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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## The Concept of Al-Kasb Theory in Islamic Theology: A Critical Analysis from Quranic Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

This article discusses the development of the al-Asy'ary method of thought as one of the sects in the Alhusunnah Wal Jama'ah movement, which is a form of rejection of the Mu'tazilah group. The kasb used by al-Asy'ary implies that something arises from the receiver of kasb (al-muktasib) through the created power, and the creator of that power is God himself. Iktisab, on the other hand, is something that happens through the created power, thus making the acquisition or kasb for the person whose action arises with the help of that power. Al-Asy'ary tried to clarify this theory by presenting a division of movement (al-harakah) where every human being has two different types of movement. The first is an involuntary movement that cannot be avoided (al-harakah al idhtirariyyah), which comes from outside human will. The second is voluntary movement (al-hirakah al iradiyyah), which arises based on the efforts made by humans. The core issue of al-Asy'ary's kasb theory is actually found in the first verse mentioned above, namely in QS al-Shaffat/37:96: "Allah is the one who created you and what you do." If we look at the previous verse (munasbat ayat), it relates to the expression of Prophet Ibrahim's (as a sign of his disapproval) towards his people who worshipped the idols they made themselves. Meanwhile, his thought, specifically in the kasb theory, can be seen that humans acquire their actions created by God when they desire to do something.

### KEYWORDS

Al-Asy'ary method, Kasb theory, Iktisab, Involuntary movement, Voluntary movement, Quranic analysis

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### 1. Introduction

The theory of kasb is one of the theories in Islamic thought developed by the al-Asy'ariyah sect. Kasb literally means "acquisition" or "achievement". (Madjid, 1992; Nadiran, 2015) In the context of al-Asy'ariyah thought, the theory of kasb refers to the view that humans have the ability to achieve certain actions through their own effort and endeavor, but all of these actions remain under the power of Allah as the creator and controller of everything. (Adnin & Zein, 2020; Samad, 2019) Thus, this theory acknowledges human freedom to perform actions but also emphasizes that all results or achievements from those actions ultimately come from the will and power of Allah. The theory of kasb plays an important role in guiding human practice and actions in daily life by considering moral and religious aspects. (Nadiran, 2015; Supriadin, 2014)

The theory of kasb is an important concept in the thought of al-Asy'ari, a significant figure in the history of Islamic thought. This theory teaches that humans are responsible for their actions and deeds because they acquire them through their own will and effort, not solely because of divine destiny or determinism. (Arrosikh, 1997; Sumanto, 2016) The theory of kasb is al-Asy'ari's response to the Mu'tazilah's belief that human actions are determined solely by Allah's destiny. According to al-Asy'ari, this belief contradicts Islamic teachings, which teach that humans have free will in choosing their actions. (Al-Asy'ari, 1955)

Al-Asy'ari's thoughts on kasb became very important in the history of Islamic thought, as it was later adopted by the Alhusunnah Wal Jama'ah as one of the pillars of their thinking. However, the theory of kasb also sparked controversy among Islamic theologians,

some of whom rejected the theory and considered it to be in conflict with Islamic teachings that advocate the existence of divine destiny.

The urgency of this writing lies in its scholarly and practical importance. The former is related to a reassessment of the development of al-Asy'ary's thinking method, while the latter fulfills the need for information on the theory of kasb al-Asy'ary, which is widely embraced by the Alhusunnah Wal Jama'ah school and is considered by certain circles as a part of the root of the decline of the Islamic community today.

