

# The Cultural, Artistic and Economic Structure of Monasteries in the Developing Procedure of the Sufi Followers of the Ilkhanid Era

## Abstract

Monasteries or “Khaneghah”, as the center of Iranian- Islamic mysticism and Sufism and a sacred building, with various social, cultural, artistic, economic and political functions, is a representation of Iranian culture and civilization. The Ilkhanid era is known as the period of the expansion of Sufism and the construction of monasteries. At this time, monasteries were considered a social, cultural, and sacred sanctuary that replaced schools, and in addition to asceticism and worship; other activities took place. In this article, it is attempted to study the various influential factors in the emergence and growth of Sufism and monasteries during the Ilkhanid period. Indeed, the study examines the impact of key factors in the process of expansion and growth of Sufis in the Ilkhanid period. Since the role of Sufism and its influence on the buildings of the monasteries of this period cannot be ignored; the study of the architecture of the monasteries is significant in order to study the factors that led to the spread of Sufism during this stage in history. The research method of this article is descriptive-analytical and the method of collecting information is accomplished by studying library resources and also by observing and analyzing the role of monastic buildings in the spread of Sufism in the Ilkhanid period; furthermore, the cultural and artistic factors of monastic buildings have been studied. The results show that the architecture of monasteries and their artistic structure are closely related to mystical and Sufi ideas and the study of the artistic structure and symbolic elements of the monastery shows its direct relationship with the spread of mysticism and Sufism in the Ilkhanid period. In the art of Islamic architecture, many symbolisms have been the source of mysticism and Sufism. The cultural and artistic events of the monasteries were influential in the growth of Sufi followers during the Ilkhanid period, and the spread of Sufism in this period established a link between mysticism and Sufism and the art of the Ilkhanid period.

## Research objectives:

1. To investigate of the influence of the most important factors in the emergence and growth of Sufism and monasteries in the Ilkhanid period.
2. To analyze the architecture of monasteries and examining its impact on the spread of Sufism during the Ilkhanid period.

## Research questions:

1. How is the architecture of the monasteries and their artistic structure related to mystical and Sufi ideas?
2. What effect did monastic buildings have on the spread of Sufism during the Ilkhanid period?

## Introduction

The monastery with its Sufi customs, architecture, religious activities, music, various social and cultural functions, can be considered as a representative of the culture, characteristics and national and religious characteristics of Iran. In addition to its special religious role, the monastery as a sacred building also had social and economic approaches. During the patriarchal period, we witnessed the expansion of Sufism

and the construction of monasteries in this era. At this time, monasteries were a social and cultural refuge, and schools replaced schools with activities such as supporting the poor and helpless. Thus, in addition to asceticism and worship, other activities were performed in monasteries.

The growth of Sufism and the establishment of monasteries can be attributed to historical, political, cultural, economic and artistic factors and contexts. In a way, each is influenced by the other and is placed next to each other like a chain of cause and effect. After the Mongol invasion, mysticism and Sufism became very popular regarding exceptional conditions that arose in the society. The spread of Sufism in this period created a link between mysticism and Sufism and the art of the patriarchal period. Also, the existence of monasteries due to the economic crises of the time and cultural events in this holy building, has been effective in the formation, emergence and spread of Sufism and religious and philosophical ideas of Sufism. In fact, in this period of history, there have been monasteries and the causes of their emergence that have overshadowed the growth of Sufism. The connection of cultural, artistic and economic factors of monasteries with the spread of Sufism and the growth of Sufis in the Ilkhanate period has a two-way process. As one of the achievements of Sufism and its expansion is the growth of monasteries and cultural, artistic and economic approaches in monasteries, the growth of monasteries has also contributed to the spread of Sufism. As a result, it is important to study the effect of these factors in the process of formation and expansion of the Sufis of the Ilkhanate period.

The background of articles and researches on the subject of monasteries and the architecture of monasteries goes back to recent decades. The article "Symbolic Elements in the Architecture of Iranian Monasteries from the Seventh Century AH to the Present" by Hamed Reza Karimi and Nasser Ghazareh (2017) seeks to collect field data from Sufi monasteries and tombs, while classifying their symbolism from a traditional point of view. From monastic art from the seventh century AH to the contemporary era. In general, based on the field data collected in this study, most of the reflections of symbolic elements in the field of monastery architecture are related to coloring, symbolic use of numbers and mystical ideas that are significantly evident in the texture and structure of monasteries and the history of Sufism. In addition, determining the types of these symbolic uses has been involved (Karimi et al., 2017). Also in the article "Lost Architecture: Monasteries in Khorasan in the fifth century", written by Mehrdad Qayyumi and Sina Soltani (2014) with interpretive-historical method to the first stage of the monastery in its birthplace in Iran, ie in the first centuries AH in Khorasan (Neishabour quarter) Is paid (Qayyumi and Soltani, 1393).

