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**AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF ONENESS FROM A SUFI PERSPECTIVE AS PRESENTED BY MUHAMMAD NAFIS AL-BANJARI IN HIS TREATISE - AL-DURR AL-NAFIS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The teachings of Tasawuf have flourished in the Malay world due to the efforts from Malay scholars who studied in Makkah. Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari is one of them. He wrote his treatise on tawhid in a small epistle known as al-durr al-nafis fi bayan wahid al-af' al- wa al-asma' wa al-sifat wa al-dhat al-taqdis . His teaching of tawhid written in Malay Jawi script is embroidered with Sufi teachings. However, his teachings raise issues of controversial and misunderstood nature. One of the contentious issues his epistle is blamed for is regarding the promotion of pantheism having connotation of unity of being (wahdah al-wujud). The objective of this study is to reveal the misconception of tawhid embroidered in the Sufi teachings and the importance of understanding the correct concept of tawhid from the original sources of Islam. This paper employs a detailed historical and textual study. Despite various controversies, al-Banjari epistle is considered to be a valuable work from a historical point of view. His highly succinct explanation requires additional reference and commentaries for readers to acquire appropriate understanding. It is according considered necessary to study his epistle under the proper guidance from the learned shuyookh to conceive it correctly.*

**KEYWORDS:** al-Banjari, *al-durr al-nafis*, *tawhid*, Sufi order

**His Life**

Little is known about al-Banjari's life except what he mentioned in his book, *al-durr al-nafis fi bayan wahid al-af' al- wa al-asma' wa al-sifat wa*

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*al-dhat al-taqdis* (the valuable pearl in explaining the unity of actions, names, qualities and transcendental divine essence). Al-Banjari stated at the end of his book that his real name is Muhammad Nafis b. Idris b. al-Husayn al-Banjari. He was born around 1148H/1735M in Martapura, South Kalimantan, and belonged to the Banjar royal family. Based on his birth date, he is believed to be a contemporary to Muhammad Arshad al-Banjari (1122-1227H / 1710-1812M) and <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Samad al-Falimbani (1118-1203H / 1704-1789M). He lived during three of Banjar's Sultanates such as Sultan Tahlilullah XIV(1707-1745M), Sultan Tamjidullah XV (1745-1778M) and Sultan Tahmidullah XVI (1778-1808M).<sup>1</sup>

Around 1210H/1795M al-Banjari returned to his hometown in South Kalimantan for an Islamic mission. He went to strategic places and villages, such as Bali, Sumabawa, and Kelua, to preach Islam. Al-Banjari passed away in his own land but the exact date and place of death are uncertain. There are various views about his place of death. According to one report, he died in Sigam or Pulau Laut. Another view is that he died in Kusan, Kotabaru or Kelua or in Tungkaran Pleihari, which are located in South Kalimantan.<sup>2</sup>

## His Education

It is believed that al-Banjari received his early education in his homeland South Kalimantan and then pursued his religious study extensively in Makkah and Madinah. However, no historical record supports this statement. Al-Banjari studied science of theology (*ilm al-kalam*) of the al-Ash'ari's school, science of Islamic law (*ilm al-fiqh*) from al-Shafi'i's School, and Sufism (*al-tasawwuf*) from al-Junayd's school. Al-Banjari followed al-Junayd's school because this school adheres to the doctrine of sobriety (*sahw*) rather than intoxication (*sakr*) or divinely ecstatic utterance (*shatahat*). He then emphasized practicality to embark spiritually on several Sufi orders. The Sufi order or *tariqah sufiyyah* is derived from Arabic term meaning 'road', 'way', 'path'. It comes finally to mean a common life (*mu'ashara*) founded on a series of special rules in addition to the ordinary observance of Islam, to become an adept (*faqir*), the novice (*murid*) receives initiation (*bay'ah, talqin*) before a hierarchy of witnesses (*shaykh*).<sup>3</sup>

He primarily practiced the recognized orders such as al-Qadiriyyah established by Shaykh <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (471-561H/1078-1166M), al-Shattariyyah established by Shah <sup>c</sup>Abd Allah al-Shattari (d.890H/1485M), al-Naqshabandiyyah founded by Shaykh

Muhammad b. Muhammad Baha' al-Din (718-791H/1318-1389M), al-Khalwatiyyah founded by Shaykh Sidi 'Abu 'Abd Allah Siraj al-Din 'Umar al-Ahji or 'Umar al-Khalwati (d.800H/1397M) and al-Sammaniyyah founded by Shaykh Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Madani al-Shafi' al-Samman al-Qadiri al-Sufi (1130-1189H /1718-1776M).<sup>4</sup> Out of all disciplines, al-Banjari was known as an expert in science of theology (*'ilm al-kalam*) and science of Sufism (*al-tasawwuf*). Since he follows these schools of thought and Sufi orders he is still within the structure of *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah*.

Although he affiliated into many Sufi orders, he maintained and followed the original teachings of the orders as taught by his masters. No sources have been found which make any claim that he intended to form a new order. Since he successfully embarked onto many Sufi orders and had very deep knowledge in Sufism, he was called as *mawlana al-'allamah al-fahhamah al-murshid 'ila tariq al-salamah* (our master of the outstanding knowledgeable spiritual teacher to a safety path) an appellation indicating his expertise and highly spiritual experiential achievement and knowledge in Sufism discipline by those who came after him<sup>5</sup>.

