

**TAN TAN D. H. THE TRANSITION FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN IRANIAN MYSTICISM
(THE BEGINNING OF IRANIAN SUFISM).**

This article investigates some historical aspects of Sufism in Iran and its influence on the Persian culture, society, literature and also the dynamics of the development of the Iranian Sufism in different periods. There is the research of the Iranian Sufism's influence on the Iranian mentality and spirituality of the Iranian ethnic community and also its effect on the people's historical destiny in the Iranian areal.

Key words: *Sufism, Mysticism, Khaneghah, Samaa, Sufi (woolen dressed).*

Introduction. Iranian culture and literature more than in any society are mixed with Sufism and mysticism thus the dominance of Sufism over the national life and history of Iran is undeniable. The subject of early Sufism is complex and relates to a wide geographical area extending from the Near East to Central Asia. The focus is here made upon the extensive Iranian territories formerly known as Khorasan, though today they are divided by international boundaries. Iranian people have been familiar with this word and got accustomed to it. Although Sufism in its early days did not profit any regular form, after the third century, Sufi thinking became popular among people and from the fourth century it had its own regular form and the organization that followed its progressive way of the development.

Therefore, it can be said that Sufi thinking becomes an integral part of the Iranian thinking. The effects of Sufism on the historical life of the Iranian nation, whether positive or negative, are controversial among critics.

Some of them, for example Ahmad Kasravi, Iranian linguist, historian, and reformer, blames Sufism for all national, religious, political and cultural backwardness and some, like Massignon, believes that the spread of Islam as a celebrated international and global religion is indebted to Sufism [1: 464]. However, the situation should be considered regarding time and place of the Sufism development and it must be criticized accordingly.

The purpose of the study. The goal of this article is investigation the origins of Sufism in Iran and its history of the earliest developments.

The Sufism beginning. Iranian mysticism after Islam grew firstly in the Northern Eastern Iran. This was an area where due to its closeness to the Indo-European cultural roots, and despite the spread of Islam, memories of the old Aryan thoughts were very alive and fresh.

The first three famous Iranian mystics were all from Balkh: Abu Eshagh Balkhi, Abu Ali Balkhi and Hatam Asam. The grading of spiritual advancement which is common to most Iranian Sufi schools and usually has seven stages was also very common among the Manichaeans followers in Balkh since the time of the Sassanids.

In Attar's "Conference of the Birds", the concept of having to go through seven stages to reach the eternal light becomes symbolized in the story of a flock of birds in search of Simorgh who has to go through seven stages to reach her nest on the Qaf mountain. But at the end Simorgh turns out to be nothing but the bird's own reflection in the water [2: 31]

This reflects the same ancient belief in the development and transformation of God or "the creator" into the world or "the created"; and the existence of the divine in every living thing. Even in Zoroastrianism, although the creator is separated from the creation and placed above the world of being, the divine can still give out its own divine essence to the worthy few.

There are cited different views and ideas about the origin of Sufism. For example Edward Brown, British orientalist, considered Sufism like the response to Aryan against the solid Semitic religion and known Sufismas anti-Islamic organization and considered it as one of the parties of Iranian Aryans [3: 75-76].

R. A. Nicholson, British orientalist, knew the origin of Sufism and the Greek government, especially of mysticism and Neoplatonism. Some think that Christianity was at the origins of Sufism and some believe that Indian Buddhism and brahmaharya beliefs had an effect on Sufism and searched its roots in the philosophy of "Vdan".

Along with these ideas some also considered Sufism as Islam and Koran teachings. Louis Massignon (was a French Catholic scholar of Islam and a pioneer of Catholic-Muslim mutual understanding) considers Sufism as a phenomenon that has arisen in the context of Islam, he puts it in the order as it follows the evolution of ascetic tendencies among the first centuries Islamic leaders. I. P. Petrushevski, a Russian professor of Near and Middle Eastern history, confirms this opinion and says: "Sufi Islamic background and evolution of Islam emerged in the feudal society and believers of non-Islamic mysticism haven't led to the emergence of Sufism but it emerged later and had little effect on the subsequent course" [4: 597].

