

A Brief Study of the Etymology of the Word “Sufi” and Origins of Sufism in Iran during the first four Hejira Centuries

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Sufism is an inner aspect of Islam which manifested itself in an ascetic form in the first century (AH), evolved over time, and came close to gnosis. At the beginning, Sufism followed an individualistic approach but gradually developed a systematic form from the third and fourth centuries (AH) onwards. Since then, Sufism and its related principles have been discussed in different books and documents. Various theories exist as to the etymology of the term “Sufi”. Moreover, different researchers have provided different views regarding the origins of Sufism in Iran during the early Hejira centuries. Some researchers have also presented a number of arguments on the influence of Christian, Buddhist, Sabian, gnostic, and neo-Platonic ideas and theories on Sufism. Following a descriptive-analytic method, this paper briefly examines each of these views. The findings of the study indicate that Sufism has no specific origin and has been influenced by all the prevalent philosophies of its time to some extent. However, it has eventually found Iran as a desirable context for its transcendence.

Key Terms

Sufism

the Sufi

Iran

gnosis

Origin

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