar*), *al-Bā'its* (raising people from the grave).<sup>32</sup>

Including, Imam Al-Juwaini with Iman Asy-Ash'ari and Imam Al-Baqillani agreed that Allah has properties, but in the distribution of the properties of Allah is different, he divides what is obligatory, impossible and permissible for Allah *First*: What is obligatory for Allah is the nafsiyah properties or ma'nawiyah properties, such as *wujud*, *qidam*, *baq'a*, *mukhalafah li al-Hawadits*, *al-qiyam bi al-Nafsi* and *wahdaniyah*. While the nature of *subutiyyah* or *ma'nawiyah*, such as the nature of power, will, knowing, life, speaking, hearing and seeing. *Second*: What is impossible for God is material or physical, so what is pleased with God's hands, face, eyes, and feet is God's power. God does not have a body, although it is not the same as the physical bodies of creatures, because the body is composed of substance and accident. Human beings rely on their limbs and are weak, whereas God, without limbs, is still all-powerful. (What is permissible with God is to see Him with one's

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<sup>31</sup> al-Ghazali, *Transendensi Ilahi Dasar-Dasar Aqidah dan Bahaya Sophisme (Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id fī Tawhīd al-Madnūn alā Ghair Ahlih Iljam al-Awwam an-Ilmi al-Kalam)*, 28–29.

<sup>32</sup> Nor Iskandar Al-Barsany, *Biografi dan Garis Besar Pemikiran Kalam Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah*, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Srigunting, 2001), 30--31.

own eyes in the Hereafter, and the nature of His actions depends on whether God wants to act or not.<sup>33</sup>

Then Muhammad Al-Amin Asy-Syinqithi determines the nature of Allah there are six parts, namely (1) *Nafsiah* is an attribute that shows the substance itself not to others, the mandatory properties included in the *nafsiah* nature are only one, namely the nature of *existence*, (2) *Ma'any* is an attribute that shows the meaning of the existence that exists in the substance. The seven of *ma'any* are *qudrah, iradah, ilmu, hayat, sama', bashar and kalam*, (3) *Salbiyah* are attributes that indicate nothingness alone. The five *Salbiyah* are *qidam, baqa', mukhalafah lil hawadits, wahdaniyah, qayamuhu bi nafsih*, (4) *Ma'nawiyah* are properties that show to accompany *ma'any*. The seven *ma'nawiyah* are *kaunuhu qadiran, murudan, aliman, hayyan, sami'an, bashiran and mutakkalliman*, (5) *Fi'liyah* is properties that the Qur'an determines for *al-khaliq* and for creatures and there is no doubt that the properties possessed by *al-Khaliq* are different from the properties possessed by creatures, and (6) *Jami'ah* is *al-'uluww* (high) *al-idzam* (majesty), *al-kabir* (greatness), *al-mulk* (power), *at-takabbur* (pride), *al-jabarut* (arrogance), *al-'izzah* (majesty), and *al-quwwah* (strength).<sup>34</sup>

The six attributes are summarized into three parts by Syahminan Zaini and Muhyidin Abdusshomad, which corresponds to Imam Al-Juwaini's division, namely the obligatory attributes for Allah, the impossible attributes for Allah and the *zaid* attributes for Allah. These three attributes will be explained in detail as follows.

*First*, the obligatory attributes of Allah are the attributes of *nafsiah, salbiyah, ma'any* and *ma'nawiyah*. *Secondly*, the Impossible Attributes for Allah are the characteristics that are opposite to the obligatory characteristics for Allah. Anything that reflects a lack of attributes is impossible for Allah. *Thirdly*, the attribute of *Jaiz* for Allah is that Allah can do something or not do something. Doing something or not doing something is the full authority of Allah. Therefore, the initiation of the *jaiz* attribute of Allah is that Allah is free and free to do what He wants, Allah is not bound by any obligations and prohibitions because everything belongs to Allah "*Say, all is from Allah*" (QS. An-Nisa (4): 78).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Tsuruya Kiswati, *Al-Juwaini Peletak Dasar Teologi Rasional Dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2005), 71–116.