Saeed Nafisi, an Indian scholar, a fiction writer and a poet has distinguished Iranian Sufism with Iraq and Mesopotamia Mysticism and distinguishes Sufism as wisdom of general Aryan race and denies any relationship with Sami thoughts. He also deems unacceptable the influence on Persian Sufism possibly made by the

Alexandrian Neo-Platonic thought, Hermes, Israeli, and Hebrew. However he confirms the exquisite effect of Manichean philosophy on Sufism in Iran and believes that these two trends are the same. Also he accepts the influence of Buddhist philosophy on Sufism in Iran and interrelationships it with Iranian and Indian philosophies. And he calls the way of Iranian Sufism the Indo-Iranian way [5: 47-100]

R. A. Nicholson in his little introduction to Sufism, "The Mystics of Islam", remarks: "Sufism, the religious philosophy of Islam, is described in the oldest extant definition as "the apprehension of divine realities", and although referring to it as "Islamic mysticism," he still maintains the popular idea that Sufism was largely the product of diverse philosophical and spiritual influences, including Christian, Neoplatonic, and others. He further states that it is "a subject so vast and many-sided that several large volumes would be required to do it anything like justice" [6: 1-6].

There is still a lot of controversy around the origins of Iranian mysticism during the Islamic era. Some Moslems consider it to be completely Islamic, some totally un-Islamic. Some Moslems consider whatever is non-Islamic as the proof of heresy, whilst the non-believers consider that Islam doesn't have mysticism in fact. Some consider its uniqueness to be the result of Buddhist influences: others find its roots in Neo-Platonist philosophy.

The Western Orientalists have found the roots of Iranian "*erfan*" in Alexandria, whilst those in search of the Aryan "race" deny all Greek or Arabic influences. Before accepting or rejecting any of these theories certain realities must be reviewed.

Iranian Mysticism must have had some specifically Iranian characteristics, otherwise, if it was simply Buddhism or Islam, similar phenomenon would have existed in other Buddhist or Islamic countries. Or if its specificity was connected to the neo-Platonist influences from the West, the same ideas should have also been effective in the West, the source of these views. Undeniably, the ancient Iranian views, their common roots with other Indo-Aryan or Indo-European groups, the era of Sassanid Zoroastrianism and the period of reaction against it are all part of this history too. The nature of mysticism is such that essentially it cannot recognize any religious or national boundaries. From the beginning, it has not only collaborated with other schools but has in fact flourished because of it. A major feature of Iranian mysticism is precisely its absorption of other cultures. It is therefore not wise to reduce Iranian mysticism only to one of its foundation sources. In the same way, its Islamic aspect should not be forgotten either. This aspect is associated with the history of Sufism.

What we call Sufism today first arose out of Christian circles residing in the areas in and around Baghdad since the Sassanid Empire. Some of these sects had denounced worldly goods and were leading the life of Christian abstinence, prayer and devotion in their convents. They used to wear rough clothes to get used to the rough life. The word Sufi comes from this origin. Sufi from the word "*suf*" ("woolen") was thus used to refer to those Moslem groups who were similar to the earlier Christian sects who wore rough clothes. In Persian we still use the same term "*pashmineh poosh*" ("woolen dressed") to refer to Sufis. The same principles of total devotion had become popular among Moslems in Baghdad too. Thus the first Moslem Sufi groups appeared [7: 194].

In this early phase, Sufism was nothing but a return to the devotional and self-denunciation trends within the earlier Islam itself. Especially towards the end of the Umayyad Caliphate, the idea for the return to the asceticism and purity of the original Islam had become very current. The Sufis of those early days were those who had reacted against the life of luxury practiced by the Umayyads and preached the life of self-denunciation and devotion and the total trust in God's rewards for such deeds. Sufism was therefore, at first, a kind of esoteric and internalized devotional order within Islam. It was the reaction against the pollution of Islam in the world power and caliphates.