### **Scholars Exerting Influence in al-Banjari's thought.**

Al-Banjari studied under several outstanding scholars whom he documented in *al-durr al-nafis* as *shaykhuna* (our master). Among the dominant masters that exerted impacts on al-Banjari's thought are; Shaykh 'Abd Allah b. Hijazi b. Ibrahim al-Sharqawi al-Azhari (1150-1227H /1737-1812M). He was a *Faqih* (a learned) who graduated from al-'Azhar University. Shaykh Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Madani al-Shafi' al-Shahir bi al-Samman al-Qadiri al-Sufi (1130-1189H /1718-1776M) and Shaykh Siddiq b. 'Umar Khan al-Madani.

Beside them, al-Banjari also learned from Shaykh 'Abd Allah b. Ibrahim al-Mirghani. He was believed to be the same person as 'Abd Allah b. Ibrahim b. Hasan b. Muhammad Amin b. 'Ali al-Mirghani, Abu al-Siyadah, 'Aff al-Din al-Mahjub (d.1193H/1779M). He who was born in Makkah and died in al-Ta'if and was an outstanding *faqih* from the School of al-Hanafi. He is called as *al-mahjub* (veiled) due to his practice of *'uzlah*'(self-isolation) in his house for 30 years. Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Maqhribi al-'Umari was probably known as 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Maqhribi al-Tadili al-Madani al-Maliki al-Samman Tariqatan (d.1200H / 1786M ).

Shaykh Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Jawhari., his full name was Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Hasan b. °Abd al-Karim al-Khalidi, ‘Abu al-Hadi al-Shahir bi ibn al-Jawhari aw al-Jawhari al-Saghir (1151H-1215H /1738-1801M). He was an Egyptian scholar and a *faqih* (a learned) in the School of al-Shaffi. Shaykh Yusuf Abu Dharrah al-Misri was a scholar, whom al-Banjari attended in his scholarly lectures in Masjid al-Haram. Shaykh al-Malawi, his full name was Ahmad b. °Abd al-Fattah b. Yusuf b. °Umar al-Majiri al-Malawi, Shihab al-Din Abu °Abbas al-Qahiri al-Azhari al-Baqhdadi al-Shaffi (1088H-1171H), and Shaykh al-Suhaymi who was also known as Ahmad b. Muhammad Muwaffiq al-Din °Ali al-Suhaymi al-Husayni al-Misri al-Shaffi (d.1178H).

Al-Falimbani stated that Shaykh Siddiq b. °Umar Khan al-Madani and Shaykh °Abd al-Rahman b. °Abd al-°Aziz al-Maqribi, were both the disciples of Shaykh Muhammad b. °Abd al-Karim al-Madani al-Shaffi al-Shahir bi al-Samman al-Qadiri al-Sufi in Madinah.<sup>6</sup> (Abdul Samad n.d) . It can be assumed that all these scholars, Muhammad Nafis, Muhammad Arshad and °Abd al-Samad al-Falimbani, studied under the same teacher, that is, Shaykh Muhammad b. °Abd al-Karim al-Madani al-Shaffi, but at different times.

Under the principal traditional teaching of Sufism, it is impermissible for one to embark into many Sufi orders. In the case of al-Banjari, it is seen that his basic Sufi order is al-qadiriyyah as he mentioned clearly in his book that it is his Sufi order. He most probably learned this order with Shaykh Muhammad b. °Abd al-Karim al-Madani al-Samman as evidenced from the title “al-qadiri” attributed to him, which indicates that he also belonged to al-qadiriyyah order, besides al-sammaniyyah order. The other Sufi orders become his supplementary spiritual learning for the purpose of the *al-tabarruk* (divine blessing and benediction). However, al-sammaniyyah order exerted strong impact on his Sufi discourse due to his strong reliance on the thought of and spiritual connection to Shaykh Muhammad b. °Abd al-Karim al-Madani al-Samman and Shaykh Siddiq b. °Umar Khan al-Madani.

From a clear identification found in al-Banjari’s teachers, it can be said that most his teachers are Theologians, Sufis and Jurists from Makkah and Egypt. It can be assumed that al-Banjari probably traveled to Egypt and learned with some Egyptian scholars or they might have come to Makkah and taught him in masjid al-haram but no empirical facts can support this.