## **2. Literature Review**

Abu Hasan al-Asy'ari, also referred to in this text as al-Asy'ari with his full name Ali bin Ismail bin Abi Basyar Ishaq bin Salim bin Abdillah bin Musa bin Bilal bin Abi Barda bin Abdillah Abu Musa al-Asy'ary (Ali Mustafa al-Ghuraby, 1988) was born in Basra in the year 260 Hijri and died in Baghdad at the age of 63, in the year 323 Hijri. (Sulaeman & Almisri, 2023)

Regarding his education, in the field of hadith, Abu Hasan al-Asy'ari studied more in Baghdad under Zakariyah bin Yahya al-Sa'jji Abu Khalifah al-Jamahy and Sahl bin Sarh (Harun Nasution, 1986). While in theology, he learned from al-Jubba'i, one of the idols of the Mu'tazilah, since the beginning of his theological pursuit. (Dja'far, 2014)

The relationship between al-Asy'ari and his teacher al-Jubba'i was not only that of a teacher and student but also of kinship because al-Asy'ari was the stepson of al-Jubba'i. His journey in the world of theology as a former figure in theology (Mu'tazilah) resulted in a method of thinking in producing ideas, especially in the field of theology. (Adnin & Zein, 2020; Hadariansyah, 2009; Hasyim, 2005) Initially, al-Asy'ari was a follower of the Mu'tazilah doctrine and had studied under the Mu'tazilah figure Abu al-Aliy al-Jubba'i. Due to his fluency and eloquence in debates, he gained the trust of his teacher to face opponents of the Mu'tazilah in debates. However, later on, al-Asy'ari left the Mu'tazilah because he felt that there were many erroneous things in his thinking that contradicted the I'tiqad and beliefs of the Prophet Muhammad.

The interaction between the teacher and the chosen student lasted quite a long time, as al-Asy'ari was selected as a student because of his intelligence and sharp analytical skills. In addition, al-Asy'ari had a family relationship with al-Jubba'i, and their relationship lasted for about 40 years. (Amin, 1966) Although their relationship was good, it did not mean that their thoughts were always in line or in agreement with the teachings given by al-Jubba'i. Even in their dialogues, they often criticized each other's opinions and explanations. This can be seen in a meeting between al-Asy'ari and al-Jubba'i when explaining about three people in the eyes of Allah, namely obedient people, unbelievers, and children. If they die in such a state, then the obedient will be placed in heaven, the unbelievers will be placed in hell, and the child will not be rewarded and will be punished. (Latif, 2013; Siraj, 2013)

The debate that led al-Asy'ari to leave the Mu'tazilah did not provide much information about the specific cause that prompted him to turn away from the Mu'tazilah. If it was only because al-Jubba'i was silent and could not answer al-Asy'ari's question, then this was a common occurrence between a teacher and a student. Therefore, al-Asy'ari did not have to leave the doctrine he had embraced for years just because he did not get an answer from his teacher, which could have been provided by al-Jubba'i at a later time.

Another cause suggested by many historians, such as al-Subhi ibn Asakir, is that one night al-Asy'ary had a dream in which Prophet Muhammad visited him and told him that the true adherents of hadith were correct and the Mu'tazilah were wrong. While this argument may seem apologetic and unsatisfying, even Ahmad Amin acknowledged that the reason for al-Asy'ary's turn away from the Mu'tazilah was due to a dream that could not provide certainty. Arguments put forth through various events that led to al-Asy'ary's departure from the Mu'tazilah appear to have many differences, not only in the psychological approach but also in the belief approach. Ibn Asakir's argument seems very difficult to observe and is subjective. However, looking at the social and political situation at that time, it appears that the Mu'tazilah were no longer worthy of survival. This was because the Abbasid caliphate's "al-Mutawakkil" as the current government was increasingly fading with the cancellation of the Mu'tazilah as a theology school that was accepted by the State at that time (Harun Nasution, 1986).

Ahmad Amin described the turning point of al-Asy'ary from the Mu'tazilah as follows: one day, he climbed onto the pulpit in the mosque of Bashrah and spoke out loudly, "Respected Muslim brothers, I used to believe that the Quran was a creature that Allah SWT could not be seen with the naked eye in the afterlife and that humans create their actions, as the Mu'tazilah believe. But now, I declare openly that I have repented of the Mu'tazilah belief, and I throw away my Mu'tazilah beliefs like I'm throwing away this shirt" (at that time, al-Asy'ary opened his shirt and threw it away). (Al-Ghurabi, 1957) There are various opinions about the motivation for al-Asy'ary leaving the Mu'tazilah; in addition to theological factors, there are also other factors, such as the political and social situation at that time (Ris'an Rusli, 2014).