This type of Sufism, characterized by its emphasis on self denunciation, total devotion and trust in God's rewards, has been termed "trusting" Sufism. It continues, more or less in the same form, to the present; not only in Iran but in most other Moslem countries. For this reason, some observers call Sufism a kind of "practical mysticism". Mysticism is more theoretical as it is concerned with epistemological question of what is the absolute truth, whilst Sufism already knows what it seeks and simply shows the practical path towards it.

However, those Sufis who already knew their ideal goal obviously spent less time trying to recognize it. For them, therefore, entering the field of mysticism made no sense at all was it theoretical or practical. One can be a Sufi but not a mystic; and vice versa. But as soon as this very same non-mystic Sufism of Baghdad reaches the Persian mystics it rapidly becomes a weapon for reviving the ancient Iranian ideas and confronting the official religion.

The Sufi schools of Baghdad had lost their vitality by the end of the 4th century (11th AD). The main reason for this decline is the rise of great Iranian Sufi thinkers particularly in Khorasan. From the first period of Sufism in Baghdad nothing written remains other than quotes and stories scattered by others. What we consider today as the principal ideas of Sufism were in fact formulated in the second phase within the Iranian Sufi trend. The first problem was bound to place Iranian Sufism on the confrontational course with the official religion and it was the question of the relationship of the self with the divine [8: 194]

In such a way, the execution of Hallaj in Baghdad in the beginning of the 4th century (10th AD) had the profound effect on the future development of Iranian Sufism. Hallaj's "crime" was to find the divine within himself. To the religious authorities, this meant the end of theocracy and the beginning of the man-god's ruling. This was also the period in which, on the one hand, the re-emergence of Iranian culture was beginning to take

shape, and on the other hand, religious doubts and constant questioning of the religious edicts of the Islamic caliphate were spreading wide among the urban population in Iran. This period was called the age of "rebellious" Sufism. Iranian Sufism becomes in fact an expression of the spiritual struggle of the urban Iranian layers against dogmatic religious beliefs and edicts [9: 464-514].

Naturally, the return to the pre-Islamic Iranian mystic idea of "man-god" played the key role here. The common feature of most Sufi schools of the time was indeed this way of confronting the theocracy of the Islamic Caliphates. The first ideological division within the Islamic Iran became the division between those who believed (only the selected few could get close to the divine) and those who saw the divine everywhere. Thus Iranian Sufism rejected the idea that reaching the divine is the privilege of the few. Many of them considered the religious practice and carrying out duties like prayers and fasting to be in fact a hindrance in the endeavor to reach the divine.

Establishing the direct relationship with the divine which was a characteristic of ancient Iranian mystical thoughts was once again revived within Islamic Sufism. The idea that the self and the divine are the unified whole, and in essence the same thing, is the most common thread that runs through most Sufi schools of this period. As Saeb Tabrizi (a poet and one of the greatest masters of one form of classical Persian lyric poetry, known as the *ghazal*) says: "involved are the waves". The same view has been for ages in Iranian mysticism [10: 117].

Few centuries later we read in Divan Shams (is known as Rumi masterpiece, It is named in honour of Rumi's spiritual teacher and friend Shams Tabrizi):

*"You pilgrims to Hajj, where are you, where are you,
The beloved is here, where are you, where are you,
Your beloved is your wall to wall neighbor".*

Thus Iranian Sufism, opposing the racial and social privileges of the time, abandons religious privileges too and brings the king and the pauper, the Moslem and the heretic under the same roof ("*khaneghah*") in front of the Sufi wisdom. The Sufi literature of the time is full of condemnation of wealth and power possessors and criticizes the false asceticism and devotion of those clerics who legitimize the corruption of the powerful persons. As in the Manichaeism movement, reaching higher stages of the divine spirituality was only dependent on devotion, spiritual and moral attainment. Anyone could reach the highest levels by going through the initiation stages. These stages differed in different Sufi sects but were mostly either 7, like the Mithraism 7 stages to the eternal light, or 4, as in the 4 categories of Manichean followers, which were called: master, apprentice, observer, chosen. The emergence of individual *khaneghahs* belongs to this period. One of the special Iranian features here is this concept of *khaneghah* which has not been seen as extensive amongst other nations. Here again the Iranians have gone back to their history and remembered Mani. Manichaeans called their religious centers *khanegah* and in any town where they had some followers they would build one of these *khanegahs*. These were centers for religious practice, meetings, devotional studies and communal prayers. Shaikh Abul Hassan Kharraqani wrote on the door of his *khanegah*: "To anyone who comes to this house, I'll give him food and do not ask about his faith. Because, as he merits his life thanks to God, no doubt that he deserves a meal at my table."

