

# BRIDGING THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIVIDE: ARSYAD AL-BANJARI'S MA'RIFAH AS A RESPONSE TO WESTERN EPISTEMOLOGICAL DILEMMAS

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## ABSTRACT

*Western epistemology encounters significant challenges due to its secular and materialistic orientation, which restricts the sources of knowledge to sensory perception and empirical experimentation. This study analyzes Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari's concept of ma'rifah as an epistemological alternative to these dilemmas. Adopting a qualitative, library-based method, the research applies Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's analytical model, framed within an integration of Islamic epistemological principles and comparative philosophical analysis. The primary source is Kanz al-Ma'rifah by al-Banjari, supported by cross-referenced verification. The findings indicate that, according to al-Banjari, ma'rifah is attainable through three key paths: Nūr Muhammad, mutu qabla an tamūtu, and fanā'. This concept provides an epistemological paradigm that integrates physical and metaphysical dimensions of knowledge, reconciles rational and intuitive methodologies, and transcends the subject-object dichotomy through spiritual experience. Through the 'irfānī method focusing on purification of the heart and spiritual discipline, ma'rifah offers a comprehensive epistemology that refines rational and sensory faculties, thereby presenting a critical alternative to the empiricism that dominates Western epistemology.*

**Keywords:** Epistemology, Intuition, Ma'rifah, Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari, Sufism.

## INTRODUCTION

Western and Islamic traditions differ fundamentally in their approaches to epistemology and the acquisition of knowledge. Western epistemology is largely confined to the physical realm and operates within rational, empirical, and positivist paradigms that assert

knowledge must be based on sensory perception and empirical observation (Kartanegara, 2003). This framework reflects the broader civilizational orientation of the West, where knowledge is regarded as scientific only when it is measurable and observable. In contrast, Islamic epistemology encompasses both physical and metaphysical dimensions, incorporating sources such as

revelation and intuition (Abdullah, 2006; Nur, 2018). This divergence creates a persistent epistemological divide that shapes scientific discourse and knowledge production across both traditions. This divide affects how knowledge is conceptualized, validated, and applied.

Western epistemology does not recognize metaphysical realities such as revelation and religious belief as objectively valid. It centers on human reason as the primary means of understanding nature and existence. Within this anthropocentric paradigm, knowledge is constructed speculatively and forms the foundation for ethical and moral frameworks in Western intellectual and social life (Kartanegara, 2005). While this approach has driven scientific and technological advancements, it also reveals a significant gap in addressing questions of ultimate meaning, purpose, and spiritual reality. Intuition is often dismissed as irrational and unscientific, as reflected in the views of thinkers such as John Stuart Mill (1843). Although certain Western philosophers recognize intuition as a type of intelligence, it is generally understood as a psychological phenomenon devoid of divine origin (James, 1902).

In Islamic tradition, intuition is expressed through the concept of *ma'rifah*, a form of knowledge attained through spiritual discipline (*riyāḍah*) and struggle (*mujāhadah*), culminating in unveiling (*mukāshafah*). This epistemological method, known as *'irfānī*, entails the reception of divine light when the heart is spiritually purified and receptive (Nata, 2013; Rusli, 2020). The Greek philosophical counterpart of *'irfānī* is referred to as gnostic knowledge, sharing the same essence as *ma'rifah*. Sufi scholars describe *ma'rifah* as knowledge revealed through the heart, experienced as divine illumination. This condition of the heart, receptive to the Light of Truth (*nūr al-haqq*), is known as *kashf* or *mukāshafah*, forming a unique epistemological path that complements rather than contradicts rational inquiry.

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, a prominent Muslim philosopher, provides a valuable framework for understanding the classification of knowledge in Islamic epistemology. He differentiates between knowledge granted by God—through spiritual insight (*basīrah*), taste (*dhawq*), and unveiling

(*kashf*)—and knowledge acquired through rational investigation based on observation and experience (Al-Attas, 1993).

The former, identified as *ma'rifah*, occupies the highest position in Islamic thought due to its focus on the soul and access to transcendent realities beyond empirical validation. The latter pertains to discursive and deductive knowledge derived from pragmatic engagement with the material world. This framework situates *ma'rifah* as a vital dimension of Islamic epistemology that both transcends and integrates empirical and rational methodologies.

One of the key figures contributing to the development of Sufi epistemology in the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago is Shaikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari. His work, *Kanz al-Ma'rifah*, articulates a distinctive perspective on *ma'rifah*, integrating metaphysical insights with practical spiritual exercises suited to the regional context. Despite his influence, research on al-Banjari's thought has focused predominantly on his contributions to Islamic jurisprudence, with limited attention to his epistemological ideas. For instance, *Sufistic Thought of Shaikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari* by Bayani Dahlan (2014) provides a general overview of al-Banjari's writings. Meanwhile, *The Sufi Thought of Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari and Its Influence on the Society of South Kalimantan* by Maimunah Zarkasyi (2014) offers a brief discussion of his Sufi teachings and their impact on the socio-religious life in South Kalimantan. Another relevant study by Abu Hassan (2017), highlights the localized transmission of Islamic knowledge in the region and emphasizes the role of figures like al-Banjari in adapting Sufi traditions to the local intellectual context.