## His Works

As far as it can be ascertained, al-Banjari wrote several works in Malay-Jawi script during his life. One of them was *al-Durr al-Nafis fi Bayan Wahidah al- Af<sup>c</sup>al- wa al 'Asma' wa al-Sifat wa Dhat Dhat al-Taqdis* which he completed writing on the Wednesday night after 'Isha', 27 Muharram 1200H / 1785M. He also wrote other small treatises including *majmu<sup>c</sup> al-asrar (collection of the secrets)*, *penjelasan huruf–huruf abjad dalam al-qur'an (elucidation on the alphabets in al-qur'an)*, *ilmu haqiqat yang sebenar benar (science of the divine reality in the real sense)*, *masalah orang yang di jadikan imam (problem on person becoming the leader in praying)*.<sup>7</sup>

Among all treatises, the most popular epistle is *al-Durr al-Nafis*. It has been taught in Makkah and many Asian countries including Malaysia and Indonesia. This is proven from manuscripts copied by particular people's handwriting such as Mahmud b. Muhammad Yusuf Terengganu that he copied it on Tuesday night between the Maghrib and 'Isha' period at 29 Safar 1255H / 14 May 1839M. Wan Kenci B. Tuan Haji <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Ghafur also finished copying at al-Jamad al-Awwal 11306H / 1888M.<sup>8</sup>

The major reason why al-Banjari wrote *al-durr al-nafis* is a response to help his fellow folk who did not know Arabic language to learn *tawhid* from the Sufi perspective.<sup>9</sup> His work in translating and transforming the significant thoughts from various Arabic Sufi literatures into Malay–Jawi scripts denotes his mastery and proficiency in both Arabic and Malay languages, and his translation skill. He thus had a commendable capability to understand the relevant important facts from Arabic texts and translate them into a comprehensible Malay language in accordance with the level of understanding of the Malay society at that time.

*Al-durr al-nafis* is a widely accepted book. It was reprinted many times in Makkah, Egypt, Malaysia and Indonesia. A number of scholars who worked to verify and edit the contents of *al-durr al-nafis* as a sound teaching of *tawhid* before it was printed are: Shaykh 'Ahmad b. Muhammad Zayn al-Fatani (d. 1903 AD), Shaykh Da'ud b. Isma<sup>c</sup>il Da'ud al-Fatani, Shaykh 'Idris b. Husayn al-Kelantani, Shaykh <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahman Gudang al-Fatani, Shaykh <sup>c</sup>Abd Allah b. Ibrahim al-Qadi Kedah, Shaykh 'Idris al-Marbawi (d 1989M) and Shaykh Ilyas Ya<sup>c</sup>qub al-Azhari.<sup>10</sup> These figures are the recognizable Malay Scholars who are well-experienced in writing and teaching various sciences of Islamic religious knowledge in the Malay World.

### **Literature Used by al-Banjari in *al-Durr al-Nafis***

In *al-durr al-nafis*, al-Banjari refers to authentic Arabic literature in order to support his explanation. Among the reliable literature are: *al-risalah al-qushayriyyah* by Abd al-Qasim al-Qushayri (376-465H/986-1072M), *ihya' ʿulum al-din* and *minhaj al-ʿabidin* by Hujjah al-Islam Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali al-Tusi Shaykh Muhammad b. Muhammad (450-505H/1058-1111M), *futuh al-makkiyyah* and *fusus* by al shaykh al-Akbar Muhy al-Din Ibn ʿArabi (560-638H / 1165-1240M), *al-jawahir wa al-durr* and *al-yawaqit wa al-jawahir fi bayan ʿaqāʿid al-akabir* by Shaykh Abd al-Wahhab al-Shaʿrani (898-973H/1493-1575M), *al-hikam* by Taj al-Din Ibn ʿAtaʿillah al-Iskandari.(d.709H/1309M), *sharh al-hadith al-arbaʿin li al-nawawi* by Shihab al-Din Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqastalani (773-852H / 1372-1449M), *qhayth al-mawahib al-ʿaliyah bi sharh al-hikam al-ʿataʿiyyah* by Ibn ʿUbbad al-Randi, (733-792H/1333-1390M), *Sharh al-Hikam* by, Shihab al-Din al-Ramli (773-844H/1371-1440M), *dalaʿil al-khayrat* by Shaykh Muhammad b. Sulayman al-Jazuli al-Simlali al-Shadhili ( 807-870H / 1404-1465M).<sup>11</sup>

Additional scholarly treatises are: *sharh fusus al-hikam* by Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (1050-1143H /1641-1731M), *mulkhis mukhtasar tuhfah al-mursalah* by Shaykh ʿAbd Allah b. Ibrahim al-Mirghani, *sharh qasidah ʿayniyyah* by Shaykh Siddiq b. ʿUmar Khan, *sharh wird al-sahar* by Shaykh ʿAbd Allah b. Hijazi b. Ibrahim al-Misri, *al-minhah al muhamadiyyah*, *ʿunwan al jalwah fi shaʿn al-khulwah* and *ighasah al-lahfan wa muʿanasah al-wilhan* by Shaykh Muhammad b. ʿAbd al- Karim al-Samman al-Madani (1130-1189H/1718-1776M). From these primary sources, it is understood that al-Banjari’s exposition of *al tawhid* from the Sufi perspective is in line with the mainstream thinking of the *ahl al-sunnah wa jamaʿah* school.