Abul Hassan Kharraqani was the Master or Shaikh of the famous Persian Sufi and poet, Khwajah Abdullah Ansari. Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Shah Mahmood of Ghazna, Abu-Saeed Abul-Khair and Nasir Khusraw traveled to Kharraqani to meet him and expressed their deep admiring feelings and respect for him.

Mawlana Jalal ad-Din Mohammad Balkhi (Rumi), Farid al-Din Attar, Khwajah Abdullah Ansari, Jami and others narrated many poems about Shaikh Abul Hassan and explained his several stories.

He was illiterate but had the wide inspirational knowledge about the Quran and Hadith; his sayings and speeches were significantly magnificent due to their philosophical views. He practiced Shafi'i sect, a school of Sunnite Islam.

The book *Noorul-Uloom* ("The light of Sciences") is dedicated to Shaikh Abul Hassan Kharraqani. It is believed to have been written by his disciples (*murids*) after his death. Its single manuscript copy is currently held in the British Museum. Here are some of his statements:

"I feel, I hear, I speak, but I do not exist.

There are 24 hours in a day. I die a thousand times in an hour, and I cannot explain the other 23 hours.

People cannot describe me. No matter in which words or in which terms they present me, I am the opposite of what they say.

I am neither a Sufi, nor a scientist, nor a pious. Oh Lord, you are the one and only, and I am one of your oneness.

What if there was neither the Hell nor the Heaven, so that we could see really devoted person?!

A scholar wakes up early in the morning and seeks how to increase his knowledge. A pious wakes up and seeks how to increase his faith. But Abul-Hassan looks for how to make a human being happy.

The one who said "I reached Allah (God, Truth and Reality)", he did not. And the one who said "He (God) himself made me reach him", he reached Allah (or he attained the reality).

He was asked: "Where did you see the God?" He answered: "... wherever I did not see my own self."

Whatever exists in the entire universe, it is also in your own heart. You have to gain the ability to see it.

The one who fell in Love found Allah. And the one who found Allah, forgot his own self.

In the whole world only one person could understand me, and it was Bayazid.

A sufi is a day that needs no sun, a night that needs no moon or stars and a non-being that needs no being" [11]

The concept of "brotherhood" and "self-sacrifice" is very special to Iranian Sufism. Most Sufi leaders have always preached the importance of "brotherhood". This is again an ancient concept. These attitudes for opposing oppression and helping others developed during the Mazdaki movement in opposition to the privileged cast system [12: 124].

Under Sassanids it is noticeable how Abu Moslem in his fights against the Umayyad Caliphate could revive this tradition with ease and speed after more than 100 years of Islam in Khorasan. Samaa is also another peculiar Iranian feature of Sufism. Although today it is mostly linked to the Molavi (Rumi) School in Konya, samaa is an ancient subject in Iranian Sufism. From the 3rd century (10th AD) and onwards there are repeated references in Islamic books on the question of its legality according to the Islam. These constant references themselves show that such practices were common amongst Iranians.

There are a number of treaties written by leading Sufis on why, how and under what circumstances is Samaa allowed under Islam. After the 5th century (12th AD), the reasoning behind its acceptance was so well established that opposition to it was considered a sign of sectarian dogmatism and religious superficiality.

Another aspect of Iranian mysticism is its emphasis on love as the only means for reaching the divine. It is only love that is not following self-interest or pragmatic gains and really leads to the true divine. Iranian mysticism becomes dependent on love not only to explain the creation itself but also as a means of return back to it. Hafiz says: "love appeared and the whole world was set on fire!".