<sup>34</sup> Asy-Syinqithi, *Asma dan Sifat Allah (Manhaj wa Dirasat li Ayatil Asma wa Shifat)*, 35–50.

<sup>35</sup> Syaminan Zaini, *Pedoman Aqidah Islam* (Bekasi: Pustaka Darul Ilmi, 2006), 92–102; Muhyiddin Abdusshomad, *Ngaji Tauhid Manhaj Imam Al-Asy'ari* (Surabaya: Muara Progressif, 2002), 26–62.

## **A Comparative Study Between Shia, Mu'tazilah and Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah Regarding the Attributes of Allah**

The discourse on the attributes of Allah is a fundamental aspect of Islamic theology that reflects an attempt to understand His oneness and transcendence. In the Islamic tradition, the differences in views on the attributes of Allah among the Shia, Mu'tazilah, and Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah schools reflect a rich intellectual dynamic. Although all three share a foundation in the Qur'an and Hadith, their approach to the division of attributes and the relationship between the nature and substance of Allah reveals significant differences.

### **Similarities in Understanding God's Attributes**

All schools agree that Allah has the attributes of perfection derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. For example, attributes such as the Almighty, Omniscient, and Eternal are considered universal among madhhabs, as affirmed in QS. As-Sāffāt [37]:180: "Most Holy is your Lord, the Mightiest God of what they characterize." This agreement affirms that these attributes reflect the oneness of God that is not limited by human nature.

However, differences arise in understanding the relationship between God's nature and substance. Mu'tazilah, for example, rejects the existence of independent natures, arguing that attributes such as knowledge and *qudrah* are an inherent part of God's substance, not a stand-alone entity.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, Shia and Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah accept the existence of Allah's attributes as different entities but still do not resemble creatures.<sup>37</sup>

### **Differences in the Division of God's Attributes**

Shia, with its symbolic and philosophical approach, divides the attributes of Allah into two main categories: *Tsubutiyah (Jamal)*, affirmative attributes such as *science* and *life*, and *Salbiyah (Jalal)*, negation attributes such as *baqa'* and *qidam*. As explained by Khalilizand,<sup>38</sup> this approach aims to emphasize God's perfection while maintaining His transcendence from all flaws. The Shia-initiated approach offers a framework for deep spiritual reflection, with symbolism allowing a more esoteric understanding of God's transcendence.<sup>39</sup> It is relevant for communities that prioritize an intimate spiritual relationship with God.

Mu'tazilah, with its rationalistic perspective, adopts a tripartite approach in dividing the attributes of Allah: *Zatihah* (essential), inherent qualities such as *qudrah* and *knowledge*;

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<sup>36</sup> Awang and Abdul-Rahim, "Anthropomorphism in Islamic theology," 129.

<sup>37</sup> Alkhalaiifi, "Abū Al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf on Divine Simplicity."

<sup>38</sup> Khalilizand, *The Attributes of God in Islamic Thought: Contemplating Allah*.

<sup>39</sup> Lindstedt, "'The Scripture Is an Instantiation of Divine Discourse' Mullā Sadrā's Notions on God's Speech (Kalām Allāh) and the Koran," 97.

*Fi'liyah* (action), a trait that describes God's actions such as creating; and *Jismiah* (physical), which is interpreted metaphorically to avoid anthropomorphism.<sup>40</sup> For example, the term "*wajhun*" (face) in the Qur'an is interpreted as a symbol of the substance of Allah, not the physical aspect.<sup>41</sup> The approach of Mu'tazilah, with its emphasis on logic, appeals to those who approach theology through the lens of philosophy. This approach seems to align with the principle of monotheism because it rejects the dualism between the nature and substance of Allah.<sup>42</sup>

Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'ah divides the attributes of Allah into three categories: *al-wājib*, such as the nature of *existence* and *knowledge*; *al-mustahīl*, such as weakness or ignorance; and *al-jā'iz*, such as God's freedom to act according to His will.<sup>43</sup> This approach integrates the literality of the Qur'an text with the principle of transcendence, allowing for flexibility of interpretation without sacrificing faith. The Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'ah approach reflects a balance between literality and transcendence, making it a more inclusive approach and suitable for traditional communities. This approach provides theological stability in daily religious practice by preserving the reality of God's attributes without anthropomorphism.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, the similarities and differences in understanding the attributes of Allah reflect the intellectual property of the Islamic tradition. These three approaches offer deep theological insights and significantly contribute to inter-sectarian and interfaith dialogue. As stated by Ranganathan, this diversity enriches academic discourse while strengthening the people's understanding of the oneness of God.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

This study underscores the dynamic interplay of understanding God's attributes among the three major Islamic schools of thought—Shia, Mu'tazilah, and Ahlu Sunnah Wal

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<sup>40</sup> S.Z. Chowdhury, "God, Gluts and Gaps: Examining an Islamic Traditionalist Case for a Contradictory Theology," *History and Philosophy of Logic* 42, no. 1 (2021): 17.

<sup>41</sup> Awang and Abdul-Rahim, "Anthropomorphism in Islamic theology," 129.

<sup>42</sup> Arslan, "A Better Argument for Tawhīd?: Philosophical Discussions of Divine Attributes in the Sharh Al-'aqāid Tradition."

<sup>43</sup> Brodersen, "Nūr Al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī and the Divine Attributes: Mātūrīdī Kalām in a Nutshell."

<sup>44</sup> Spannaus, "Ṣihāb Al-Dīn al-Marḡānī on the Divine Attributes: A Study in Kalām in the 19th Century," 74.

<sup>45</sup> B. Ranganathan, "Normativity and Solidarity," in *Religion and Soc. Criticism: Tradition, Method, and Values* (Springer Nature, 2024), 251–274, [https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85204515353&doi=10.1007%2f978-3-031-48659-3\\_11&partnerID=40&md5=be63090b3da0fda27271edfd99240063](https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85204515353&doi=10.1007%2f978-3-031-48659-3_11&partnerID=40&md5=be63090b3da0fda27271edfd99240063).

Jama'ah—reflecting a confluence of philosophical, theological, and spiritual approaches. While all three share foundational reliance on the Qur'an and Hadith, their methodologies in categorizing divine attributes and conceptualizing the relationship between God's essence and attributes reveal marked distinctions.

Broadly, these schools agree on the perfection of God's attributes, such as omnipotence, omniscience, and eternity. However, Mu'tazilah reject the notion of independent attributes to preserve the purity of divine oneness (*tawhīd*), whereas Shia and Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah affirm the existence of such attributes within a framework of transcendence that avoids anthropomorphism. The Shia approach, characterized by symbolic dualism, emphasizes affirmative (*Tsubutiyyah*) and negational (*Salbiyyah*) attributes to foster spiritual reflection. In contrast, Mu'tazilah advocate for logical consistency by interpreting God's attributes metaphorically. Meanwhile, Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah harmonize textual literalism with transcendence, classifying attributes into obligatory, impossible, and permissible categories, thereby balancing doctrinal precision with practical application.

The diversity of these approaches exemplifies the intellectual richness of Islamic tradition, capable of addressing complex theological and philosophical challenges in both classical and modern contexts. Beyond enriching inter-sectarian discourse, this study demonstrates that integrating classical theological frameworks offers inclusive solutions to contemporary moral and metaphysical dilemmas, including issues of social justice and interfaith dialogue.

This study is primarily theoretical and does not delve into the practical implications of differing understandings of God's attributes on religious practices or social dynamics within contemporary Muslim communities. Additionally, a broader interdisciplinary approach could further enhance the connection between classical theological thought and modern challenges. This research enriches Islamic theological literature by providing an in-depth comparative analysis of the attributes of God among Shia, Mu'tazilah, and Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah. By highlighting the relevance of classical thought in addressing contemporary issues, the study offers a conceptual framework that underscores theological diversity as a strength in tackling global challenges such as social justice and interfaith dialogue.

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