## Responses From The Contemporary Scholars

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a number of scholars gave their responses to the teaching of *tawhid* in *al-durr al-nafis*. Some of them criticize it and some expressed a positive reaction. Wan Muhammad Shaghir reports that al-Sayyid ʿAlwi Tahir al-Haddad, a state Mufti of the Government of Johor, expressed his disapproval of the teaching of *tawhid* by al-Banjari. The Mufti believed that the concept of *tawhid wujudiyah* in al-Banjari’s book clearly conflicts to Islamic basic principles and mixes with Hinduism. Abdul Fatah Harun also criticizes al-Banjari in his books *ahli sunnah dan wujudiyah –batiniah (mengenai ajaran salah)(ahl al sunnah and wujudiyah-batiniyyah* pertaining to its deviant teachings. He is of the opinion that al Banjari’s teaching of *tawhid wujudiyah* is not in line

with *ahl Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* mainstream thought and was influenced by Greek philosophy, Hinduism and Shi'ism. Muhammad Hanif Hassan in his paper, *sejarah ringkas perkembangan ajaran sesat di singapore (brief history of the development of deviant teaching in Singapore)* remarks that al-Banjari's teaching of *tawhid* leans towards pantheism and the belief that God is a part of the world.<sup>12</sup>

Although al-Banjari's teaching was severely criticized by many, his teaching also exerted a strong impact on many scholars such as 'Abd al-Rahman Siddiq Safat Tamabanhan Indragiri, a grandson of Shaykh Muhammad 'Arshad al-Banjari. He wrote *risalah 'amal ma'rifah (treatise for gnostic practice)* in 1332H with a short quotation from the content of *al-durr al-nafis*. Furthermore, Shaykh Muhammad Salih b. 'Abd Allah al-Minangkabaw also wrote *kashf al-asrar (revealing the secrets)* in 1344H with reference to *al-durr al-nafis*. K.H Haderanie romanized *al-Durr al-Nafis* into the Indonesian language with some commentary entitled *ilmu ketuhanan permata yang indah (al-durr al-nafis beserta soal jawab) (science of god the precious jewel with answer and question)*. Jahid Sidek also quoted the ideas of al-Banjari in his book *shaykh dalam 'ilmu tariqah (shaykh in tariqah)*.<sup>13</sup> It can be said that the difference in acceptance of al-Banjari's teachings of *tawhid* among the scholars can be a result of the the methods of interpretation they applied to receive them.

## The Concept of *Tawhid* According to Al-Banjari

In Ash'ari's school, the discussion method of unveiling and its relation to *tawhid wujud* is not vividly mentioned and discussed by the earlier theologians, but both concepts had been deliberated by the late theologians. Theologians in Ash'ari School had their own perception toward *tawhid wujud*. Some of them like Sa'ad al-Din Mas'ud al-Taftazani (d.1390M) criticized severely *tawhid al-wujud* through his theological methodology. He found out that the doctrine of *tawhid wujud* leans to pantheistic connotation and abrogating the *shari'ah* teaching. His view is based on his critical evaluation of the content in *fusus al-hikam* by Ibn 'Arabi, 'Ali bin Muhammad (d.1240M). However the other theologian such as 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d.1731M) defended *tawhid al-wujud* as a true representation of the facts based on the relevant Sufi perspective. He harmonized between the theologian and Sufi methodology within the blueprint of *shari'ah* in a way that is not perceived by some a group of scholars to be against the theological principle and *shari'ah* practice. He wrote some books and commentary elucidating the true meaning of *tawhid wujud* and unveiling method such as *idah al-maqsud fi bayan wahdah al-*

*wujud* (clarifying what is meant by the unity of being) and his *sharh fusus al-hikam* (commentary of bezels of wisdom).<sup>14</sup>

As an adherent of Ash'ari's school embroidered with Sufi teaching, al-Banjari is seen as expressing precise definition of *tawhid* in *al-durr al-nafis* in accordance with relevant sufi views. Al-Banjari's exposition the concept of *tawhid* from the Sufi's perspective is more dominant than theological element and accordingly there is more emphases on the unveiling (*kashf*) methodology. This methodology can be considered as a doctrine of *tawhid* for unveiling people (*ahl al-mukashifin*). *Tawhid* literally means making one or asserting oneness. Al-Banjari views it as believing wholeheartedly by direct vision and spiritual tasting in the oneness (*wahdaniyyah, tawahhud*) of Allah in all aspects of actions, names, attributes and essence. The ultimate essence of al-Banjari's meaning of *tawhid* is the belief that there is no real being but Allah or there is no reality but the reality of Allah without any pantheistic meaning and strong practicing the *shari'ah* teaching internally as well externally.

In other words, this doctrine firmly asserts that Allah is the Absolute Real One Being and all other beings are metaphorical and nonexistence being without disregarding the *shari'ah* principles. Thus, al-Banjari's teaching is in line with the doctrine of *tawhid wujud* or *wahdah al-wujud* even though he never employs clearly this terminology in his writing. *Wahdah al-wujud* is the unity of being, a doctrine indicates that there is only Oneself which is manifested in multiplicity. Allah is the One in His essence, His qualities and His actions. There is only One Entity in existence and multiplicity appears through relation between non-essential entities.<sup>15</sup>