Nevertheless, these works do not extensively examine al-Banjari's concept of *ma'rifah* or its relevance in addressing contemporary epistemological issues. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring how al-Banjari's conception of *ma'rifah* offers a critical alternative to the limitations of Western epistemology. The analysis demonstrates how Islamic intellectual traditions from the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago can contribute meaningfully to contemporary philosophical discourse and enrich the global conversation on knowledge and its sources.

## Literature Review

The epistemological crisis within the Western intellectual tradition has been extensively examined by scholars. Nasr (1989) identifies how modern Western epistemology, grounded in Cartesian dualism and scientific rationalism, has produced a fragmented conception of reality that marginalizes the spiritual dimension of knowledge. This fragmentation, according to Al-Attas (1993), has resulted in the "de-Islamization of knowledge," wherein knowledge is divorced from its sacred foundation and reduced to empirical data alone. Kartanegara (2007) further argues that Western epistemology's exclusive dependence on sensory perception yields an incomplete understanding of reality by neglecting metaphysical aspects. He emphasizes the necessity of alternative epistemological frameworks that integrate both the physical and metaphysical domains. Rusli (2020) contributes to this discourse through a comparative analysis of Islamic and Western epistemologies, particularly by contrasting the views of Al-Ghazali and Descartes. His findings underscore how these foundational thinkers shaped divergent epistemological trajectories within their respective intellectual traditions.

Scholarly work on Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari's contributions to Islamic thought has predominantly concentrated on his jurisprudential scholarship, while his Sufi epistemology remains underexplored. Dahlan (2014) provides an overview of al-Banjari's Sufistic ideas but does not offer an in-depth analysis of his concept of *ma'rifah*. Likewise, M. Zarkasyi (2014) discusses al-Banjari's religious influence in South Kalimantan but pays limited attention to his epistemological contributions. Hadi (2011) analyzes *Kanz al-Ma'rifah* mainly in terms of its discussion of al-Banjari's Sufi order (*tarīqah*), rather than its epistemological significance, thereby revealing a substantial gap in the literature. Although Abu Hassan (2017) examines the transmission of Islamic knowledge in the seventeenth-century Malay world, his study provides contextual background rather than a focused analysis of al-Banjari's epistemological framework.

By contrast, the broader concept of *ma'rifah* in Islamic intellectual tradition has garnered more scholarly attention. Chittick (1989) elucidates how *ma'rifah* constitutes a

form of direct, experiential knowledge that surpasses rational cognition, granting access to aspects of reality that lie beyond empirical observation. Bakar (1998) explains how Islamic epistemology integrates diverse sources of knowledge, including revelation (*wahy*), reason (*'aql*), and intuition (*kashf/ma'rifah*), thus offering a comprehensive system that encompasses both physical and metaphysical truths. More recent works by Zaidi (2006) and Setia (2007) explore the potential of Islamic epistemology to respond to modern philosophical challenges, asserting that intuitive knowledge offers insight into dimensions of reality inaccessible through empirical approaches. Nur (2018) makes a significant contribution by examining the role of mystical knowledge within Islamic epistemology, arguing that it remains compatible with rational inquiry when situated within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition.

Despite these developments, little research has been conducted on the specific relationship between al-Banjari's conception of *ma'rifah* and Western epistemology. While Amin (2014) and Hanafi (2002) explore the broader potential of Islamic epistemology in addressing philosophical dilemmas in the West, they do not focus on al-Banjari's unique contributions. This study addresses that gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of al-Banjari's concept of *ma'rifah*, as presented in *Kanz al-Ma'rifah*, and demonstrating its relevance for contemporary epistemological discourse, especially in critiquing the limitations of Western empiricism and rationalism.

## Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a conceptual framework that integrates multiple theoretical perspectives to examine Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari's conception of *ma'rifah* and its potential to address epistemological dilemmas within Western thought. The primary foundation of this framework is the Islamic epistemological paradigm, as developed by contemporary Muslim philosophers such as Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Osman Bakar. Al-Attas's classification of knowledge into revealed knowledge (*ma'rifah*) and acquired knowledge (*'ilm*) offers a critical distinction that underscores the unique status of intuitive knowledge in Islamic thought (Al-

Attas, 1993). This classification acknowledges diverse pathways to knowledge acquisition, situating *ma'rifah* as a form of knowledge granted directly by God through spiritual insight (*basīrah*), spiritual taste (*dhawq*), and unveiling (*kashf*).

Bakar's (2008) hierarchical conceptualization of knowledge further supports this framework by positioning intuitive knowledge as a superior mode of cognition that complements, rather than contradicts, rational and empirical knowledge. This hierarchy illustrates the interconnectedness of various epistemic sources, demonstrating how revelation, reason, and intuition collectively constitute a coherent system of knowledge in Islamic intellectual tradition. The study also incorporates the concept of *tasawwuf* (Sufism) as a methodological approach to attaining *ma'rifah*. Drawing from Al-Ghazali's elaboration of the spiritual path, *ma'rifah* is conceptualized as knowledge acquired through spiritual discipline (*riyāḍah*), inner struggle (*mujāhadah*), and purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). These practices are understood as epistemological methods that enable access to realities beyond the reach of empirical observation.