The "pure" and "beautiful" contemplative thinking was preached by Mani as necessary for reaching the eternal light, Iranian mysticism of the Islamic era added "love". This was not common among the Sufis in either Baghdad or Cairo and was specific to the Iranian school.

Hallaj was probably the first Iranian Sufi to propose love as a means of communion with the divine. The next stage of Iranian Sufism was called the age of hidden (secret) Sufism. This is the age when it was said "the red tongue will get the green head hanged!".

Iran enters a long dark age in which hiding one's views would become a matter of life or death. It coincides with the period when Iran, after the breakup of the Islamic empire, was suffering under different warlords indifferent to religions and was constantly under attack by migrating Turkic tribes from central Asia. The characteristic features of Sufism in this period are avoidance of current issues, maintaining religious appearances, paying lip service to the official edicts and in general hiding what they actually believed in.

But this is at the same time the period of a Farsi revival in Iran and the rise of a new vibrant movement of Persian poetry. Many leading figures of Sufism turn to the Persian language after the 5th century (12th AD). During a period of about two hundred years, we witness the great revolution in Persian poetry both in form and content, most of which we owe to Khorasan's Sufism. Persian poetry provides the Iranian mystics not only with a versatile tool for expressing their complex, multi-layered, emotive and esoteric views but also a means for hiding those views in a language of hidden meanings and symbolism. On the other hand turning to poetry helped to emphasize love even more as the only ideal relationship between the self and the divine. The 5th and 6th (12th and 13th AD) centuries Iranian Sufi literature is full of pamphlets and treaties on love and the psychology of love. The creation of such artistic works reaches such levels of perfection that there are tens of collected works by poets like Molavi, Hafiz, Attar, Shams and others.

We found out Molavi's mystic point of view in "Mathnavi". He was more concerned about God's knowledge and mystic elements such as sobriety, intoxication, annihilation and other mystic and Sufism terms. Molana takes benefit of servitude, asceticism and thought integrated with love, enthusiasm, lure and attention in mysticism or Sufism. Love and intuition are the main objects of studies of Molavi insight. He is quite aware of love and all the ins and outs of it. He meditates with insight, he is well informed what happens to passionate wayfarers and of course he is absolutely eloquent in vocalizing the tips scarcely found in one's heart or uttered by anyone. Love constructs the pillars of his way and forms his insightful school. Molavi regards love as the core of way (*tariqat*) and religion (*shariat*). He believes that passion is the most influential agent in purifying one's heart. His "Mathnavi" (couplets) is rich in lessons of theology teaching the precepts of Islam. Monotheism is one of the columns in which "Mathnavi" has been found. Fatalism and free will are also included in "Mathnavi" where Mulana tends to stand somewhere in between. So it prevents from going astray. Molavi believes every wayfarer needs a spiritual guide (*morshed*). The ideal perfection in "Mathnavi" is translated as a perfect human being for those whose whole universe has been swallowed by action. In conclusion, the eternity in his view is nothing but falling on his way.

Hafiz is a well known mystic-poet philosopher of the 14th century in Iran, is a "magical poet" who can capture and actually did capture the heart and mind of numerous people of different ranks and from widely separated life pathways.

Such magical uniqueness of Hafiz lyrics mainly is due to his mastery of the art and the science of the language of allusion. The language of indirect messages by using metaphors and equivocations induces the

multiplicity of meanings and involves the imagination. In terms of rich content, Hafiz poems represent the synthesis of numerous aspects of traditional wisdom in the Iranian culture: religious and theological, philosophical, mystical and spiritual, and last but not least, Hafiz own contribution designated by himself as *ishq-o-rendi* ("love and slyness"). For such reasons Divan-e Hafiz destined to become the book of Oracle (*fal-e-Hafiz*) for those sincere friends of him who seek guidance and direction.