## **3. Methodology**

The method used in this study is thematic, with a historical approach, using a qualitative approach. Other approaches used include pedagogical, sociological, linguistic, and normative theological approaches in understanding al-Asy'ary's method of thought regarding kasb. The analysis technique used in examining the method of kasb thinking is content analysis, which is a systematic

technique for analyzing message content and processing messages using deductive, inductive, and comparative methods. In addition, textual, contextual, and intertextual analysis techniques are also used to explain the concept of kasb in al-Asy'ary's understanding.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Al-Asy'ari never distanced himself from using reasoning and intellectual argumentation. He strongly opposed those who claimed that using reason in religious matters or discussing issues that were not mentioned by the Prophet was wrong. The companions of the Prophet discussed new issues after his death, but they were not considered deviant (*bid'ah*). In his book *Istihsan al Khawdi fi Ilmi al-Kalam*, Al-Asy'ari vehemently opposed those who objected to defending religion with theological knowledge and intellectual argumentation. (Al-Rasyid, 2022a; Nuhung, 2018)

As a former member of the Mu'tazilah, Al-Asy'ari did not entirely rely on reasoning in developing his theological ideas, unlike other Mu'tazilah figures. This was greatly influenced by the social conditions of the time, where the thinking of Ahl al-Hadith was on the rise. In addition, his education in hadith played a role in his understanding of hadith as a source of theology after the Quran. Al-Asy'ari also based his arguments on the interpretation of a hadith, as seen in a hadith cited in the book *al-Ibanah*:

وروى عن النبي صل الله عليه وسلم انه قال : خلق الله ادم بيده فمسح ظهره بيده ه فا ستخرج منه ذريته فثبت اليه وقد جاء في الخبر الما ثور ان الله خلق ادم بيده وخلق جنت عدن بيده

Translation: *In a narration attributed to Prophet Muhammad, he said, "Allah created Adam with His hand, and then He wiped his back and brought forth his offspring from him." Al-Asy'ary commented that the hadith describes that Allah created Adam with His own hand and that paradise is also in His hand.*

Furthermore, in his statement as stated by Abu Zahrah as follows: "The opinion and belief that we hold onto are to adhere to the Book of Allah, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, and whatever is narrated from the companions, the followers, and the hadith scholars. We hold onto all of that, and the opinions followed by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal and distance ourselves from those who oppose his opinions. Ibn Hanbal is an imam who led with perfection. Through him, Allah explained the truth when misguidance was rampant, showed the way, turned away the innovators, and turned away from the misguidance of the misguided and the doubts of the skeptics. May Allah bestow His mercy upon him as a distinguished imam and wise figure and upon all the leaders of the Muslim community." (Abu Zahrah, 1996)

Abu Zahrah's statement highlights the importance of adhering to the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the knowledge and wisdom passed down by the companions and followers of Islam. He emphasizes the significance of following the opinions of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who was a renowned scholar and leader in Islam. Abu Zahrah also stresses the importance of distancing oneself from those who oppose the opinions of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal. This suggests that there were disagreements within the Islamic community during his time and that it was important to follow the teachings of a respected and knowledgeable scholar like Ibn Hanbal in order to stay on the correct path.

Additionally, Abu Zahrah praises Ibn Hanbal for his leadership during a time of misguidance and innovation in the Muslim community. This highlights the importance of strong and wise leaders in Islam who can guide their followers towards the truth and away from misguided beliefs and actions.