In examining the limitations of Western epistemology, the study utilizes Nasr's (2001) critique of modern scientific rationalism, which highlights the consequences of divorcing knowledge from its sacred roots. This critique elucidates the fragmentation of knowledge in the modern era and provides context for how al-Banjari's conception of *ma'rifah* may respond to such epistemological challenges, particularly with respect to validation criteria, sources of knowledge, and the relationship between the knowing subject and the known object.

The framework facilitates an in-depth analysis of three core dimensions of al-Banjari's concept of *ma'rifah*: (1) its metaphysical grounding in the doctrine of *Nūr Muhammad*, (2) its methodological foundation in the principle of *mūtū qabla an tamūtū* (die before you die), and (3) its culmination in the state of *fanā'* (annihilation). These dimensions are examined in relation to key Western epistemological issues, including mind-body dualism, the marginalization of metaphysical knowledge, and the subject-object dichotomy that characterizes modern Western thought.

By integrating physical and metaphysical dimensions of knowledge, reconciling rational and intuitive epistemologies, and overcoming the subject-object divide through spiritual experience, al-Banjari's concept of *ma'rifah* offers a holistic and transformative epistemological paradigm. This framework enables a critical exploration of how traditional Islamic thought from the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago can contribute meaningfully to contemporary philosophical discourse and propose constructive responses to the limitations of Western empiricism and rationalism.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, library-based research methodology, characterized by Creswell (2014) as "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem." The research design aligns with Zed's (2008) library research model, relying entirely on literature-based sources without field investigation. Primary and secondary data were gathered from a range of sources, including books, academic journals, institutional publications, and digital repositories focusing on Arsyad al-Banjari's writings and contemporary epistemological discourse (Muhadjir, 2011). Systematic documentary analysis was employed for data collection, encompassing both manifest content (explicit elements) and latent content (underlying meanings) (Krippendorff, 2004).

The research process commenced with the identification and selection of data relevant to the research objectives, following the framework proposed by Arikunto (2013). All data were verified for authenticity and credibility through cross-referencing with multiple sources to ensure scholarly validity (Scott, 1990). The analysis process followed Saldaña et al.'s (2014) qualitative data analysis model, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data were condensed through rigorous reading and coding to identify key themes and patterns, and then organized into coherent categories in accordance with the methodological framework developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Interpretive analysis was guided by a conceptual framework that integrates Islamic epistemological principles with comparative

philosophical analysis to explore how al-Banjari's concept of *ma'rifah* addresses Western epistemological limitations. The framework is structured around three interrelated dimensions: ontological foundations, methodological approaches, and experiential realization of knowledge (Al-Attas & S. M. N, 1995). The ontological dimension draws upon al-Attas's (1993) distinction between revealed knowledge (*ma'rifah*) and acquired knowledge (*'ilm*), establishing spiritual insight (*basīrah*) as a valid source of knowledge. This allows for an in-depth analysis of al-Banjari's metaphysical foundations, particularly his doctrine of *Nūr Muhammad* as the primordial source of illumination.

The methodological dimension investigates al-Banjari's emphasis on spiritual discipline (*riyāḍah*) and purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), integrating Bakar's (2008) hierarchical model of knowledge that places intuitive knowledge as complementary to rational and empirical modes. This study also employs Chittick's conceptualization of the "science of the heart" to analyze al-Banjari's epistemic method, particularly the principle of *mūtū qabla an tamūtū* (die before you die), examining how spiritual practices serve as epistemological tools to access transcendent realities (Chittick, 2007). The experiential dimension focuses on the realization of *ma'rifah* through the state of *fanā'* (annihilation of the self in God), incorporating Izutsu's (1984) analysis of mystical experience as epistemologically meaningful.

In assessing Western epistemological limitations, the study adopts analytical categories based on Nasr's (2001) critique of modern scientific rationalism: (1) validation criteria that privilege empirical verification over spiritual insight, (2) exclusion of intuitive knowledge as a legitimate source, and (3) the subject-object dichotomy that separates the knower from the known. The framework also includes a contextual analysis of al-Banjari's intellectual environment, drawing on Azra's (2004) research on Islamic scholarly networks in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago to situate al-Banjari's epistemology within its historical and regional context.

A hermeneutical approach, as developed by Gadamer (2004), was applied to interpret classical Sufi texts, particularly the writings of

al-Banjari. This interpretive method ensures contextual sensitivity to both historical background and contemporary significance. Validation was achieved through triangulation with authoritative commentaries by prominent Sufi scholars, including al-Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi, and contemporary Southeast Asian Islamic thinkers (Al-Attas, 1995).