Besides al-Banjari's teaching is considered to be inclined toward the *wujud* doctrine, yet his teaching also can be categorized in other terminologies such as *'ilm al-mukashafah* (science of unveiling), *'ilm al-asrar* (science of the secrets), *haq al-yaqin* (absolute certainty), and *fana' fi tawhid* (annihilation in the unity) - It is considered as the highest degree of *tawhid* that he who attains it, his belief is affirmative and unchangeable. This is because this *tawhid* deals with the degree of certainty and unveiling of the reality of things in one's heart. It is similar with al-Ghazzali's teaching of *tawhid*. It means one ceases himself in the unification of God by witnessing nothing in being but Allah alone. This level is like oil in the kernel, the ultimate truth of *tawhid*. It is an article of faith of the truthful people (*al-siddiqun wa al-'arifun*).<sup>16</sup>

People who have experienced this kind of *tawhid* are people of unveiling. This is proven from the story of magicians who were fearless of the death punishment imposed by Fir'aun because they believed firmly the



reality of things discovered before their eyes and heart and that it is Allah who changed Musa's stick to be a big snake. The clear proof from unveiling the reality of things strongly refrain them from changing their belief as evident in the al Qur'an. Allah says: So they (the Magicians) were defeated there and then and were returned disgraced. And the sorcerer fell down prostrate. They said: We believe in the Lord of all creatures. The Lord of Musa and Harun. Surely I (Fir<sup>c</sup>aun) will cut off your hands and your feet on opposites sides than I will crucify you all. They said: Verily, we are returning to our Lord. And you take vengeance on us only because we believed in the *Ayat* (proofs, evidences, lessons, signs etc.) of our Lord when they reached us. Our Lord pour out us patience and cause us to die as Muslims.<sup>17</sup> And the magicians said: "We prefer you not over the clear signs that have come to us and to Him (Allah) Who created us. So decree whatever you desire to decree for you can only decree regarding this life of the world."<sup>18</sup>

This *tawhid* is also supported by the hadith in which the Prophet asked the proof from al-Harithah b. Malik al-Ansari to testify to his belief. The Prophet questioned him one day: "How is your condition today, Oh al-Harithah.?" He replied: "I am a true believer". The Prophet asked him again: "Indeed for every single word has its own fact thus what is your testimony of your genuine faith.?" He replied: "I have removed from myself looking into worldly life, so it's stone and it's gold is similar (valueless) to me, thus I was sleepless at night for worship and was thirsty in shrine day until I can watch like as my Lord's throne in front of my eyes obviously and like as I saw people in Paradise have mutual visits of each other in Paradise and like as I perceive the sound of screaming people in the fire". The Prophet said: "You are really knowable, so consistent in such condition". In another narration the Prophet said: "Who wish to see one whose Allah enshrines His Light into his soul, look forward to al-Harithah b. Malik.<sup>19</sup> From the account given, it can be said that al-Banjari's doctrine of *tawhid* is so unique that requires a proper Sufi methodology to comprehend it.

### **His Methodology in *Tawhid***

Al-Banjari adheres to the al-Asha<sup>c</sup>ari's school in science of theology (*ilm al-kalam*). He uses the Asha<sup>c</sup>ari's speculative method that is reasoning as a starting point in learning *tawhid* and then ends up by employing Sufi's method: method of spiritual unveiling (*kashf*) and spiritual tasting (*dhawq*) Both are as direct vision or the uncovering of anything covered that

alludes to a knowledge which does not require proof as it is a direct perception of the nature of thing<sup>20</sup>

Al-Banjari combines both theological and Sufi's method as the integrated means to understand *tawhid*. However, the Sufi' method prevails in his teaching and writing. He believes that the unveiling (*kashf*) is a perfect way to verify the true sense of *tawhid*. It is so important to purify the heart because the heart is the basic locus of *al-tawhid*. Since the *kashf* phenomena can occur in the pure heart, it becomes the best mean to perceive the real meaning of *tawhid*. Thus, in Sufism it is important to know the characteristics of the heart because it is a basic in religion and fundamental way to reach Allah.<sup>21</sup> Some people claim that the only way to purify the heart is by experiencing Sufi path through exercising any Sufi order's institution.

As the method of unveiling dominates in al-Banjari's explanation, his method is considered within *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah*'s methodology but most people do not realize it. His method is in line with that of <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Wahhab b. <sup>c</sup>Ali b. <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Kafi al-Subki, 'Abu Nasr Taj al-Din (727-771H / 1328-1370M), known as Ibn al-Subki in his exposition in "*sharh 'aqidah Ibn al-Hajib*" where he stated," that, "*Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* unanimously agreed on one similar basic creed such as necessary (*al-wajib*), possible (*al-jaiz*) and impossible (*al-mustahil*) to Allah even though they employed different methodology and principle to perceive theological issue. *Ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah* are divided into three main group; The first is *ahl al-Hadith* (the traditionalist); their fundamental concept is based on literal interpretation of al-Qur'an and al-Hadith and consensus agreement (*al-ijma'*), the second is *ahl al-nazar wa al-'aql* from *al-Asha'iriyyah* and *al-Maturidiyyah* group (the rationalist and demonstrationist); their basis is complementary with reason and revelation (*al-Qur'an* and *al-Hadith*). The third is *ahl al-wujd wa al-kashf* (people of experience and unveiling) namely the Sufi group; Their starting points commence with the method of *ahl al-nazar and ahl al-hadith* and end up with the unveiling method (*al-kashf*) and Divine inspiration (*al-ilham*)"<sup>22</sup>