On the other hand, Abu Zahrah stated that al-Asy'ary came to revive the thinking method of Imam Ahmad (Abu Zahrah, 1996). He even tends to consider Imam Ahmad as his favorite imam, and besides his scholarly abilities in thinking methods, there is also an argument that Allah chose Imam Ahmad to explain the truth. This last statement indicates that al-Asy'ary is actually too emotional in assessing Imam Ahmad, so from the perspective of the method used, the author concludes that besides al-Asy'ary using the revelation of the Qur'an and the hadith of the Prophet, he also uses reason. Although, at first glance, excessive emotions are used, that reason functions less in assessing the correctness or incorrectness of the opinions later presented by Imam Ahmad. This can be seen in another statement as stated by Abu Zahrah that: "...we affirm all the narrations presented by the famous hadith scholars, the good leaders of the Muslim community whose leadership is recognized, and consider those who rebel against them as misguided," (Abu Zahrah, 1996)

Al-Asy'ary's excessive evaluation of Imam Ahmad, according to some commentators, may be related to an obsession that was extinguished in a condition where the community needed a new theology, supported by the political atmosphere at that time, as stated by Amir Ali in the following Encyclopedia: "Perhaps it was due to his ambition that he needed to align himself with the group of Ahmad bin Hanbal (ahl al-hadith) who at that time received sympathy from the caliph and the general public". (Abrahamov, 1989)

Looking at al-Asy'ary's thought method, as discussed above, it appears that his ideas or thoughts lack consistency in utilizing reason. The emotional attitude that colors al-Asy'ary's thinking as described gives the impression that he has a tough character in defending what he fights for and openly dismissing and even declaring war against opposing parties. According to Muhammad

Abduh, al-Asy'ary took the middle ground (wasathan) between the textualist view (which holds firmly to the literal meaning of a naql proof) and the rationalist view (which is based on the worship of the intellect and often uses takwil in understanding naql proofs) (Effendi, 2021; Munir, 2011; Muzairi, 1994)

This psychological assumption is related to his tendency to avoid meetings held by certain ruling authorities. The caliph al-Ridha gave opportunities to community figures to attend discussions and studies at the palace including al-Asy'ary (Abu Hasan Ali bin Ismai, 1409 H). Al-Asy'ary's thought is specifically focused on the theory of kasb. As for human actions, according to him, humans cannot create an action, but humans are capable of making kasb or effort (Muhammad Abu Zahrah, 1996).

The term kasb, used by al-Asy'ary, means that something arises from the receiver of kasb (al-muktasib) through the power created (Harun Nasution, 1986). The Creator of that power is God himself. Meanwhile, iktisab is something that happens through the mediation of the power created, thereby creating gain or kasb for the person through whose power that action arises. (Badhrulhisham & Dzulkarnain, 2020; Muhtarom, 2017)

The argument presented by al-Asy'ary, as cited in Harun Nasution's book, using a verse from QS al-Shaffat/37: 96:

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَاتَعْمَلُونَ

Translation: "...yet it is Allah who created you and all that you do."

According to al-Asy'ary, the term khalaqakum (created you) means that God created you, while ta'malun (do) means the actions of humans. His theory of kasb implies that God only gives the ability to act or perform actions to humans, and God does not give humans the ability to create actions. He firmly asserts that it is God himself who brings about kasb. (Ghadrdan-Gharamaleki & Ahadrdan Aharamaleki, 2016)

Al-Asy'ary tries to clarify this theory by presenting a division of movement (al-harakah) where each human has two different movements. The first movement is involuntary and cannot be avoided (al harakah al idhtirariyyah), and this movement comes from outside the human will. The second movement is desired by the human self (al hirakah al iradiyyah), which is based on human efforts. The first movement is a movement which humans do not have the power to avoid, such as when someone dies from a fever. In the second movement, humans have the power of choice (ikhtiar), such as reading, writing, or walking. (Mudzakkir, 2020; Nuhung, 2018)

In line with the opinion in the Arabic language (ilmu nahu), as quoted by al-Razi in his interpretation of the meaning of the verse wa ma taf'alun, which means "all of your actions," this is based on the existence of maa in the verse which functions to turn the verb into a noun (infinitive noun). Thus, the sentence wa ma taf'alun means your work, meaning that humans, with all their deeds and actions, are creations of Allah. (Faqih, 2021; Muttaqin, 2015)

According to this theory, human actions are not actualized by humans themselves but are created by God. Humans only obtain their own actions created by God when they desire to do something. According to this theory, human actions are not carried out in freedom nor in compulsion. Human actions are still determined by God in their execution. However, humans are still responsible for their actions because they have made kasb. With the existence of desire, choice, or decision to perform a particular action and not another, even though they themselves cannot control and determine the actualization of the desired action, it is chosen and decided to be done. (Al-Rasyid, 2022b; Asy'ari, n.d.)