Through this integrated methodological and conceptual framework, the study examines how al-Banjari's concept of *ma'rifah* presents a distinctive epistemological paradigm that incorporates both physical and metaphysical dimensions of knowledge, reconciles rationality with intuition, and transcends the subject-object divide through spiritual experience. Following Mertens's (2014) transformative paradigm, the analysis highlights the potential contributions of al-Banjari's thought to contemporary epistemological discourse, particularly in integrating spiritual insight with empirical investigation, thereby offering a substantive alternative to the predominantly physicalist and empiricist orientation of Western epistemology (Nasr, 2007).

## DISCUSSION

### *Ma'rifah* According to al-Banjari

*Ma'rifah*, a fundamental concept in Sufism, occupies a central position in the teachings of Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari, an eminent 18th-century scholar from South Kalimantan, Indonesia. While al-Banjari is widely recognized for his expertise in Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), his engagement with Sufi thought is equally significant. This aspect of his scholarship is particularly evident in his seminal works, *Fath al-Rahmān* and *Risālah Kanz al-Ma'rifah*, both of which provide deep insights into his understanding of spirituality. A comprehensive understanding of al-Banjari's notion of *ma'rifah* requires an exploration of his ontological perspective, particularly his views on *wujūdiyyah* (existence). Al-Banjari maintained that true existence belongs solely to Allah, whereas the existence of all other beings is metaphorical (*majāzī*) (Al-Banjari 1405). This position reflects the belief that creation lacks independent existence and only subsists through Allah's creative act. Accordingly, all created existence is considered annihilated (*fanā'*) in the presence of divine existence (Al-Banjari, 1405).

In al-Banjari's metaphysics, God is conceived as a necessary and eternal substance (*Qadīm*), incomparable to any created being (Al-Banjari 1405). This understanding corresponds with the Qur'anic concept of *tanzīh*, which affirms the absolute transcendence of God. The doctrine of *wujūdiyyah* thus forms the ontological foundation for his epistemology of *ma'rifah*.

Al-Banjari's conception of *ma'rifah* closely parallels that of al-Ghazālī, who contended that true recognition of the Divine results from divine illumination granted by Allah to the hearts of prophets and saints (I. Al-Ghazālī). This illumination serves as the medium through which genuine spiritual knowledge is attained. At its highest level, al-Banjari equated the essence of *ma'rifah* with *tawhīd* (divine oneness). This identification underscores the integral relationship between knowledge of the Divine and the foundational Islamic principle of monotheism. Al-Banjari described *ma'rifah* as "heaven on earth," suggesting that the experience of divine proximity surpasses even the promised delights of the hereafter (Banjari, 1405).

Despite affirming the centrality of *tawhīd*, al-Banjari strongly rejected the idea that God becomes the universe. He identified such a belief as *wujūdiyyah mulhīdah*, a heretical view that erroneously equates the universe with the outward manifestation of God. This clarification highlights his commitment to maintaining a balanced Sufi metaphysics that upholds divine transcendence while acknowledging divine immanence.

### Steps to Achieve *Ma'rifah*

In *Risālah Kanz al-Ma'rifah*, al-Banjari outlines three essential steps in the pursuit of *ma'rifah*, reflecting the Sufi aphorism: "*Man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa Rabbah*" (He who knows himself knows his Lord). These steps are: (1) recognizing the origin of all things in *Nūr Muhammad*, (2) dying before death (*mūtu qabla an tamūtu*), and (3) devoting oneself to Allah's power (*qudrah*), will (*irādah*), and knowledge (*'ilm*).

#### 1. *Nūr Muhammad* (The Light of Muhammad)

The notion of *Nūr Muhammad*, or the Light of Muhammad, has been a central theme in Sufi cosmology. Prominent figures in philosophical Sufism, such as Ibn 'Arabī and

'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, were among its key proponents (Chittick, 1989). This doctrine is grounded in several *ḥadīths*, including a significant *Ḥadīth Qudsī* which states that Allah created the spirit of Prophet Muhammad from His essence and then created the universe from that spirit (Mahmud, 1983).

The discourse on *Nūr Muhammad* within Sufi thought can be traced to Sahl al-Tustarī, who initially introduced the concept into early Sufi metaphysics. It was subsequently developed and expanded by prominent Sufi thinkers, including al-Ḥallāj, who integrated it into his doctrines of *ḥulūl* (divine indwelling) and *waḥdat al-adyān* (unity of religions). In articulating the theory of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* (Unity of Existence), Ibn 'Arabī conceptualized *Nūr Muhammad* as *al-Ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyyah* (the Muhammadan Reality). This notion was further elaborated by 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī in his influential work *al-Insān al-Kāmil* (The Perfect Human) (Massignon, 1982).

In the Sufi tradition, *Nūr Muhammad* is viewed as the primordial intermediary enabling access to *ma'rifatullāh* (knowledge of God). This aligns with Qur'anic descriptions of the Prophet as a "light from God" (Q.S. *al-Nur* 24:35 and Q.S. *al-Mā'idah* 5:15), thereby reinforcing its metaphysical and cosmological significance (Nasr, 1987).