"Love", "slyness", and "purity of heart" are three focal concepts of Hafiz's notion of existence and the spiritual dimension of his world view. He teaches that hypocrisy does not provide the "purity of heart" and for this reason he is going to select the "Path of slyness and love". Love and slyness are virtues the acquisition of which may seem easy at first but actually are very hard and emotional consequently. Hafiz perceives "love" as the best souvenir remaining under the rotating dome of the temporal universe.

No doubt, Hafiz was a hero, who took every chance to invade the Sufi class hypocrites and hypocrisy. He takes the advantage of sarcasm and humor, to ridicule and put mockery on them.

During the Safavid era and later, Sufism and mysticism in Iran takes the more complex and troubled character. Although the Safavids themselves were originally a Sufi sect, because of their rule, Sufism in Iran entered the period of decline. Firstly, the corruption of political power led to the moral degeneration of the Sufis in power. Secondly, there appeared suddenly the whole layer of swindlers in Sufi cloths and finally the Sufi's in power were extremely dogmatic and themselves started persecuting other movements. Many Iranian Sufis emigrated abroad in this period. Sufi literature of the period is full of attempts at proving the Islamic nature of Sufism.

Mola Sadra, the great Islamic philosopher of the Safavid era, wrote a number of treaties in defense of Sufism and redefined faith from the Sufi standpoint which influenced Sufi thought ever since. He was one of those who tried to redefine the concept of unity of existence in a new "Islamic" way. The old Iranian notion that the divine is in all of us is in this new philosophy that stipulates that only the divine exists. This concept which was acceptable to the Moslem theologians of the time provided some support for certain Sufi sects. However, despite this acceptance, many of the Shiite clerics used the forces of the state to start a vociferous campaign against Sufism which continues to the present. From the Safavids and onward, we have witnessed a period of the constant conflict between the Shiite hierarchy and Sufism.

Conclusion. The subject of Iranian Sufism is still emerging into contextual focus. The origins of that phenomenon involve some controversial issues, and a great deal remains obscure about the history of the earliest developments. The extensive province of Khorasan, in the north-east of Iran, gains some distinction in this respect. In early Islamic times, this province was very extensive, though the borders changed over the centuries. The earlier territory is sometimes called "Greater Khorasan" to distinguish it from the later contraction. From the beginnings Sufism has not only collaborated with other schools but has in fact flourished because of it. A major feature of Iranian mysticism is precisely its absorption of other cultures. It is therefore not wise to reduce Iranian mysticism only to one of its founding sources. In the same way, its Islamic aspect should not be forgotten either. This aspect is associated with the history of Sufism. Iranian history and culture through ages has been intermixed with Sufism and has been influenced by its religious, ethical, and pragmatic teaching. In the very beginning, as a real need of the nation but in the following centuries, it fell into the hands of ruling governments that took the advantage of it to rule the country. Sufi thought during its history has survived with its weaknesses and strong points and remained alive in the Safavid period. As its effects on the Iranian literature, we can refer to the modification of religious sentiments among different sects and the creation of a new language along with symbols, metaphors, allegories and new expressions.

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***Тан Тан Д. Х. Шлях від стародавнього до сучасного іранського містицизму
(Витоки іранського суфізму).***

У статті досліджено історичні витоки суфізму в Ірані та його вплив на перську культуру, суспільство, літературу, а також динаміку розвитку іранського суфізму в різні періоди. Досліджено вплив іранського суфізму на іранський менталітет та духовність іранського етносу, а також вплив на історичну долю народів Іранського ареалу.

Ключові слова: суфізм, містицизм, Ханегаг, Самаа, Суфі (одягнений у вовну).

Тан Тан Д. Х. Путь от древнего к современному мистицизму (Начало иранского суфизма).

В статье исследуются исторические истоки суфизма в Иране и его влияние на персидскую культуру, общество, литературу, а также динамику развития иранского суфизма в разные периоды. Исследуется влияние иранского суфизма на менталитет и духовность иранского этноса, а также влияние на историческую судьбу народов Иранского ареала.

Ключевые слова: суфизм, мистицизм, Ханегаг, Самаа, Суфи (одетый в шерсть).