



# Sufism and Shi'ism in South Asia: shahadat and the Evidence of the Sindhi marthiya

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### PART III

#### Relations between Shi'ism and Sufism in other Literary Sufi Traditions

## Sufism and Shi'ism in South Asia:

*Shahādat and the Evidence of the Sindhi marṣiya*

Michel Boivin

In one of the first Sindhi-English dictionaries published in 1879, the word *marṣiyo*<sup>615</sup> is translated as follows: 'An elegy or dirge, particularly one sung during the Muhorrum'.<sup>616</sup> In Arabic, the *marṣiya* is an elegy composed to lament the passing of a beloved person and to celebrate his merits. When did the word enter the Sindhi language? Unfortunately, it is not possible to answer but the spread of the *marṣiya* in Sindhi literature didn't start before the 18th century. This paper addresses a double issue. On the one hand, it wishes to introduce the *marṣiyas* from the countryside. What does that mean? In South Asia, the *marṣiya* is associated with the court culture of the main states that have flourished in the ruins of the Mughal empire. The leading school of *marṣiyas* growth in Lucknow, the then capital of the state of Awadh in North India. As a matter of fact, the *marṣiyas* composed by poets such as Mīr Babar 'Alī Ānīs (1216–1290/1802–1874) were considered as the ultimate reference for the writing of these elegies in the whole Indian subcontinent.

Another centre for the production of *marṣiya* literature was the State of Hyderabad, in Dekkan. The *marṣiyas* schools of Hyderabad and Awadh both used Urdu, which was then

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<sup>615</sup> Although the right word in Sindhi is the masculine *marṣiyo*, I shall use the Persian and Urdu form *marṣiya* (Arabic, *marṥhiyya*) which is increasingly predominant even in Sindhi literature. The vernacular words are nevertheless quoted according to the Sindhi language and transliterated according to Ali S. Asani, *The Harvard Collection of Ismā'īlī Literature in Indic Languages: A Descriptive Catalog and Finding Aid* (Boston, 1992).

<sup>616</sup> G. Shirt, U. Thavurdas and S. F. Mirza, *Sindhi-English Dictionary* (sic) (Karachi, 1879), p. 773.

becoming the *lingua franca* of the majority of Muslims in colonial India. The Urdu *marṣiyas* have long attracted the interest of scholars,<sup>617</sup> but the focus they put on urban and Urdu *marṣiyas* gave a distorted image of the art of *marṣiyas*. For the *marṣiya* genre was also cultivated in peripheral regions where vernacular languages were used for literature, as was introduced as early as 1978 by Christopher Shackle.<sup>618</sup> In studying the Sindhi *marṣiya*, this chapter wishes to address the issue of the relation between the court culture from the imperial cities and the vernacular expression of the *marṣiyas*. I draw on the common cleavage used in Muslim South Asia between vehicular languages or *lingua franca* such as Persian and Urdu, and vernacular languages such as Punjabi, Bengali, Gujarati, Sindhi and so on.

On the other hand, it intends to address the issue of the relationship between Shi'ism and Sufism, an issue which has already been addressed in depth mainly in the context of

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<sup>617</sup> For a synthesis, see J.A. Haywood, 'Marthiya. 4. In Urdu Literature', *EI2*, vol. 6, pp. 610-612; and Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala. Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (Oxford, 2006). Also Andreas D'Souza, 'The Influence of the *Rawḍa-ḥwānī* on the development of *Naḥwa* in the Deccan', in Denis Hermann and Fabrizio Speziale, ed., *Muslim Cultures in the Indo-Iranian World* (Berlin, 2010), pp. 167-180.

<sup>618</sup> In 1978, Christopher Shackle published a paper on Multani *marṣiya*, and in 2003 a small book on Siraiki *marṣiya*. His work was obviously one of the earliest dealing with the *marṣiyas* out of the scope of Urdu culture. See Christopher Shackle, 'Multani marsiya', *Der Islam*, 55, (1978), pp. 281-311; *Siraiki marsiya* (Multan, 2003). Regarding the Sindhi language, a short article was recently published on the depiction of the *imām mahdī* in Sindhi poetry, mostly based on the works completed by members of the Kalhora lineage who ruled Sindh in the late 18th century; Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro, 'The depiction of Imam Mahdi in Sindhi Poetry of Sindh (Pakistan)', *Rupkatha Journal*, 9, 3 (2015), pp. 162-171.

Iran.<sup>619</sup> The hypothesis is that the Sindhi *marṣiya* is a promising venue for such a study. It allows scrutinising the transformation of the issue of martyrdom in Sufi poetry and finally its role as a motif in Sindhi literature. Finally, the chapter wishes to shed some light on the complex process through which Shi‘i topics have nurtured the Sufi culture of Sindh, especially through the incorporation of the Shi‘i motif of martyrdom in Sufi poetry. But first, it is necessary to provide some historical context regarding both Shi‘ism and Sufism in Sindh.

### Historical Context

The province of Sindh, which is the southern part of the Indus Valley, was conquered by Muḥammad bin Qāsim, an Umayyad general, in 92/711. Thus, the connection of Sindh with both Sufism and Shi‘ism is ancient, and one point in particular is intriguing: Sindh, located at an edge of the Muslim Empire, was very soon a privileged place for hosting Ghulāt groups.<sup>620</sup> Sindh is an early land where these Shi‘is had found refuge, for example Muḥammad Nafs al-Zakiyya’s son known in Sindh as ‘Abd Allāh Shāh Ghāzī (101–156/720–773). Nafs al-Zakkiyya was a great grandson of Ḥasan, ‘Alī’s son and the grandson of Muḥammad. He claimed the imamate and rose in rebellion against the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136–158/754–775) but he was killed in 145/762. After his death, his followers known as the Muḥammadiyya pretended that he was in concealment and would return to fill the earth with justice. A

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<sup>619</sup> Among the copious literature devoted to this issue, see Henry Corbin, *En islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques. Tome III. Les fidèles d’amour. Shī’isme et soufisme* (Paris, 1972), pp. 149–375.

<sup>620</sup> The *ghulāt* (plural of *ghālī*), ‘extremists’ or ‘exaggerators’, is the name given by the Shi‘i imams and the Muslim heresiographers after them to the Shi‘a who divinised Imam ‘Alī. See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, ‘Ghulāt’, *EI2*.

number among them reached Sindh and ‘Abd Allāh Shāh Ghāzī, whose shrine is in Karachi, is supposed to be his son. ‘Abd Allāh Shāh Ghāzī’s *dargāh* is currently the most popular *dargāh* in Karachi.<sup>621</sup>

Nevertheless, the booklets in Urdu which can be found all around the shrine do not introduce Nafs al-Zakkiyya as a Shi‘i leader, but as a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad. Neither is ‘Abd Allāh Shāh Ghāzī introduced as a Sufi. It is said that he was a military commander who died fighting the infidels. It is to be noticed that his sanctity thus does not result from a Sufi affiliation, or from ascetic behavior, but rather from sacrifice, since he died while expanding the *dar al-islām*. Furthermore, no source is quoted about his career in Sindh. However, it is interesting to observe that the interaction between a Sufi figure and the issue of martyrdom is already addressed through ‘Abd Allāh Shāh Ghāzī’s veneration. Nonetheless, the cult is probably recent and the narratives framing his story may be contradictory. It implies that the figure presently accepted comes from a late reconstruction rather than from attested historical facts.