Since al-Banjari integrates both methods (theological and Sufi), he is seen as continuing Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani's approach in explaining the meaning of *tawhid*. It is seen that Al-Sha'rani is the first scholar who claimed that he officially worked in harmonizing between reasoning and unveiling method in *al-'aqidah*. Both actually are not contravened but have mutual role to strengthening each other.<sup>23</sup> Al-Banjari's way in explaining *tawhid* follows the steps of eminent Sufi scholars utilizing many terminologies, metaphors, allusions and symbols as indicators to

present the meaning in *tawhid*. These ways are styles and trends of Sufi scholars to avoid people misinterpreting their teaching and accusing them of heresy. This tradition is also practiced by al-Hasan al-Basri (d.110H/728M) and al-Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 298H/910M). For instance, to avoid misinterpretation by people, al-Junayd never spoke publicly about *tawhid* from Sufi perspective to ordinary people. However if he wanted to discuss the issue of *tawhid* in this manner, he will close the door and keep the key secured.<sup>24</sup>

Al-Banjari's methodology in attaining *al-kashf* (unveiling) is called *mujahadah al-kashf* (striving unveiling) because it deals with pure heart. For those who wish to realize this kind *tawhid*, they must follow its own particular discipline and understand its terminologies properly. If not, one is unable to perceive the highest end of the Sufis in their elaboration the meaning of *tawhid*. His way is clarified by Ibn <sup>°</sup>Ajibah, Ahmad b. Muhammad b. <sup>°</sup>Ajibah al-Hasani (d.1224H). He stated that *mujahadah al-kashf* (striving unveiling) compulsorily requires a *shaykh* because, in fact, the *shaykh* has spiritual escalation (*tarqiyyah*) that can help improve pupil's spiritual dimension within their meeting, a particular spiritual ceremony, and explain unseen phenomena like the Prophet sought descriptions from Waraqah b. Nawfal to know about Prophethood's matter and its signs.

In this way, the *shaykh* is called *shaykh al-tarqiyyah* (master of spiritual escalation). He also covers the functions of *shaykh al-ta<sup>°</sup>lim* (master of learning) and *shaykh al-tarbiyyah* (master of teaching). Ibn <sup>°</sup>Ajibah acknowledged the necessity of the *shaykh* in *mujahadah al-kashf* as very completely helpful to attain objective and close to the truth. Whereas in *mujahadah al-taqwa*, it is seen as unnecessary to require the *shaykh* for guidance and it is sufficient for one to practice by collecting data via reading books. In *mujahadah al-istiqamah* (striving of consistency), it is encouraged to seek a *shaykh* for instruction on what the best matter for one is but sometimes it also enough for him to read in order to attain his end objective. However, both are recommendable and more helpful to have the Sufi master to complete one's aim. The scholars who practice *mujahadah al-kashf* are the likes of al-Ghazzali who learned from al-Shaykh Muhammad al-Bazighani, <sup>°</sup>Abd al- Wahhab al- Sha<sup>°</sup>rani took a lesson from Shaykh <sup>°</sup>Ali al- Khawwas, Shaykh <sup>°</sup>Izz al-Din b. <sup>°</sup>Abd al-Salam studied under Shaykh Abu al-Hassan al-Shazili.<sup>25</sup> (Ibn Ajibah 2000; al-Sha<sup>°</sup>rani n.d)

In conclusion, al-Banjari's views on Sufism have a strong basis from al- Qur'an and al-Sunnah and spiritual experiences of previous prominent Sufi Scholars. He chooses reason and the unveiling method to

understanding *tawhid*. He never denies the function of reason in understanding the foundation of *tawhid*. The use of the unveiling method is the last step to verify the true meaning of *tawhid*. One who is able to comprehend the meaning of *tawhid* from a Sufi's perspective is called as *al-rasikhun fi al-ilm* (those who firmly established in knowledge).

## Methodology of His Writing

Al-Banjari has his own way in writing about the teaching of *tawhid*. Following the tradition of many scholars, he commences his preface by praising Allah and asking for the Prophet Muhammad blessings upon him as well as his families, companions, Saints and the followers of followers of the Prophetic teaching until to the Day of Judgment. This action is observed as a courtesy from al-Banjari toward Allah and His Prophet. He regards his writing as a succinct work (*risalah mukhtasarah*) comprising a high-level teaching about *tawhid* cited from both the words of reputable Sufi's scholars as well as from authentic Sufis' texts.

As his work comprises a highly valuable teaching level of *tawhid*, he entitles his work as *al-durr al-nafis*. He also mentions his objective is to help his fellowmen who cannot understand the Arabic language to learn *tawhid* in a Malay medium. To indicate the element of *tawhid* in his work, he says that he composes the content of the book by requiring Allah's assistance and His guidance.<sup>26</sup>

He organizes his teaching systematically: by locating introduction, the four classifications of *tawhid* and a conclusion. In his introduction, al-Banjari explains the four major destructive qualities that prevent one from reaching knowledge of God such as laxity (*fujur*), lack of interest (*malal*), hypocrisy (*riya'*), dishonesty (*sum'ah*), and self-satisfaction (*'ujub*). This introduction is pivotal for one to be aware about spiritual obstacles in traveling in the path to God.<sup>27</sup> This shows al-Banjari's expertise in successfully educating one in undergoing the spiritual journey to God.