The concept of *Nūr Muhammad* found fertile ground in the Malay Archipelago, where it spread extensively and became embedded in various local Sufi traditions, including within the Banjar community of South Kalimantan. In this context, it was prominently propagated by Abdul Hamid Abulung, a controversial Sufi figure who emphasized the doctrine so strongly that some of his followers began to neglect *Sharī'ah* (Islamic law) in favor of *ḥaqīqah* (spiritual truth) (Isa 2001).

This orientation, however, sharply diverged from the teachings of al-Banjari. While al-Banjari acknowledged the significance of *Nūr Muhammad*, he consistently upheld a commitment to *'amalī akhlāqī* Sufism, a practical and ethically grounded form of Sufism that underscores the necessity of observing *Sharī'ah* in conjunction with spiritual development. In addition, al-Banjari adhered to the doctrine of *Waḥdat al-Shuhūd* (unity of witnessing) rather than *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* (Unity of Existence), thereby distinguishing his theological stance from

more esoteric interpretations of *Nūr Muhammad*.

## 2. *Mūtu qabla an tamūtu* (Die Before You Die)

The second step in al-Banjari's path to *ma'rifah* entails the profound concept of "dying before death," as encapsulated in the Prophetic tradition *mūtu qabla an tamūtu*. Al-Banjari interpreted this not as an encouragement toward physical death but as a directive to undergo a metaphorical death of the ego prior to one's actual demise (Banjari, 1405).

In elaborating this concept, al-Banjari distinguished between two forms of death: essential and meaningful. Essential death denotes the physical separation of the soul from the body, marking the end of biological life. In contrast, meaningful death signifies a spiritual condition characterized by the firm conviction that all power and will belong solely to Allah (Al-Banjari, 1405).

This conceptual distinction resonates with the view of Ibn 'Allān al-Makkī, a prominent Sufi scholar, who classified death into *iḍṭirārī* (necessary) and *ikhtiyārī* (voluntary). In this framework, voluntary death involves a deliberate and gradual eradication of one's base nature, ego-driven will, and worldly desires. It represents an intentional reorientation from self-centered inclinations toward full submission to the divine will (Al-Makki, 2003).

According to al-Banjari, "dying before death" demands more than philosophical assent or verbal acknowledgment. It requires an experiential transformation whereby blameworthy traits are systematically extinguished and replaced with the praiseworthy attributes of Allah. This inner transformation must be accompanied by verbal affirmation and a deeply embedded belief in *tawḥīd* (divine oneness) firmly established in the heart (Banjari, 1405).

Al-Banjari suggested a practical method for attaining this spiritual state: by imagining oneself as having already died, one may reach the profound realization that all actions ultimately belong to God. This realization parallels the Sufi notion of *fanā' al-af'āl*, or the annihilation of individual actions (Banjari, 1405).

The practice of "dying before death" serves several critical spiritual functions. It

reminds individuals of their mortality, promoting detachment from worldly distractions and prioritization of spiritual growth. It also cultivates humility and dependence on God, countering tendencies toward pride and self-sufficiency. Ultimately, it prepares the seeker for the supreme aim of *fanā'*, or the total annihilation of the self in God.

## 3. *Fanā'* (Annihilation)

According to al-Banjari, the final and most advanced stage in attaining *ma'rifah* is the realization of *fanā'*, or the complete annihilation of the self in the power, will, and knowledge of Allah. *Fanā'* occupies a central position in Sufi doctrine and practice, representing the culmination of the spiritual journey.

Etymologically derived from the Arabic root *faniya* (to perish or be destroyed), *fanā'* in Sufi thought denotes the dissolution of human attributes, which are then replaced by divine attributes (Al-Kalabadhi, 1969). This transformation is often described as the shedding of the ego-self to unveil the divine essence within the human being.

Al-Banjari stressed that *fanā'* should not be understood as a purely abstract or philosophical idea detached from religious practice. He maintained that the journey toward *fanā'* must be accompanied by strict adherence to *Sharī'ah*. He cited Surah Tāhā, verse 14, which commands believers to establish prayer for the remembrance of God, to demonstrate the inseparable relationship between spiritual states and religious observance.

In al-Banjari's framework, the path to *fanā'* comprises a triad of spiritual disciplines: 1. *Mushāhadah* (witnessing the oneness of Allah), which involves cultivating constant awareness of divine unity and presence; 2. *Murāqabah* (awareness of being observed by Allah), the practice of maintaining uninterrupted consciousness of God's watchfulness; 3. *Muhāḍarah* (keeping the heart attentive to Allah), the continual remembrance of God in one's inner thoughts and emotions.

These practices are supported by the persistent recitation of the Islamic declaration of faith, *Lā Ilāha Illa Allah* (there is no God but Allah). Through this combination of spiritual exercises, the seeker progressively dissolves

the illusion of individual selfhood, advancing toward complete absorption in the divine reality.

Al-Banjari's conception of *fanā* parallels that of al-Ghazālī, who regarded it as the highest of the *maqāmāt* (spiritual stations) leading to *ma'rifah* (Al-Ghazālī). Both scholars asserted that *fanā* is not an end in itself but a means to attain a deeper knowledge and love of God.