Another character related to the Ghulāt in Sindh is Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya (d. 81/700). Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya was the third son of ‘Alī, but not with Fāṭima. He was thus not a descendant of Muḥammad. Nonetheless, after Ḥusayn’s death in 680, some partisans acknowledged him as the head of the ‘Alid family. His followers, known as the Kaysanites, headed by al-Mukhtār (d. 67/687), claimed that Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya was the *mahdī*, ‘the rightly-guided one’, although the word did not yet have eschatological connections since his return was expected imminently and not at the end of time. They also introduced into Islam the themes of occultation (*ghayba*), and return to life (*raj‘a*).

Mas‘ūdī (d. 345/956) wrote that a number of Muḥammad bin Ḥanafīyya’s descendants

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<sup>621</sup> Michel Boivin, *Historical Dictionary of the Sufi Culture of Sindh in Pakistan and in India* (Karachi, 2015), p. 73.

were settled in Sindh. One of them was the head of a dissident branch of Shi'ism and he was executed in Multan at the beginning of the 4th/9th century.<sup>622</sup> According to the Arab historian Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya's mother was a Sindhi. Furthermore, Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya was the hero of the *maqṭal-nāmas*, narratives in which he headed raids in revenge against the authors of the tragedy of Karbala. According to local traditions in interior Sindh, the Amīr Pīr *dargāh* which is run by the Ismailis is actually the tomb of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya.

In the 19th century, the eldest son of the first Aga Khan, 'Alī Shāh (d. 1302/1885) transformed an obscure saint into a well-known character among the early Shi'i leaders. In the surroundings of the shrine located in interior Sindh, an inscription gives the date of 1852, without any date in the Muslim calendar. In this period, the first Aga Khan Ḥasan 'Alī Shāh was living in Bombay, but his son and heir, 'Alī Shāh, was fond of hunting in deltaic Sindh. The reason why 'Alī Shāh decided to dedicate the place to Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya and not to another Shi'i leader of the early centuries of Islam is unknown. Was he already trying to separate his followers, known as the Khojas, from the Twelver Shi'is? As a matter of fact, since Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya was not acknowledged by the Twelver Shi'is, it left a room for non-Twelver Shi'is to construct their own distinct genealogy and consequently, tradition. Furthermore, it is well known that in the second half of the 19th Century, the Aga Khans were 'inventing' a new tradition whose main achievement was the rejection of Twelver Shi'i references.<sup>623</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> Derryl McLean, *Religion and Society in Arab Sind* (Leiden, 1989), p. 130.

<sup>623</sup> I have discussed this topic in detail in my book. See M. Boivin, *Les âghâ khans et les Khojah: Islam chiite et dynamiques sociales dans le sous-continent indien contemporain* (Paris, 2013), pp. 73-76.

According to Derryl Mclean, between the middle of the 8th and the beginning of the 12th centuries, the balance between the Sufis and the Shi‘a was in favour of the Shi‘a, although it is not known to what extent such categories are relevant. However, it is probable that fewer than one Muslim out of five was Shi‘i. In the 4th/9th century, the Ismailis spread in Sindh and the province became an Ismaili state under Fatimid suzerainty. After its destruction by Maḥmūd of Ghazni (r. 387–420/998–1030) at the beginning of the 5th/11th century, another wave of Ismaili proselytism reached Sindh from the 6th/12th or 7th/13th centuries onwards. Although it is not really attested by local sources, oral tradition states that the Sindhi dynasty of the Sumrās, who ruled Sindh until 1350, was Ismaili. In any case, it is quite probable that after the fall of Alamut (1256) seized by the Mongols, which occurred two years before the fall of Baghdad (1258), the Ismaili imams could have re-activated their oriental network.

Coincidentally, in the 7th/13th century, the Ismailiyya were challenged by the Sohrawardiyya settled in Multan and Uch. Bahā’ al-Dīn B. Zakariyya (539–631/1145–1234), the head of the Sohrawardīs, sent a number of his family members to Sindh to build a network which is still very active. In the Indus Valley, the Ismailis and the Sohrawardīs used similar strategies of proselytism to win new followers for their respective spiritual leaders. Briefly put, they used to settle in a place inhabited by non-Muslims, most of the time by Hindus often belonging to depressed [the lower ???] castes. They learnt the local language and traditions, and started to compose devotional songs with the local patterns, melodies as well as narratives. They recentred the motifs on the Ismaili or the Sohrawardī spiritual leaders. For example, a song which was devoted to the Devī, one of the figures of the Hindu Goddess, was thus devoted to the imam or to the *pīr*. In addition, with the narration of the many miracles they had performed, part of the local community were gradually becoming followers. Furthermore, the imbrication of the Ismailiyya and the Sohrawardiyya is obvious in a number of polymorphous figures, like that of Pīr Shams, whose shrine is in Multan.



Another relevant case is that of La'ī Shāhbāz Qalandar, who is given a double genealogy, Shī'ī and Sufī.

The interrelation between the Sufis and the Shī'ā, especially with those coined as Ghulāt by the Muslim heresiographers, dates back to the coming of the Muslims to Sindh, in the early 2nd/8th century. Despite the lack of sources, it can be assumed that such a situation is a main frame for the understanding of the special relation between Sufism and Shī'ism. On the other hand, the Ismaili Shī'ā and the Sohrawardīs faced each other as soon as in the 7th/13th century. Although their historical relations are not well documented, the Sohrawardīs probably borrowed parts of their esoteric doctrine from the Ismailis.<sup>624</sup>

#### **The *Rawḍat al-shuhadā'* and the Issue of Martyrdom in 18th-Century Sindhi Literature**

However, there is very little data regarding the spread of Twelver Shī'ism into the Indus valley and the issue has not yet merited academic attention. An explanation could be the migration from Khurasan of a number of Iranian Shī'ī lineages of sayyids to the Indus valley, such as for example the Sabzwārīs.<sup>625</sup> However, it is not until the 18th century that a new and strong connection appears in Sindh between Sufism and Shī'ism: Shī'ī devotional literature. This said, some questions are to be addressed: when did Shī'ī devotional literature spread into Sindh? And what was its origin, meaning was it a vernacular production from the starting point, or was it a 'translation' from another literature?

In 1970, Ghulām Rasūl Baloch published the first study devoted to the Sindhi

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<sup>624</sup> Regarding this, see the pioneering work by Ḥasan 'Alī Khan, drawing mainly on architecture, *Constructing Islam on the Indus. The Material History of the Suhrawardi Sufi Order, 1200-1500 A.D.* (London, 2016).

<sup>625</sup> Rubīnah Tarīn, *Shāh Shams Sabzwārī sawānah ḥayāt āwr āthār* (Multan, 2007), pp. 33-43.

*marṣiyas*.<sup>626</sup> He started by introducing the Arabian tradition of *marṣiyas*, followed by the Persian tradition. He understood the *marṣiyas* as a recollection of great figures, turning to the Arabic root of the word. In the same **wake [work?]**, he also quoted Persian poets such as Rūdakī, Firdawsī and others. For him, the first to have written a *marṣiya* understood as an elegy devoted to the martyrdom of the imams at Karbala is Moḥtasham Kāshānī (934–996/1528–1588), **known as???** Kāshī. As a matter of fact, Kāshānī integrated the pre-Islamic Arabic tradition of *marṣiyas* into the context of the Moḥarram ceremonies that had received a new impetus under the Shi‘i dispensation of the Safawid state (906–1134/1501–1722). More interestingly, the poem reached the peak of its popularity during the Qajar period, from 1786 onwards.