He then explains the categorization of *tawhid* into four divisions systematically: *tawhid al-af'al* (the unity of actions), *tawhid al-asma'* (the unity of names), *tawhid al-sifat* (the unity of attributes) and *tawhid al-dhat* (the unity of Essence). The pattern of organizing topics and the divisions of *tawhid* is similar to the way done by 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili (d. 832H/1428M) in his book *al-insan al-kamil*.<sup>28</sup> But al-Banjari's explanation is different from al-Jili in form of expression. He tries to make his work succinct and simple and includes various short significant citations of Sufi Scholars and stresses a greater commitment to Islamic law.

In each topic of *tawhid*, he elaborates the teaching with a brief definition and supports the explanation with al-Qur'an and al-Hadith, and citations from various authentic Sufis literatures and clarifications from his masters' words. Besides referring to al-Hadith, he also alludes to the words of companions of the Prophet and reputable Saints. It is believed he uses the words of companions and saints to strengthen his elucidation and make it clearer. However, in citation of al-Hadith, al-Banjari does not mention the source of al-Hadith, neither its narrator nor its value. It seems in his time that it is not so important to state names of the narrators because society at his period placed trust in the scholars' credibility and their teaching.

On another point, al-Banjari does not use full translation in his work. On some occasions, he still maintains use of Arabic terminologies such as *naskhah* (transcript), *'adam* (nonexistence), *fana'* (annihilation), *baqa'* (continuance), *wujud* (being), *ittihad* (union), *hulul* (incarnation) etc. It is believed that these terminologies do not necessarily need to be translated since they signify important meaning in their original form. If they are translated, they may lose the actual meaning because translation sometimes does not give accurate impressions unless in Arabic terms. Most of al-Banjari's elucidation is short and precise so that it needs more elaboration from the original text.

In explaining the difficult idea of *tawhid*, al-Banjari uses symbolic expression and exemplification to make the idea understandable. In order to maintain *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah* mainstream school of thought, al-Banjari does a comparative study between other schools of thought in order to clarify the belief in a balanced manner. As an adherent of al-Ash'ari's School, al-Banjari attempts to expand and reconcile al-Ash'ari's thought in Sufism. This is because almost all of al-Ash'ari's thought is similar to Sufism even though they apply different terminologies but have a close meaning to each other. In his conclusion, he advises that his teaching should be kept properly to its members. He supports this idea by several Quranic verses and relevant al-Hadith.

## Conclusion

In nutshell, even al-Banjari epistle faces many challenges and critique but it is still relevant and readable by many Malay scholars in the Malay world. It can be said that al-Banjari's way of writing is well organized, precise and complicated in several sentences as well as terminologies. It is not suitable for all people but is more appropriate for those who seek to learn *tawhid* under the guidance and explanation of

*shaykh murshid*. Even though, his explanation may be said to be too succinct, but it requires the additional reference and commentaries from other authentic books in theological and Sufism to understand the teaching of *tawhid* correctly to avoid misunderstood from its literal expression and teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari, *Al-Durr al-Nafis fi bayan Wahid al-Afal- wa al-Asma' wa al-Sifat wa al-Dhat Dhat al-Taqdis*, n.d. Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-<sup>c</sup>Arabiyyah, Misr., p. 2; Azyumardi Azra, *The Transmission of Islamic Reformist to Indonesia: Networks of Middle Eastern and Malay-Indonesia 'Ulama' In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. 1992, (P.h.d. Dissertation, United States: Colombia University, 1992), p. 508. H.Ahmadi Isa, *Ajaran Tasawuf Muhammad Nafis dalam Perbandingan* 2001, SriGunting Jakarta, p.23.

<sup>2</sup> Wan Muhammad Shaqir Abdullah, *Penyebaran Islam Dan Silsilah Ulama Sejagat Dunia Melayu*, 1999, vol.8, Khazanah Fathaniah, Kuala Lumpur p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> H.A.R Gib and J.H Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1973, Leiden E.J. Brill Netherland, p. 573.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari, *Al-Durr al-Nafis fi bayan Wahid al-Afal- wa al-Asma' wa al-Sifat wa al-Dhat Dhat al-Taqdis*, p.2-30

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari, *Al-Durr al-Nafis* p.1

<sup>6</sup> <sup>c</sup>Abd al- Samad al-Falimbangi, *Sayr al-Salikin*, vol.3 n.d, Maktabah wa Matba<sup>c</sup>ah Muhammad al-Nahdi wa Auladah: Thailand, p. 179.

<sup>7</sup> Wan Muhammad Shaqir Abdullah, *Penyebaran Islam Dan Silsilah Ulama Sejagat Dunia Melayu*, vol.8, p.53

<sup>8</sup> Kataloq Manuskrip Melayu, Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, MSS 2488(A) al-Durr al-Nafis, 2001, Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari, *Al-Durr al-Nafis*, p.2.