From the perspective of human actions, it appears that humans are merely a vessel through which God's actions are realized. God's actions are realized through the power given by God to humans, and without that power, those actions cannot be realized. According to al-Asy'ary, power as God's creation is manifested through human actions. Power was created by God to fulfill His will to perform actions in His place of action, which is on humans. Therefore, it is impossible for someone to obtain power from God if humans do not perform an action. (Mas'udi, 1996; Mufid, 2013) This is because power is created by God to fulfill a human action. Furthermore, it can be understood that the more capable a human is in performing an action, the more open the opportunity for them to obtain power commensurate with their ability to perform a particular action.

Functionally, power is the correlation between the ability to perform an action and the realization of the action by humans themselves. Thus, the owner of power and the motivator to perform an action by humans is God. As stated in the Quran, QS al-Insan/76: 30,

وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

Translation: "And you do not will except that Allah wills. Indeed, Allah is ever Knowing and Wise."

The kasb theory proposed by al-Asy'ary is actually at the heart of the problem, which is in the first verse mentioned above, namely in QS al-Shaffat/37: 96: "Allah created you and what you do."

If we look at the previous verse (munasbat verse), which relates to the statement of Prophet Ibrahim (as a sign of his objection) to his people who worshiped the statues they made themselves. The complete translation of the verse reads: "Ibrahim said, 'Do you worship idols you carve out yourselves, when it is Allah who created you and what you make?'" The emphasis of this verse is how foolish it is for someone to worship something other than Allah, especially if what they worship is the result of their own effort. Whereas Allah is the one who created humans along with their potential in the form of power. So why do humans worship something that is the same as themselves, which is the creation of Allah? This can also mean that Allah, who created you and what you make, created humans and stones as the raw material that they carve into statues. (Rahman, 2017)

In one of the hadiths narrated by Bukhari from Huzaifah regarding the above verse, as quoted by Ibn Kathir, it reads:

عن حذيفق قال : قال رسول الله صلّم ان الله تعالى يصنع كل صانع وصنعتة

Translation: "Huzaifah reported: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, 'Verily Allah, the Most High, creates every doer and what is done by the doer.'"

However, as previously mentioned, the Asy'ari method of thought considers hadiths as a theological source after the Quran, meaning that the verses are explained through the hadiths' commentary on the intended verses. From the perspective of human actions, it appears that humans are merely vessels for the realization of God's actions. The power that God gives to humans enables the actions that humans perform to come to fruition. It can be understood that in the Asy'ari understanding when a person has the ability to perform an action, it opens up more opportunities for them to obtain power according to their abilities in performing that action. Thus, it is impossible for humans to obtain power from God if they do not perform an action. Therefore, the possessor of power with the impetus to carry out an action against humans is God.

## 5. Conclusion

There are various arguments put forward by historians regarding al-Asy'ary's migration from the Mu'tazilah school of thought. The development of theological knowledge is no longer monopolized by the Mu'tazilah. Abu Hasan al-Asy'ary, a scholar educated in Basra in Mu'tazilah thinking, abandoned his beliefs and pioneered a new school of thought called Asy'ariyah as an anti-Mu'tazilah ideology. In his method of thinking, al-Asy'ary presented arguments and evidence through his understanding of the Qur'an, hadith, and logic, influenced by his educational background in both Mu'tazilah theology and hadith studies.

Regarding al-Asy'ary's theory of kasb, it can be seen that humans acquire their actions created by God when they desire to perform a certain action. This differs from the Mu'tazilah belief, which claims that power exists before human action, allowing humans to use that power according to their will and desires. The theory of kasb by al-Asy'ary is an alternative between Qadariah and Jabariah, not a compromise between the two, and it is even closer to the Jabariah concept.

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