The next chapter focused on the Urdu tradition, highlighting the role played by Mīr Ānīs (Mīr Babar ‘Alī Ānīs, 1217–1290/1803–1874), the **head??** of what the author named ‘urban *marṣiyas*’.<sup>627</sup> It is true that Baloch’s work did not follow academic requirements, and he started with the Urdu *marṣiyas* probably because for him they were the pinnacle of the genre. Nonetheless, the most amazing point is that in the chapter devoted to the Persian *marṣiyas*, Baloch did not mention a main work whose impact on Muslim South Asia is well known, the *Rawḍat al-shuhadā’*.<sup>628</sup>

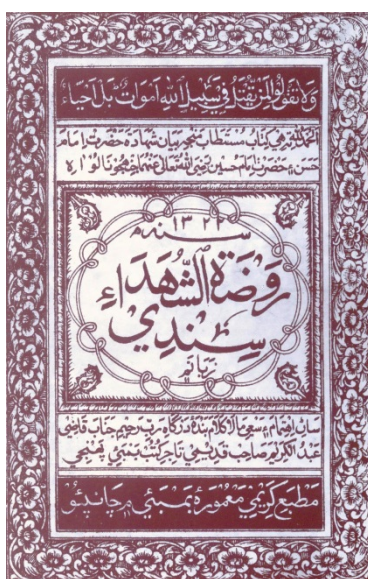
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<sup>626</sup> Ghulām Rasūl Baloch, *Sindhī marṣiya nivesī* (Hyderabad, 1970).

<sup>627</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>628</sup> For example, Hyder claims that the impact of the *Rawḍat al-shuhadā’* on the Urdu *marṣiyas* is due to the focus put on the wedding of Qāsim with Ḥusayn’s daughter, Sakīna, knowing that weddings were a very popular topic of Indian culture. See Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, p. 28. On the issue of the wedding, see also Karen G. Ruffle, ‘Karbala in the Indo-Persian Imaginaire: The Indianizing of the Wedding of Qāsim an Fāṭima Kubrā’, in Denis Hermann and Fabrizio Speziale, ed., *Muslim Cultures in the Indo-Iranian World* (Berlin, 2010), pp. 181–200, see pp. 181–

Yet, a survey of the manuscript catalogues of the British Library collections shows that the Persian treatise played a leading role in the fabric of Shi‘i devotional production in Sindhi.<sup>629</sup> The *Rawḍat al-shuhadā*, the ‘Garden of the Martyrs’, is a Persian martyrology of ‘Alī and his family, particularly of Imam Ḥusayn, authored by Ḥusayn Wā‘iẓ Kāshifī (d. 910/1505). But here again, a number of questions are to be raised: when did it reach Sindh? Was it really a starting point for the writing of *marṣiyas*? No evidence can be found before the early part of the 18th century, knowing that Kāshifī should have written his work at the beginning of the 10th/16th century, maybe in 907/1502. There is thus a gap of more than two centuries.



**Fig.1** Lithography of the *Rawḍat al-shuhadā* *sindhī*, Bombay, 1904 (Baloch, 1992, p. 102)

It **should** could not be the same as the one on which Memon wrote a few lines in his *Sindh jī ādabī tārikh* (History of Sindhi Literature). According to him, it would be the first Sindhi

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<sup>629</sup> James Blumhardt, *Catalogue of the Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Assamese, Orya, Pushtu and Sindhi Manuscripts in the Library of the British Museum* (London, 1905).

translation of the *Rawḍat al-shuhadāʾ*, by Maulvī Aḥmad Marhum in 1212/1798,<sup>630</sup> knowing that the first Urdu translation was implemented around 1163/1750 by Faḥal ʿAlī Faḥlī.<sup>631</sup> Another manuscript of the 18th century is a metrical account of the martyrdom of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, by one Muḥammad Hāshim, probably a loose Sindhi translation in verses of the *Rawḍat al-shuhadāʾ*.<sup>632</sup>

On his side, after he had introduced the Arab tradition and the Persian tradition of *marṣiya*, Baloch divided the Sindhi *marṣiyas* in two parts: ancient (*qadīm*) and modern (*jadīd*). He stated that the first Sindhi author of *marṣiyas* is Shāh ʿAbd al-Laṭīf (d. 1165/1752), to whom I shall return.<sup>633</sup> The most striking point is that Baloch referred to the *Rawḍat al-shuhadāʾ* in the chapter devoted to the Sindhi *marṣiyas*: he wrote a few lines on the translation in ‘Sindhi *dohīrans*’<sup>634</sup> of the *Rawḍat al-shuhadāʾ*, adding it was published by

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<sup>630</sup> Muḥammad Ṣādiq. Memon, *Sindh jī ādabī tārikh* (Shikarpur, 2005), p. 201.

<sup>631</sup> The Urdu translation was titled *Karbal kathā* (The Narrative of Karbala). According to Hyder, it is one of the first prose works of North Indian Urdu. See Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, p. 29.

<sup>632</sup> J. Blumhardt, *Catalogue of the Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Assamese, Orya, Pushtu and Sindhi Manuscripts in the Library of the British Museum*, p. 38. While Kalhoro acknowledges Muḥammad Hāshim as one of the earliest Sindhi authors of *marṣiyas*, he did not pay attention to the role played by the *Rawḍat al-shuhadāʾ*; Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro, ‘The Depiction of Imam Mahdi in Sindhi Poetry of Sindh (Pakistan)’, p. 165.

<sup>633</sup> His theory would be supported some years later by Annemarie Schimmel, who wrote a short paper on the Sindhi *marṣiyas*: See A. Schimmel, ‘The Marsiya in Sindhi Poetry’, in Peter Chelkowski, ed., *Taʿzieh: Ritual and Drama in Iran* (New York, 1979), pp. 210-221.

<sup>634</sup> The *dohīro* or *dohā* is a kind of Sindhi verse, whose shape varies greatly.

Jamnādās Bhagwāndās, a member of the Hindu literati.<sup>635</sup>

Of course, this does not mean that Kāshifī's work was not known before in the original Persian version but it is not known whether excerpts of it were read before the singing of the *marṣiyas*, as it was performed with the Urdu version in Lucknow. However, it is obvious that the motif of martyrdom was spreading in Sindh since the early 18th century, while it was so to say unknown before, as a literary motif. Among the manuscripts of the British Museum, presently kept in the British Library, there are several versions of 'Alī Akbar's death, al-Ḥusayn's son. One of them, from the 18th century, is an anonymous account of the death of the same 'Alī Akbar.<sup>636</sup>

Amazingly, the first authors of *marṣiyas* lived during the period when the Sindhi version of *Rawḍat al-shuhadā'* was completed: was there an influence of the second on the first? It is not possible to answer, but it would hardly be a coincidence. Nonetheless, the first *marṣiyas* were written simultaneously in Persian and in Sindhi, but by different authors. In Persian, the *marṣiyas* were introduced in Sindh by Muḥammad Muḥsin (d. 1163/1750). Himself a Shi'ī, he authored, among other works, *Tirāz-i Dānish* (The Royal robe of Knowledge), a *maṣnawī* commemorating the birth of Imam Mahdi. He was following the *tarjī'-band*<sup>637</sup> in his *marṣiyas*.<sup>638</sup> But Makhdūm Tharo (d. 1160/1748) had already authored Persian quatrains in which he paid tribute to the *Asad Allāh*, the Lion of God, the *laqab* of Imam 'Alī, as well as to the memories of the martyrs of Karbala.

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<sup>635</sup> Baloch, *Sindhī marṣiya nivesī*, p. 37.

<sup>636</sup> Blumhardt, *Catalogue*, p. 39.

<sup>637</sup> *Tarjī'-band* is a form similar to that of the *ghazal* and the *qaṣīda*, in that the first half of the beginning line rhymes with the second half, but the first halves of the following lines are free from this constraint.

<sup>638</sup> H.I. Sadarangani, *Persian Poets of Sind* (Jamshoro/Hyderabad, 1987), p. 100.