<sup>10</sup> Wan Muhammad Shaqir Abdullah, *Penyebaran Islam Dan Silsilah Ulama Sejagat Dunia Melayu*, vol.8, p.53

<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari, *Al-Durr al-Nafis*, p.2-30; Isma<sup>c</sup>il Basha al-Baghdadi, *Hidayah al-<sup>c</sup>Arifin*, vol.5, n.d, Mu'assasah al-Tarikh al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi Bayrut p. 117; Bassam, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Wahhab al- Jabi, d mu<sup>c</sup>jam al-A<sup>c</sup>lam Mu<sup>c</sup>jam Tarajum li Ashhur al-Rijal wa al-Nisa' min al-<sup>c</sup>Arab wa al-Musta<sup>c</sup>ribin wa al-Mustashriqin, Al-Jaffan al-Jabi, Cyprus: p. 430; Al-Zirikli, Khayr al-Din al-A<sup>c</sup>lam Qamus Tarajum li Ashur al Rijal wa al-Nisa' min al-<sup>c</sup>Arab wa al-Musta<sup>c</sup>ribin wa al-Mustashriqin, vol.4, Dar al-<sup>c</sup>Ilm li al- Malayin, Bayrut: p 22.

<sup>12</sup> Abdullah Muhammad Zain, Haji Mohammad Alwi Yusoff and Muhammad Haizuan Rozali *Kebatilan Dalam Ajaran Kebatinan* 2003, KUIM, Kuala Lumpur, p.152.

<sup>13</sup> H.Ahmadi Isa, *Ajaran Tasawuf Muhammad Nafis dalam Perbandingan*, p.42; K.H Haderanie, *Ilmu Ketuhanan Permata yang Indah (al-Durr al-Nafis beserta soal jawab)* C.V. Nur Ilmu Surabaya, p.1; Jahid Sidek, *Shaykh dalam <sup>c</sup>ilm Tariqah*, 1997, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur p. 243.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Nabulusi, <sup>c</sup>Abd Al-Ghani Idah Al-Maqsud Fi Bayan Wahdah Al-Wujud wa Ma<sup>c</sup>ahu Masa'il fi al Tawhid wa-al-Tasawwuf, 2004..Edited Sa<sup>c</sup>id <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Fattah. Dar Afaq al-<sup>c</sup>Arabiyyah Al-Qahirah, p.3. Risalah fi wahdah al-wujud li Sa<sup>c</sup>ad al-Din al-Taftazani. <https://archive.org/stream/WahdaAlwgwwd#page/n11/mode/2up.p.2>

<sup>15</sup> Aisha Bewley, *A Glossary of Islamic Term*, 1998, Deluxe Printer, London. p. 227.

- <sup>16</sup> Al-Ghazzali, *Ihya' ʿUlum al-Din*, 1995 vol.1, Dar al-Fikr, Bayrut, p. 9; Ibn ʿArabi, Muhammad ibn ʿAli. *Al-Futuh al-Makkiyyah fi Maʿrifah al-Asrar al-Malikiyyah wa al-Mulkiyyah*, vol.1, n.d. Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-ʿArabi, Bayrut, p.69.
- <sup>17</sup> Al-Quran al-Aʿraf 7:119-126.)
- <sup>18</sup> al-Quran. Taha 20: 72
- <sup>19</sup> al-Tibrani. al-Muʿjam al-Kabir.n.d, Dar al-Bayan Al-ʿArabi,Jeddah.
- <sup>20</sup> Aisha Bewley, *A Glossary of Islamic Term*, p. 213
- <sup>21</sup> Al-Ghazzali, *Ihya' ʿUlum al-Din*, vol.3, p.3.
- <sup>22</sup> Al-Zubaydi, Muhammad b. Muhammad, *Ithaf al-Sadat al-Muttaqin bi sharh Ihya' ʿUlum al-Din*, vol.2, 1989,Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah,, Bayrut,p. 9
- <sup>23</sup> Al-Shaʿrani, ʿAbd al-Wahhab *al-Yawaqit wa al-Jawahir fi bayan ʿAqa'id al-Akabar* n.d Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-ʿArabi, Bayrut,p.15.
- <sup>24</sup> Al-Shaʿrani, ʿAbd al-Wahhab,, Ibid.p.18.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibn ʿAjibah, Ahmad b. Muhammad, *al-Futuh al-Ilahiyyah fi sharh al-Mabahith al-Asliyyah* 2000, Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah,Bayrut:p.75; al-Shaʿrani,ʿAbd al-Wahhab, *Lataif al-Minan wa al-Akhlaq fi wujub al-Tahadduth bi niʿmah Allah ʿala al-Itlaq* n.d Aʿlam al-Fikr, Bayrut.,p 87.
- <sup>26</sup> Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari, *al-Durr al-Nafis*, p.2.
- <sup>27</sup> Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari, *al-Durr al-Nafis*, p.3.
- <sup>28</sup> Al-Jili, ʿAbd al-Karim b. Ibrahim, *al-Insan al-Kamil fi maʿrifat al-Awakhir wa al-Awail* ,2005,Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah ,Bayrut, p. 87-102