Al-Banjari delineated three progressive levels of *fanā*: 1. *Fanā' fi al-af'āl* (annihilation in actions), where the seeker realizes that all actions, including their own, are ultimately manifestations of God's will, leading to total surrender and reliance on divine agency; 2. *Fanā' fi al-sifat* (annihilation in attributes), wherein the seeker acknowledges that no creature possesses intrinsic qualities; all attributes originate from Allah and are reflected in creation to varying degrees; 3. *Fanā' fi al-Zāt* (annihilation in essence), the most profound level, where the seeker perceives all beings as non-existent in themselves and recognizes only the absolute existence of Allah (Al-Banjari 1405).

It is important to emphasize that al-Banjari, consistent with orthodox Sufi tradition, did not interpret *fanā* as literal unification with or ontological identity with the Divine. Rather, he described it as the apex of God-consciousness, where the individual's awareness becomes so intensely focused on God that it eclipses awareness of the self and creation (Mujiburrahman, 2014).

Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari's approach to *ma'rifah* exemplifies a harmonious integration of Sufi metaphysics and Islamic legal tradition. His threefold method, which is comprehending *Nūr Muhammad*, engaging in metaphorical death, and attaining *fanā*, presents a holistic spiritual system that combines esoteric insight with practical discipline (Fathurahman, 2012).

Several core features characterize al-Banjari's teachings on *ma'rifah*: 1. A consistent affirmation of God's absolute transcendence (*tanzīh*) alongside His immanence and accessibility to the human heart (Al-Attas, 1963); 2. A rejection of radical interpretations of *Wahdat al-Wujūd* that may verge on pantheism, in favor of the more moderate concept of *Wahdat al-Shuhūd* (Azyumardi Azra, 2004); 3. An insistence on the unity of spiritual states (*ḥāl*) and outward

religious actions (*'amal*), stressing that true *ma'rifah* requires both inner realization and external observance (Mansur, 1982); 4. A nuanced interpretation of *fanā* as a pathway to greater knowledge and love of God, rather than an ultimate goal in itself (Huda, 2017); and 5. A pragmatic orientation that provides structured, actionable guidance for aspirants on the path to spiritual realization (Bruinessen, 1995).

By uniting inner awareness with outward discipline, al-Banjari's teachings offer a compelling model for contemporary seekers of Islamic spirituality. His methodology represents a balanced middle path between rigid legalism and unchecked mysticism, providing a grounded and accessible route to spiritual enlightenment within the bounds of Islamic orthodoxy (Johns, 1961).

As interest in Sufi teachings continues to grow both within the Muslim world and beyond, al-Banjari's thoughtful and measured approach to *ma'rifah* offers a valuable resource for understanding the richness of Islamic spiritual heritage. His legacy affirms that the deepest forms of spiritual insight are not in conflict with religious law and ethical conduct but are intimately and necessarily connected to them (Woodward, 1989).

### ***Ma'rifah* of Arsyad al-Banjari as a Response to Contemporary Western Epistemology**

Western epistemology, emerging from modern philosophical traditions, has primarily relied on rationality and empiricism as criteria for determining truth. This perspective, grounded in Cartesian philosophy and further elaborated by empiricists and rationalists, has cultivated a secular and materialistic worldview that frequently disregards metaphysical dimensions of reality. In contrast, Islamic epistemology, particularly as articulated by Arsyad al-Banjari and other Muslim scholars, offers a more integrative understanding of knowledge that encompasses both physical and metaphysical realities.

The constraints of Western epistemology originate from Descartes' renowned assertion, "I think, therefore I am" (*cogito ergo sum*), which elevated human reason as the principal means of knowledge acquisition. This rationalist view was reinforced by empiricists such as David Hume, who prioritized sensory experience as the



foundational source of knowledge (Woodward, 1989). Immanuel Kant further entrenched this position by contending that metaphysics is unfeasible due to its lack of empirical basis (Kant, 1998).

The evolution of Western philosophical thought progressed with Hegel's dialectical method, proposing knowledge as an ongoing, dynamic process without definitive resolution (Hegel 1977). Subsequently, thinkers like Feuerbach criticized religion as a projection of human consciousness (Feuerbach, 1957), contributing to the rise of secularism, liberalism, and atheism. This intellectual trajectory marginalized revelation and disrupted the intrinsic relationship between humanity and the divine (Taylor, 2007).

Islamic epistemology, exemplified by al-Banjari, places significant emphasis on the metaphysical realm. This perspective is consistent with Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' categorization of knowledge into two domains: one derived from inspiration, *ma'rifah*, and revelation, and the other from intellectual reasoning, experience, and reflection (Al-Attas, 1993). This comprehensive epistemology affirms both empirical observations and higher spiritual truths.

Al-Banjari's conception of *ma'rifah* offers a substantive critique of Western epistemological limitations. In the Islamic tradition, *ma'rifah* denotes intuitive or experiential knowledge that transcends rational analysis and sensory input. It constitutes direct awareness of divine realities, attainable through spiritual refinement and inner illumination (Chittick, 1989).