The spread of *marṣiya* literature in Persian, Urdu and in Sindhi occurred when, after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the Indian subcontinent was going through turmoil. The Mughal empire was on the verge of decline. The intestine quarrels between his successors and the growing threat from the Marathas and the Sikhs opened India to new invasions. Nādir Shāh (r. 1148–1160/1736–1747) was to invade the Mughal empire in 1739, followed by the Afghan ruler Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī (r. 1159–1185/1747–1772) in the 1750s. It is tempting to see the development of laments and dirges in the local literature as mirroring the many wars in which the Subcontinent, including the Indus Valley, had felt [suffered??] in the main part of the 18th century.

Furthermore, the Urdu *marṣiya* blossomed at the same time at the beginning of the 18th century, for example with Muḥammad Rafī‘ Saudā (d. 1195/1781), who was patronised by the kings of Awadh. The first ruler of Awadh, Burhān al-Mulk (d. 1143/1731), was himself ethnically an Iranian, and he worked hard for the spread of ‘Alid cults in his kingdom. But contrary to the *marṣiya* in Urdu, the Sindhi *marṣiya* was not born in a Shi‘i state, it occurred in the Adil Shāh sultans of Bijapur (894–1097/1489–1686) and the Quṭub Shāhs of Golkonda (901–1098/1496–1687),<sup>639</sup> who were patrons of poetry, and sometimes poets themselves. In Sindh the rulers known as the Kalhorās (r. 1112–1196/1701–1782) were Sunni, and simultaneously affiliated to a local branch of the Sohrawardiyya.<sup>640</sup> There is no evidence that they they patronised Shi‘i rituals or literature.

In other regions like the Dekkan, numerous poets composed *marṣiya* from the 16th

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<sup>639</sup>For a general introduction of the cultural life in the Dekkan sultanates, see R.M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton, NJ, 1978); Shrirām Sharmā and Mubārāj al-Dīn Rafat, *‘Alī Ādil Shāh kā kāvy-sāgrah* (Agra, 1958).

<sup>640</sup> Boivin, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 220-221.

century onwards, and some even specialised in it.<sup>641</sup> Like other Urdu poetical forms, the *marṣiya* was at first court poetry, and Haywood claims that because of its religious nature it was taken by princes to the people, to form a corporate religio-literary and social activity. It probably played an important part in the development of the *mushāʿiras* (public poetical recital or competition) which became—and still remains—a phenomenon of Indo-Pakistani literary and social life.

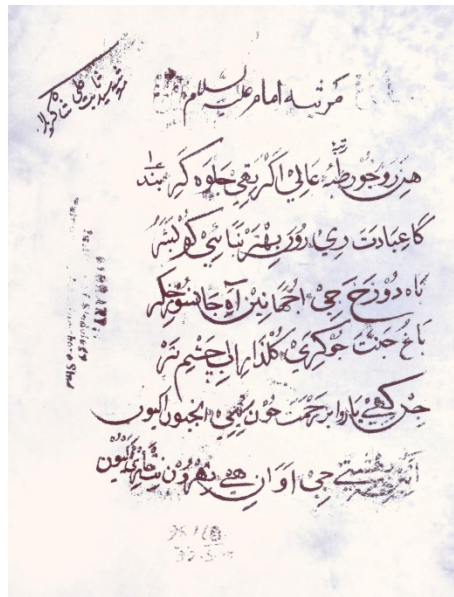


Fig.2 *Marṣiya imām ʿalayhi al-salām*, end of 18th century (Baloch, 1992, p. 88)

### *Sur Kedāro as the Matrix of the Sindhi marṣiya*

The life of the first poets of Sindh who authored *marṣiyas* in Sindhi as well as in Persian are not well documented. They could have been court poets, and when they were granted royal patronage, it was not only as authors of *marṣiyas*. However, the birth of the Sindhi *marṣiya* occurred in the countryside. Notwithstanding, a piece of poetry will work as the matrix of

<sup>641</sup> Haywood, 'Marthiya. 4. In Urdu Literature', p. 610.

the *marṣiya* that was inserted in a Sufi work:?? the *Shāh jo risālo* by Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf (1100–1165/1689–1752). He was from a Sayyid family settled in Bulri, a small village where his great grandfather, Shāh ‘Abd al-Karīm (942–1032/1536–1623), was buried. After years of peregrination, Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf went to settle in a remote part of the interior of Sindh where there was no village. His verses praise the simple life of the peasant.

As Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf is the first to devote a full chapter to Karbala, it is necessary to examine it in detail. My contention here is to decipher the Shi‘i elements. It is an easy task since the Sindhi Sufi poets who preceded Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf did not use any Shi‘i referent, be it in the lexicon or as a literary motif.<sup>642</sup> Before starting, it is interesting to mention that it is not known if Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf was Sunni or Shi‘a. It is said that some follower asked him the question. He answered: ‘I am between both’. The follower said again: ‘But master, there is nothing between?’ Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf stated: ‘So I’m nothing...’. Despite the naivety of the story, it highlights a fundamental principle of Sufism in Sindh: Sufism is located beyond religious or confessional, or sectarian, affiliation and belonging.

The *Shāh jo risālo* is a significant sample of the *marṣiya* from the countryside. It reflects the vernacularised religious culture that flourished in peripheral regions of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>643</sup> This is a poetry which comes from the very land (*deśi*). More than to master the apex of sophistication in aesthetics as in the courtly culture of North India, the poet wishes to move the simple man of Sindh, a province where a large majority of the inhabitants were landless peasants. Also, the poet speaks directly in his poetry to the groups of local society most discriminated against, such as the dyers (*kaprā*).<sup>644</sup> But since he refers to

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<sup>642</sup>Qāzī Qāzan, Shāh ‘Abd al-Karīm and others. See Memon, *Sindh jī ādabī tārikh*.

<sup>643</sup>For a more elaborate discussion on the issue of vernacularised religious culture, see Boivin, *Historical Dictionary*, pp. 12-17.

<sup>644</sup>In 18th-century Sindh, social organisation was very much influenced by the caste system.



folk narratives and heroes shared by all creeds and traditions, all Sindhis felt involved in Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s poetry.

The *Shāh jo risālo* consists of 30 chapters, each centering around one topic and traditional tales which are mystically interpreted and sung in a specific melody, a *sur*. The Sindhi word *sur* is more or less the equivalent of *rāga*, namely a musical mode which is to express a given feeling, and/or to be played at a given moment of the day. In the *Shāh jo Risālo*, there is a *sur* which of special interest, *Sur Kedāro*. In Sindhi, the word *kedāro* means war. It comes from a Sanskrit term with same meaning of war. In classical Indian music, the *rāga Kedār* is said to be associated with the god Shiva and is to be sung at mid-day. Furthermore, it is also a contemplative *rāga* and it is represented as an ascetic who is deeply absorbed in meditation. In the 17th century, the *rāga Kedār* was one of the main *rāgas* performed at the Mughal court (*The Raga Guide*, 1999: 5).

In the *Shāh jo risālo*, *Sur Kedāro* is thus the chapter on war. The whole chapter is devoted to the martyrdom (*shahādat*) of the third Shi‘i imam, Ḥusayn, who died in 680 at Karbala with many of his family members. A thorough study has yet to be made on the reasons for which Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf introduced a Shi‘i topic in his poetry. However, this is something which distinguishes him from his predecessors in classic Sindhi Sufi poetry. One might think that it could be due to influence from Persia where the *marṣiya* genre, the dirge devoted to the martyrdom of Ḥusayn and his family, was booming. The narrative of the Karbala tragedy did not, however, strictly follow the shape of the Persian *marṣiya*.