Regarding the effect of mysticism and Sufism on the art of architecture in the study "Introduction to the effect of Sufism on Iranian architecture with the approach of cultural history" written by Mohammad Yaghoubloo and Ahadnejad Ebrahimi, the relationship between Sufism and architecture with different approaches has been studied. With the approach of cultural history, this article realistically seeks to answer the question using evidence: What has been the impact of Sufism on the architecture of Iran and what kind of architectural structures has it formed? The result of this research, which has been done by historical-interpretive method, is that Sufi thoughts, behaviors and their values cause the formation of general architectural bodies (Yaghoubloo and Ebrahimi, 2019).

Also, Hadi Esthehri (2010) in his article "The Origin and Expansion of Monasteries in Iran", has accomplished research in regard to the place of monasteries and their development in Iran. He believes that the center of such monasteries, from the point of view of the Safavid era, is a place for Islamic teachings and instructions; moreover, the refinement of the self is a place for self-knowledge and finding and acknowledging God. In addition, Esthehri states that Sufism in the Ilkhanid period is of high importance

and it is the peak of its prevalence in this period (Ashtari, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to focus more on the patriarchal period and the formation and expansion of monasteries in this period. It is also essential to conduct more detailed studies in this field due to the lack of research on the impact of Sufi ideas on the architecture of monasteries. The present article tries to take a step towards conducting this part of the study with the library method.

## **Conclusion**

The monastery is known as the center of Iranian and Islamic mysticism and Sufism, as a kind of representation of Iranian culture and civilization and a demonstrative of culture, national and religious characteristics and features. The monastery as a sacred building, in addition to its special religious role, also had social, cultural and economic approaches. During the Ilkhanid era, we see the spread of Sufism and the construction of monasteries in this era. At that time, monasteries were a social and cultural refuge; since the monastery had changed its meaning from a place of worship to a social place. In this article, we tried to point out the most important factors influencing the emergence and growth of Sufism and monasteries in the Ilkhanate period.

After the Mongol invasion, due to the special social conditions of the time and the fundamental transformation of life, mysticism and Sufism became more and more important. The growth and expansion of Sufism during this period led to the growth of monasteries and also the growth of monasteries and their cultural, artistic, social and economic activities contributed to the growth of Sufism. In fact, the relationship between Sufism and the monastery has been two-way and interactive. This interactive relationship in the Ilkhanate period, due to unique social and economic factors such as popular material poverty and economic crises, as well as the patriarchal elders' support for Sufis, led to the expansion of monasteries and Sufism and mysticism became the dominant worldview of this period. This dominance of worldview is evident in various fields such as poetry, music and architecture of this period.

The architecture of the monasteries and their artistic structure have a significant and close relationship with mystical and Sufi ideas. The study of the artistic structure and symbolic elements of the monasteries of the patriarchal period indicates that there was a direct and continuous connection with mysticism and Sufism of this period. The present article, while studying this relationship and examining the architecture of monastery buildings in the Ilkhanate period, evaluates the impact of mystical ideas on the architecture of this period and focuses on the architecture of monasteries and its impact on the spread of patriarchal Sufism. The results of the mentioned research indicate that in the art of Islamic architecture, the source of many symbols and symbolisms is mysticism and Sufism and in the artistic structure of monastic architecture in the patriarchal period, symbolic artistic elements of Sufism and Islamic architecture are seen.

## **Conclusion**

Khaneghahs (monasteries) are known as the center of Iranian and Islamic mysticism and Sufism, as a kind of representation of Iranian culture and civilization and a representative of culture, national and religious features and characteristics. The monastery as a sacred building, in addition to its special religious role, also had social, cultural and economic approaches. During the Ilkhanid era, we see the spread of Sufism and the construction of monasteries in this era. At that time, monasteries were a social and cultural refuge since they had changed its meaning from a place of worship to a social place. In this article, it is attempted

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