Rooted in Islamic epistemological frameworks, al-Banjari's *ma'rifah* incorporates multiple avenues of knowledge acquisition. Unlike the restrictive empirical-rational paradigm of Western thought, Islamic epistemology accommodates revelation, reason, sensory perception, and intuition (Bakar, 1998).

The *ma'rifah* articulated by al-Banjari addresses the reductionist tendencies of Western epistemology. While the latter often bifurcates the physical and metaphysical, *ma'rifah* unites these spheres. It proposes a means of knowing that includes direct, intuitive understanding beyond empirical or deductive constraint (Arsyad al-Banjari, 1955).

Al-Banjari emphasizes spiritual purification and internal transformation as prerequisites for attaining higher knowledge. His approach aligns with the Sufi tradition, which maintains that genuine knowledge encompasses a transformative experiential process involving the entire being (Al-Ghazali, 1991).

In his teachings, al-Banjari outlines a structured path to *ma'rifah*, beginning with strict adherence to *Sharī'ah* (Islamic law) and progressing through stages of spiritual elevation. This path highlights three essential elements: purification of the heart, sincere devotion, and dhikr (remembrance of God) (Al-Banjari 1405). These practices condition the seeker to receive divine knowledge beyond rational and empirical limitations.

Al-Banjari's *ma'rifah* resonates with other prominent Islamic scholars. Al-Ghazali viewed it as the supreme form of knowledge, accessible only through spiritual experience and enlightenment (Al-Ghazali, 1998). Similarly, Ibn Arabi, in "Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyah," elevated *ma'rifah* above *ilm* (discursive knowledge), emphasizing its superiority in accessing divine truths (Arabi, 1972).

Suhrawardi's illuminationist philosophy (*ishrāq*) also supports al-Banjari's epistemology. He proposed a hierarchy of knowledge culminating in illuminative insight achieved through rational contemplation and mystical intuition (Suhrawardi, 1999). Like al-Banjari, Suhrawardi sought to integrate intellectual and spiritual cognition, offering a more comprehensive epistemology than in much Western philosophy.

The contemporary relevance of *ma'rifah* becomes particularly clear when considered through the lens of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's critique of modern scientific paradigms. Nasr argues that modern civilization is experiencing a profound crisis rooted in the secularization of knowledge and a distorted conception of reality (Nasr, 1989). In this context, *ma'rifah*, as articulated by Arsyad al-Banjari and other Muslim thinkers, serves to restore the sacred dimension of knowledge, reorienting epistemology toward metaphysical truths.

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi's conception of *tawhīd* (divine unity) as the foundational principle of Islamic epistemology further underscores the integration of all forms of

knowledge, which are empirical and metaphysical, under the unity of God (Faruqi, 1982). This holistic framework is consistent with al-Banjari's emphasis on *ma'rifah* as a means of apprehending the unity underlying all aspects of existence.

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' hierarchy of existence provides a valuable model for situating *ma'rifah* within Islamic epistemology. By acknowledging multiple levels of reality, from the sensory to the supra-rational, this framework accommodates the intuitive, experiential knowledge championed by al-Banjari (Al-Attas, 1995). It also illustrates the broader epistemological range offered by Islamic thought, in contrast to the narrower empiricist and rationalist scope typical of Western traditions.

The practical implications of al-Banjari's epistemology are equally significant. His insistence on spiritual purification and inner transformation suggests that knowledge acquisition is not merely an intellectual exercise but a deeply transformative process. This stands in contrast to the detached and objectivist tendencies of Western epistemology, which often result in a fragmented understanding of reality and a disconnect between knowledge and ethics (Sardar, 2006).

Moreover, al-Banjari's teachings offer a framework for integrating various forms of knowledge. Rather than opposing reason to revelation or empiricism to intuition, his approach seeks to harmonize these domains. This integrative vision presents a potential resolution to the fragmentation of knowledge that characterizes much of modern intellectual discourse (Chittick, 2007).

The concept of *ma'rifah* also addresses a fundamental limitation of empiricism and rationalism: their inability to adequately confront questions of ultimate meaning and metaphysical reality. While these methodologies have undeniably propelled scientific and technological advancements, they often falter when dealing with existential concerns. In contrast, *ma'rifah*, as understood by al-Banjari, provides a means of engaging with these deeper dimensions of human experience (Nasr, 2006).

Additionally, al-Banjari's emphasis on ethical and spiritual development as prerequisites for the attainment of *ma'rifah* introduces a moral dimension often absent in

Western epistemological frameworks. This perspective challenges the notion of value-neutral inquiry and suggests that true knowledge is inseparable from the cultivation of virtue and spiritual awareness (Murata, 1992).

The relevance of *ma'rifah* extends beyond abstract epistemology. In an era marked by ecological degradation, social fragmentation, and spiritual disorientation, al-Banjari's holistic approach offers a compelling framework for re-envisioning the relationship between humans, knowledge, and the cosmos. By re-integrating the sacred into our understanding of reality, *ma'rifah* supports more ethical and sustainable relationships with both nature and society (Weiming, 1985).