The main argument of *Sur Kedāro* is that the experience of martyrdom is the experience of meeting God. Subsequently, a sacrifice, regardless of its shape, is necessary to reach God. *Sur Kedāro* is divided into six parts addressing four main issues. First is the coming of Moḥarram, the month of mourning of martyrdom of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī, a trial of their love.

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Groups such as the dyers belonged to the untouchables, who were considered impure.

Second is the apparent helpless state of the imams. The third part is about their bravery in fighting and the fourth part deals with their union with God after death. As in other poetry, Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf involves the natural elements in the grief resulting from the martyrdom of Ḥusayn, when it is said for example that on the last day, the 10th of Moḥarram, the sky darkened. Animals can also play a leading role. For example, a bird (*pakī*) carried the message of the martyrdom to the Prophet’s mausoleum in Medina. It could be a reminiscence of the *Rawḍat al-shuhadā’* where it is a pigeon that is the messenger.

Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s depictions of the different episodes of the battle are made very vivid with precise details. In the first part, he starts by giving a detailed description of the weapons. The poet also points out the bravery of the Imam’s party, as well as of the women, especially when he explains how they faced the death of their husbands. In the fifth part the most heartbreaking passage is the depiction of Imam Ḥusayn’s end. The red colour, which dominates the narratives through different nuances, has invaded the battlefield and the desert. Even the hoofs of Duldul, the name given to Ḥusayn’s horse,<sup>645</sup> are all red. Finally the Imam himself is turning red:

With blood his beard became crimson red;

His teeth appeared red like a rose, as they profusely bled.

Like the full moon on the fourteenth night, His majestic turban shone, clear and

bright.<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> Amazingly, Duldul is the name given here to Ḥusayn’s horse at Karbala, although usually it is the name of ‘Alī’s horse. Nowadays, as least in the processions of Moḥarram, Ḥusayn’s horse is called Żul Jināḥ.

<sup>646</sup> Ghulamali Allana, *Four Classical Poets of Sind* (Jamshoro, 1983), p. 70.

The concept of martyrdom is a key concept which links Shi‘ism and Sufism. Ḥusayn’s martyrdom is the matrix from which the martyrdom of Sufis will be depicted, like Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 302/922) or Shāh ‘Ināyat (d. 1130/1718), to whom I will return. After providing the dramatic feeling of Karbala, Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf reaches his central statement when he sings:

The hardship of martyrdom (*shahādat*), Listen!

Is the day of wedding (*shādī*)

This statement which assimilates *shahādat* with *shādī* is reminiscent of death symbolised as the merging of the Sufi in God: the *‘urs*, which also means wedding. In another verse, Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf claims: ‘The *rend* understand the secret (*rāz*) of Karbala’. It reinforces the identification of the Sufi, with Ḥusayn, and thus the link between Sufism and Shi‘ism. It is interesting to note that Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf uses the word *rend*, and not *faqīr* or any other. It refers to Sufis who are embedded in a *ṭarīqa*, limited by a specific *ādab*. The *rend*, or the *qalandar*, is the one whose desire is only one, to be merged with God. Simultaneously, the *rend* is therefore the only one who can understand properly what occurred at Karbala. The use of this terminology is rare in Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s lexicon. Maybe it is a kind of reminiscence of a powerful Sufi saint of Sindh, La‘l Shahbāz Qalandar (d. 672/1274), since he himself uses the word *rend* in his Persian poetry.<sup>647</sup>

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<sup>647</sup> La‘l Shahbāz Qalandar (d. 672/1274) is said to be the descendant of Isma‘īl, the sixth imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s son who was acknowledged as imam by his followers thus known as Ismailis. He was himself a *qalandar* and as such, he travelled in the heartland of the Islamic world, before reaching the Indus Valley soon after the Mongol intrusion. He finally settled in Sehwan Sharif, in Sindh, and his mausoleum is one of the most popular in Pakistan. A number of artefacts which are currently worshipped [revered ???] on different occasions relate him with Shi‘i sacred figures, as for example the fourth imam Zayn al-‘Abidīn. See Michel Boivin, *Artefacts of Devotion. A Sufi Repertoire of the Qalandariyya in Sehwan Sharif, Sindh*

In another verse, Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf says: ‘The Friend (*dust*) kills the beloved, the lovers are slain’. Here again, Karbala tragedy is depicted with Sufi terminology. In the last part of *Sur Kedāro*, Ḥusayn is described as the bridegroom (*ghoṭ*), a *topos* of Sindhi Sufi poetry which is most of the time attributed to Muḥammad: ‘With flower-embroidered dress, O man, be prepared for the wedding’. The bridegroom has decorated his horse, as in Sindhi custom, and he rides for his fatal battle. The issue of the *ghoṭ* is also addressed in regard to Qāsim, who was to be married before he died. A passage of the *sur* pictured him with his uncle Ḥusayn. The latter asks him to rescue his companions and he comes in his beautiful bridegroom garments. In another passage, the word *ghoṭ* (pl. *ghoṭan*) is given to all the companions who, besides Ḥusayn, are to die as martyrs. There is a beautiful and tremendous description of the final part of the battle, when the *ghoṭs* and their horses (*ghoṭan ghoṭan*) are all intermingled in the savagery of the battlefield.

The metaphor of the wedding is therefore crucial for the integration of Shi‘i elements in Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s Sufi poetry. The chapter ends with a meaningful verse in which the integration is achieved:

‘They have become annihilated in God, with Him they have become He’.

Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf employs the Arabic expression *fanā’ fi’llāh* which is, interestingly, coupled with, and thus reinforcing, the Sindhi version of *fānī thiya*. The poet carries his argument through associations since he started by associating *shahādat* with *shādī*, and he ends the *sur* in associating *shahādat* with *fanā’*. In concluding *Sur Kedāro*, Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf exhorts God to provide him the vision of the martyrs, in a typical Sufi mood. It is noteworthy that here, he doesn’t use the Persian word *dīdār*, although one can find it in other *surs*, but the very Sindhi

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(Pakistan) (Karachi, 2011), pp. 94-95.

verb *dekhārān*. In referring to this main Sufi achievement, Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf definitively embodies Shi‘i elements into Sufi poetry.

Briefly put, Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf expresses Ḥusayn’s martyrdom (*shahādat*) with the Sufi lexicon and main trope. In this respect, it is relevant to see it as the Sufi poet’s attempt to capture the emotion of Karbala, as if reaching *fanā’ fī’llāh* was only possible by performing a self-sacrifice. Ḥusayn’s *shahādat* thus works as a metaphor whose aim is to prove that *fanā’ fī’llāh* cannot be realised without the sacrifice of the self. Along the way, he merged Ḥusayn’s *shahādat* with that of a number of Sufis who sacrificed their lives in different circumstances.

Devotional literature in Sindhi gives evidence of how Shi‘ism and Sufism are interwoven there. It appears that Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf uses Sufi terminology to describe the tragedy of Karbala. Furthermore, the main achievement of his verses is the identification of Ḥusayn with Sufi figures, martyrs and others. It is possible that the identification process of Husayn with a Sufi figure has been reinforced by historical circumstances, both regional and South Asian at large.

### **The *marṣiya* as a Genre of Sindhi Poetry**

Regarding regional history, a major event occurred in 1197/1783: a Baluch clan, the Ṭalpūrs, seized power and interestingly, founded a state which was divided into three distinct territories, each of them ruled by a king (*mīr*) established in a separate capital, at Hyderabad in Sindh, Khairpur and Mirpur, presently known as Mirpur Khas. Almost all the Ṭalpūr princes of Sindh were Twelver Shi‘is. Not only did they patronise Shi‘i rituals as well as Shi‘i buildings such as the *imāmbārās*,<sup>648</sup> but a number of them wrote *marṣiyas* and other poetry.

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<sup>648</sup> In Sindh, the *imāmbārā* is the building where sermons are delivered during the first ten days of Moḥarram, and where the different artefacts which are paraded are kept.

The first author who was specialised in writing *marṣiyas* in Sindhi is Thābit ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1224/1810). He was twelve years old when Shāh ʿAbd al-Laṭīf passed away. Thābit ʿAlī Shāh was born in Multan, but settled in the holy city of Sehwan Sharif with his father Madar ʿAlī Shāh. He was a sayyid who wrote poetry in Persian, Urdu and Sindhi. He was patronised by the Ṭalpūrs and lived at the court of Hyderabad. It was at the expenses of the king that he was able to make a pilgrimage to Karbala and the shrines of all the imams. In 1805, he was sent by the *mīr* of Hyderabad as an ambassador to the king of Persia, Fath ʿAlī Shāh Qājār (d. 1249/1834).

His *marṣiyas* are usually filled with Persian and Arabic expressions and terms but he also produced pure Sindhi poetry. They are still sung during the procession of Moḥarram in the main cities of Sindh. Furthermore, Thābit ʿAlī Shāh is also the author of a *madāḥ*, praise to a saintly figure, devoted to Laʿl Shahbāz Qalandar, which is sung for ʿAlī's birthday inside his shrine. His *marṣiyas* move both Muslims and non-Muslims to tears. Although he composed some verses on the martyrdom of the *Imams* in Persian, he was nicknamed the 'Ānīs of Sindh' for his Sindhi *marṣiyas*. In his verses which follow generally the form aaabb, Thābit ʿAlī Shāh uses all the references of the genre, naming Ṣaḥab Duldul, ʿAlī's horse, and focusing mainly on the fate of ʿAlī Akbar, one of Ḥusayn's sons. He praises the sacrifice (*qurbān*) they have performed and often quotes the famous *Lā fatā illā ʿAlī lā sayf illā dhū'l-faḳār*, 'there is no hero except ʿAlī, there is no sword except *dhū'l-faḳār*'.<sup>649</sup>

From the time of Thābit ʿAlī Shāh, the *marṣiya* was a genre of Sindhi poetry. Richard Burton is probably the first to mention it as one of the four genres with *madāḥ*, *munājāt* and *lānat* which

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<sup>649</sup> Baloch, *Sindhī marṣiya nivesī*, p. 53. The word *dhū'l-faḳār* is the name of ʿAlī's sword.

Regarding the word *fatā* or *javānmard* in Persian, see Mohsen Zakeri, 'Javānmardi', *EIR*, vol. 14, pp. 594-601.

are ‘common to all the Moslem world’, to which he added five others ‘more original’.<sup>650</sup> After the fall of the Ṭalpūrs in 1258/1843, other leading Shi‘i families patronised the authors of *marṣiyas*, or sometimes they themselves authored *marṣiyas*, without these always being published. A good example is that of Makhdūm Muḥammad Zamān Ṭāleb al-Mawlā (1919-1993), a scion of the powerful *khāndān* of the Makhdūms of Hala.<sup>651</sup>



Fig.3 Sindh showing the main places mentioned

The spread of a vernacular form of the *marṣiyas* did not prevent the existence of a courtly

<sup>650</sup> Richard Burton, *Sindh and the Inhabitants of the Indus Valley* (Karachi, 1851), pp. 78-79.

Interestingly, Nabi Bakhsh Baloch classified *marṣiya* among the devotional songs with *madāḥ*, *munājāt mawlūd*, but he didn't publish any of them, contrary to the other three categories: Boivin, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 95-96.

<sup>651</sup> Makhdūm, no date. The Makhdūms of Hala are the descendants of Makhdūm Nūḥ, a Sohrawardī Sufi who played a leading role in 16th-century Sindh, working as a scholar of Islam, and also as a mediator with political power. See M. Boivin, *Historical Dictionary of the Sufi Culture of Sindh*, pp. 206-208.

*marṣiya* expressed in Persian. It does not seem that the Persian *marṣiyas* were very common in Sindh before the 19th century. After the Ṭalpūrs were defeated by the British in 1843, the states of Hyderabad and Mirpur Khas were suppressed; the state of Khairpur was thus the sole princely state of Sindh ruled by a Shiʿi Ṭalpūr up to 1955, when it was incorporated in Pakistan. During British colonisation, Khairpur became a hotbed of Shiʿism in Sindh. In the last decades of the 19th century, especially during the long reign of Mīr ʿAlī Murād (r. 1257–1311/1842–1894) and that of his successor, Mīr Faīẓ Muḥammad (r. 1311–1326/1894–1909), magnificent palaces were built, such as the Faizi Mahal, as well as beautiful *imāmbārās* and *taʿzīās*,<sup>652</sup> mainly in the capital, Khairpur, and in Kot Diji, another main residence of the *mīrs*.<sup>653</sup>

As Sadarangani pointed out, since the Shiʿi Ṭalpūrs broadly patronised poetry, many Sunni poets wrote in praise of Imam ʿAlī and the martyred imams: ‘In the circumstances it becomes difficult for the reader to determine from the works of a poet of the Ṭalpūr Age whether he was a Sunni or a Shiʿa (...)’.<sup>654</sup> Mīr Nāṣir Khān Ṭalpūr (d. 1260/1845), a son of Mīr Murād Alī Khan the *mīr* of Hyderabad, was nonetheless himself a Shiʿi who wrote with the pen name of Jaʿfarī. After the British conquest, he was exiled like all the Ṭalpūr princes. He stayed in Calcutta and longed to be buried in Karbala instead of Bengal. In his verse, Jaʿfarī still echoes the assimilation of martyrdom with the wedding with God: ‘The blood of the self-

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<sup>652</sup> In South Asia, *taʿzīa* is the name given to the replica of the tomb of Imam Ḥusayn carried in procession during Moḥarram.

<sup>653</sup> Interestingly, the craftsmen belonged to Hindu castes from Jodhpur, in neighbouring Rajputana (nowadays Rajasthan), and Bahawalpur. Regarding architecture, it is said the Ṭalpūrs were influenced by their Northern neighbours, the Sikhs of Punjab, particularly the famous architect Bhai Rām Singh.

<sup>654</sup> H.I. Sadarangani, *Persian Poets of Sind* (Jamshoro, Hyderabad, 1987), p. 152.



sacrificing lover is henna for the beloved's hands!



**Fig.4** A ta'zīa kept by the Ṭalpūrs in Kot Diji, late 18th or early 19th century

(©Michel Boivin, 2014)

Despite the dwindling of patronage after the British took control of Sindh, the Ṭalpūr school of Persian poetry did not end. However, there was no special literary form used for the lament. In this context, the use of the word *marṣiya* comes from the overall topic rather than from a literary genre. Also, one can find hardly any works that are devoted totally to martyrdom. The best example of this trend is Mīr Sābir 'Alī (d. 1264/1868) who praised 'Alī in his verses, figured as *Shah-e mardān*, to reach self-realisation. One could say it was thus the most common trope of Persian poetry of Sindh in general.

#### **Sachal Sarmast and the Junction of Ḥusayn's *shahādat* with the Sufi figure of the Martyr**

During the last days of Mughal domination in Sindh a Sufi, Shāh 'Ināyat (ca 1032–1123/ca 1623–1712), rose to prominence. He travelled around India, and was initiated into the Qādiriyya and the Sohrawardiyya in Bijapur or Burhanpur. He settled into a life of devotion

to God in the village of Jhok, not far from Thatta but on the eastern bank of the Indus River. His reputation of being a high-level mystic spread all around Sindh and in Jhok he provided free land to the peasants who quickly flocked to the place. The bonded farmers of many of the local landlords reached Jhok.