Nonetheless, integrating *ma'rifah* into contemporary academic and scientific discourse is not without challenges. Its emphasis on intuitive and experiential knowledge often stands at odds with the prevailing demand for empirical verification (Nasr, 2001). This tension reflects broader epistemological divides between traditional metaphysical systems and modern secular frameworks.

However, there are signs of a shifting paradigm. In fields such as quantum physics and consciousness studies, the limitations of reductionist models are increasingly acknowledged. These developments suggest a growing openness to alternative epistemologies, such as al-Banjari's, that incorporate metaphysical and intuitive insights (Wallace, 2000).

Al-Banjari's conceptualization of *ma'rifah* thus offers a profound response to the limitations of modern Western epistemology. By embracing both the physical and metaphysical dimensions of reality, his framework addresses the inadequacies of purely rationalist and empiricist approaches. The emphasis on spiritual refinement, intuitive insight, and epistemic harmony provides the foundation for a more holistic and transformative vision of knowledge (Bakar, 2008).

This contribution is especially relevant in addressing the contemporary crisis of meaning, a consequence of the materialistic worldview that has come to dominate much of Western thought. Max Weber's notion of the "disenchantment of the world" aptly describes this condition, in which the sacred is

systematically excluded from modern life (Weber, 1946). In contrast, *ma'rifah*, which is centered on the direct experiential knowledge of divine realities, offers a path toward re-enchancement and the restoration of spiritual depth in human existence.

The integrative approach of *ma'rifah* also resonates with recent developments in cognitive science. Scholars are increasingly acknowledging the role of embodied cognition and the limitations of purely computational or disembodied models of mind (Francisco et.al., 2016). This aligns with Islamic epistemology's holistic conception of knowledge, which locates cognitive faculties not only in the brain but also in the *qalb* (heart), understood as a center of spiritual perception.

Furthermore, *ma'rifah* offers valuable insights for rethinking ecological ethics. By nurturing an intuitive and reverent connection with nature, this epistemology lays the groundwork for a deep ecological perspective that moves beyond instrumentalist and utilitarian frameworks. This vision is consonant with the ideas of ecological philosophers like Arne Naess, who advocate for a "deep ecology" that recognizes the intrinsic value of all life (Naess, 1989).

As contemporary society grapples with complex global challenges, many of which elude resolution through purely rational or empirical means, the wisdom embedded in al-Banjari's conception of *ma'rifah* may offer vital guidance. By bridging the chasm between physical and metaphysical realities, reason and intuition, and knowledge and ethics, this epistemology proposes a more integrated, meaningful, and sustainable worldview (Nasr, 1996).

## CLOSING

This study demonstrates that Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari's concept of *ma'rifah* offers a substantive epistemological alternative to the dilemmas found in Western epistemology. While Western approaches often rely on rational-empirical frameworks that prioritize sensory experience and experimentation, *ma'rifah* introduces a more holistic paradigm that connects both physical and metaphysical dimensions of knowledge. The analysis of *Kanz al-Ma'rifah* reveals three interrelated pathways of *ma'rifah*: the metaphysical principle of *Nūr Muhammad*, the

transformative practice of *mutu qabla an tamutu* (dying before death), and the spiritual culmination in *fanā'* (annihilation of the self).

Al-Banjari's epistemological framework addresses the limitations of secular and materialistic tendencies by acknowledging multiple valid sources of knowledge, including intuitive spiritual insight, while maintaining the relevance of reason and empirical observation. His concept does not create a dichotomy between rational and intuitive knowledge but integrates them into a coherent hierarchical system, in which each form of knowledge operates within its proper domain. This integration transcends the subject-object dualism prevalent in post-Cartesian Western thought by proposing a participatory model where the knower and the known are unified through spiritual experience.

The *'irfānī* method central to al-Banjari's epistemology refines, rather than rejects, rational inquiry and sensory perception. Through spiritual discipline (*riyāḍah*) and purification of the self (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), the seeker gains access to dimensions of reality that empirical methods alone cannot reach. This approach recognizes the divine as the ultimate source of all knowledge and offers a critique of anthropocentric epistemology, while still valuing intellectual rigor and empirical verification within appropriate contexts.

The relevance of al-Banjari's contribution extends beyond theoretical discourse and offers practical insights for contemporary epistemological challenges. His framework encourages a rethinking of the relationship between science and spirituality, rational and intuitive knowledge, and the human subject and the objective world. In an intellectual climate marked by increasing fragmentation and specialization, his integrative model offers a promising approach that values epistemological diversity within a unified metaphysical vision.

This research highlights the potential of indigenous intellectual traditions from the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago to contribute meaningfully to global philosophical discussions. By recovering and critically engaging with al-Banjari's work, this study contributes to the development of more inclusive and comprehensive epistemological models. Rather than rejecting Western epistemology, the concept of *ma'rifah*

complements and potentially completes it by incorporating dimensions of knowledge often excluded from the modern scientific worldview.

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