In 1126/1715, the sayyids of the neighbouring villages were given permission by the Mughal governor of Thatta to attack Jhok. Many of the dervishes sacrificed their life for their master, Shāh ‘Ināyat. In 1127/1716, a new Mughal governor was posted in Thatta after which the Kalhoras took northern Sindh under their control. Yār Muḥammad Kalhoro was keen to expand his control throughout Sindh. In the summer of 1128/1717, he started a campaign against Jhok, probably with the consent of the Mughal governor. In January 1129/1718, Shāh ‘Ināyat decided to surrender to spare the life of his dervishes. He was executed and his head was sent to Delhi.<sup>655</sup>

Shāh ‘Ināyat’s martyrdom gave birth to many legends in Sindh. The Sohrawardī Sayyid Mīr Jān Muḥammad from Rohri (d. 1167/1754) clearly alluded to Shāh ‘Ināyat’s martyrdom.<sup>656</sup> He was present at Jhok when it was decided to put him to death. Many other Sufi poets will echo the tragic event in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Of course, it is not possible to claim it can explain the spread of Kāshifī’s work on the martyrdom of Karbala. It is nonetheless undeniable that his martyrdom paved the way for the incorporation of *marṣiyas* into Sufi poetry.

Another Sufi poet was a follower of Jhok Sharif. Dalpat Ṣūfī (1769-1842) was a Hindu from Sehwan Sharif. He belonged to the Merāṇī family who used to perform the *mendī*

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<sup>655</sup> See a detailed description of Shāh ‘Ināyat’s martyrdom in Schimmel’s pioneering work: Annemarie Schimmel, *Pearls of the Indus. Studies in Sindhi Culture* (Jamshoro, Hyderabad, 1985), pp. 156-165.

<sup>656</sup> Sadarangani, *Persian Poets of Sind*, pp. 102-103.

ritual<sup>657</sup> for the death anniversary of La'ī Shahbāz Qalandar. Dalpat regularly visited Jhok Sharif but he spent the last years of his life as a recluse in Hyderabad. His Sindhi poetry is still much acclaimed in Pakistan and in India. In Persian, he wrote a *mathnawī* entitled *Jang Nāma* where he deals with the martyrdom of Shāh 'Ināyat as well as with the different phases of the struggle for the eradication of the *nafs-e āmāra*, the lower or carnal soul, otherwise known as *jihād-e akbar*, the biggest fight.<sup>658</sup> To some extent, one can surmise Dalpat gave a renewed version of the *Sur Keḏāro* where Shāh 'Ināyat seizes the figure of Imam Ḥusayn, knowing the main issue is to introduce martyrdom as the *fanā' fī'llāh*. However, Shāh 'Abd al-Laṭīf's language is far more sophisticated than Dalpat's. The latter wrote in simple and very clear Sindhi and he thus contributed to the massification of the issue of *shahādat* among the Sindhis.

Throughout the decades, many hints show that Kāshifī's work was still a main reference regarding the issue of martyrdom in Sindhi poetry. Still in 1278/1862, the *Rawḍat al-shuhadā'* was translated into Sindhi as found in a manuscript kept by the Khojas, the followers of the Aga Khan [I].<sup>659</sup> The Khojki<sup>660</sup> collection of Harvard University provides many samples with *marṣiyas* devoted to the imams or their family members, such as Qāsim, Ḥasan's son who was to marry Ḥusayn's daughter. Others are devoted to 'Alī Asghar or 'Alī Akbar, and even to female figures such as Bibī Khānūm or Sakīna.<sup>661</sup> Other *marṣiyas* deal with the

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<sup>657</sup> The Sindhi word for henna, a main symbol of a wedding in South Asian culture. As noted above, a saint's death is represented as his wedding with God.

<sup>658</sup> Sadarangani, *Persian Poets of Sind*, p. 204.

<sup>659</sup> Asani, *The Harvard Collection*, p. 80.

<sup>660</sup> Khojki is the name given to the script used by the Khojas. It belongs to the Laṇḍāor 'clipped' scripts used by merchant communities in Sindh and in Punjab.

<sup>661</sup> Asani, *The Harvard Collection*, p. 164-166.

martyrdom of some direct ancestors of the Aga Khans. For example, there is a *marṣiya* on Shāh Khalil Allah, the first Aga Khan's father, who was assassinated in Persia in 1232/1817.

Interestingly, there are also devotional pieces known as *vāvilās*, the Sindhi word for lament, which are attributed to the first Aga Khan, Ḥasan 'Alī Shāh (d. 1298/1881). In the beginning of the 19th century, the Khojas were among the specialists of *marṣiyas* in Sindh. According to Richard Burton: 'They are fond of the *Marṣiyas*, or elegiac poetry on the subject of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn's martyrdom; such compositions are common among them (...)'.<sup>662</sup> In this case, it is interesting to see that although Kāshifī still works as a model, simultaneously, the *marṣiyas* were re-oriented to serve the Aga Khan's policy which was to take control of the Khoja caste.<sup>663</sup>

In parallel with Shāh 'Inayāt's *shahādat*, another Sufi martyr was framed into a pattern. According to local historians, a famous martyr paid a visit to Sindh in the early 10th century: Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), who died on the gallows in Baghdad because he said publicly that he was God: *anā al-ḥaqq* (lit. 'I am the Truth') in Arabic. Officially, he was accused of being a heretic but the mystics as well as the common people in Sindh claim that it was because he had reached the divine stage. According to Schimmel, Ḥallāj's importance was highlighted first in the lines of the Qādirī mystics,<sup>664</sup> but in Sindh, the motif could have known a new dynamic with the *shahādat* of Shāh 'Inayāt. Ḥallāj was probably a popular figure but nonetheless, it is with Sachal Sarmast (1151–1241/1739–1826), himself a Qādirī, that he was transformed into a trope of Sufi poetry.<sup>665</sup> Although he didn't die on the gallows, Sachal

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<sup>662</sup> Burton, *Sindh and the Inhabitants*, p. 250.

<sup>663</sup> Boivin, *Les âghâ khans et les Khojah*.

<sup>664</sup> See the paper Schimmel has devoted to the issue: Schimmel, *Pearls of the Indus*, pp. 87–149.

<sup>665</sup> Sachal Sarmast authored poetry in a number of languages such as Persian, Hindustani, Siraiki and Sindhi. I use here his work in Sindhi: Sachal Sarmast, *Risālo Sachal Sarmast (Sindhī*

Sarmast was known in Sindh as ‘Manṣūr Thānī’, the second Manṣūr.

Sachal is considered by Baloch to be an author of *marṣiyas* belonging to the old school.<sup>666</sup> In his verses, Sachal highlighted the bravery of Ḥusayn and his companions and relatives. He also praises Qāsim’s wedding as a prelude to the marriage of the martyr with God. All these references can be seen as reformulations of Shāh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf poetry. Nonetheless the innovation he brought concerns the assimilation of Ḥallāj’s death with Ḥusayn’s martyrdom. The most striking point is that the focus is put on the martyrdom itself, as if it was a new shape of Ḥusayn’s *shahādat*. Sachal Sarmast associates the state reached by Ḥallāj with a triumph. It is thus clear that divinity is the finality of the Sufi path. He also pointed out that sacrifice is but a *sine qua non* condition to reach the state of divinity:

My head I am ready to sacrifice

Like this will suffice<sup>667</sup>

Sachal was only the first of many Sufi poets who referred to Ḥallāj’s martyrdom, such as Bedil (d. 1288/1872), his son Bekās (d. 1299/1882) or Rakhiyyal Shāh (d. 1358/1940). Once again, martyrdom is a trope of Sufi poetry in the 19th century and other Sufi poets also tried to associate the martyrdom of Ḥallāj with that of Ḥusayn. The construction of Ḥallāj as a trope attracted the interest of a Hindu from Sehwan who published a biography in 1915.<sup>668</sup>

In the mid-19th century, Faqīr Qādir Bakhsh (d. 1288/1872), better known as Bedil, was a Qādirī Sufi from northern Sindh who wrote a pastiche in Persian of the famous *Rawḍat al-shuhadā’*. Bedil composed poetry in Sindhi, Siraiki, Urdu and Persian. He also wrote Sindhi

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*kalām*), ed. ‘Umān ‘Alī Ānṣārī (Kandiyaro, 1997).

<sup>666</sup> Baloch, *Sindhī marṣiya nivesī*, pp. 43–44.

<sup>667</sup> Allana, *Four Classical Poets of Sind*, p. 105.

<sup>668</sup> Deumal Arumal Sehwanī, *Manṣūr jī ḥayātī* (Hyderabad, 1915).

*marṣiyas*, and consequently he is well represented in Baloch's anthology. His verses are very simple such as:

When Shāh as a guest (*mehmān*), appeared at the battleground of Karbala,  
The wave of grief (*dard*) and agony (*gham*) highly prevailed there!<sup>669</sup>

In his verse, Bedil reproduces the associations operated by Shāh ʿAbd al-Laṭīf whose aim is to implement a fusion between both figures, the Shiʿi imam and the Sufi. He even reinforces the mystical interpretation of Karbala in diminishing the very real depiction of the battle, the wounds, the bleeding of the fighters etc. He proceeds in putting together opposite couples of feelings, such as sadness (*soz*) and love (*piyār*), or pain (*dard*) and love (*dil*).<sup>670</sup> The goal is to show Karbala's lesson that pain and sadness are but a step on the way of divine love.

### **Mīrzā Qalīch Beg and the Final Bridging of Shiʿism and Sufism**

While the trope of *shahādat* was incorporated with Sufi poetry, the spread of the *marṣiyas* as a distinct literary genre did not end. A Ṭalpūr mīr, Ḥasan ʿAlī Khān (d. 1324/1907), was an author of fine *marṣiyas* where he mostly focused on *shahīdan jo gham*, the word *gham* referring to the last part of the *majlis*, when the narrative gives the more striking details of the martyrdom, inducing tears of grief in the audience.<sup>671</sup> Another Ṭalpūr, Mīr ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Sangī (d. 1342/1924) also composed *marṣiyas* although his work is composed mostly of *ghazals*. He was the grandson of the last mīr of Hyderabad, Mīr Nāṣir Khān Ṭalpūr, who was

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<sup>669</sup> Baloch, *Sindhī marṣiya nivesī*, p. 64.

<sup>670</sup> *ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>671</sup> *ibid.*, p. 74.

defeated by General Napier at the battle of Miani in 1258/1843. The final incorporation of Shi‘i *shahādat* as a trope of Sindhi poetry is obvious with the work of a Hindu poet, Parsrām Ziyā’ (d. 1377/1958), where one can find reference to Imam Ḥusayn’s martyrdom.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the *mīrs* of Khairpur were among the leading figures of the Indian Shi‘i community. In 1928, Mīr ‘Alī Nawāz Khān Ṭalpūr, who ruled Khairpur from 1921 to his death in 1935, was the president of the All India Shi‘a Conference held in Calcutta, and as such, he was asked to deliver the presidential address. Since the late 19th century, the *mīrs* of Khairpur had patronised the building of *imāmbārās*, following the mainstream process centred on Lucknow, tagged by Justin Jones as the building of a ‘Shi‘i *qawm*’, namely a distinct Shi‘i community. Some of the Shi‘is went so far as to publicly oppose what they saw as the Sunni-run Muslim League.<sup>672</sup>

Mīrzā Qalīch Beg (1853-1929), a leading member of the *literati* of Sindh, was close to the *mīr*, himself a Shi‘a. He was a member of the Anjuman Shi‘a Conference, a local branch of the All India Shi‘a Conference, and Mīr ‘Alī Nawāz Khān invited him several times to be his *wazīr* or prime minister but he politely declined the offer. Mīrzā Qalīch Beg was probably the first scholar to take an interest in Shi‘i devotional literature in Sindhi. Knowing the involvement of both Mīr ‘Alī Nawāz Khān and Mīrzā Qalīch Beg, through their membership of the *anjumans*, one can surmise that their concern was to locate the Shi‘ism of Sindh in the

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<sup>672</sup> On the construction of a ‘Shi‘i *qawm*’ in North India, see the detailed analysis in Justin Jones, *Shi‘a Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (Cambridge, 2011). Regarding the representation of the Shi‘a in the Muslim League, a number of them were among the founders of the organisation in 1906, such as Sulṭān Muḥammad Shah, the third Aga Khan. Later on, their number decreased but this issue is still to be investigated. On the early years of the Muslim League, see Francis Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims, 1860-1923* (Cambridge, 1974).

wake of this Shi'ī reappraisal.

As a matter of fact, in 1925 Mīrzā Qalīch Beg was the first editor of Šābit 'Alī Shāh's work (*diwān*), mostly comprised of *marṣiyas*.<sup>673</sup> The title was simply *Marṣiya Thābit 'Alī Shāh jā*, or *The Marṣiya of Šābit 'Alī Shāh*.<sup>674</sup> The process of shifting such a poetry genre from the oral corpus, unless manuscripts had been copied, to a published corpus, obviously has a manifold meaning. It occurred more than half a century after the first Sindhi poetry was published, the famous *Shāh jo risālo*, in 1866. Being Shi'ī was thus not an issue in Sindh prior to the 20th century. The main impact of publishing Šābit 'Alī Shāh's *marṣiyas* was both to represent him as the Ānīs of Sindh, and to anchor the Shi'ī community into a unique devotional corpus **with which they can be identified**. This construction didn't prevent the process of incorporating Shi'ī elements in Sufi poetry in which Mīrzā Qalīch Beg played a leading role.



Fig.5 Mīr 'Alī Nawāz Khān Ṭalpūr (1884-1935) was *mīr* of Khairpur from 1921 to 1935

<sup>673</sup> Memon, *Sindh jādabī tārīkh*, p. 162.

<sup>674</sup> Baloch, *Sindhī marṣiya nivesī*, p. 102. Nothing more is known about it, and needless to say I was not able to see a single copy.



Apart of the *marṣiyas* he had himself written,<sup>675</sup> Mīrzā Qalīch Beg published in 1929 a compilation of Sindhi *salāms* and *noḥās* titled *Tuḥfah-i imāmiyah*, *The Gift of the Imāmites*.<sup>676</sup> Consequently, after he had edited Šābit ‘Alī Shāh’s *marṣiyas*, he felt the need to focus on a more popular type of Shi‘i literature, which referred to the *majlis* itself, which is the commemorative assembly.<sup>677</sup> The *salāms* are the salutations or benedictions, used especially in the context of the *majlis* as an identity marker of the nascent Shi‘i *qawm* to refer to the opening part. The *noḥās* are elegies commemorating one of the martyrs of Karbala, mainly chanted during the *matām*, when the devotees beat their chests. This title is the one given in the British Library catalogue, while the title of the copy kept by the Institute of Sindhology, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, does not include *salām ‘ain noḥā*. However, there is no place and the date as stated in the introduction is 1919, instead of 1929 as it is put in the British Library copy. [repeated in the footnote below]

However, the copy of the Institute of Sindhology does not include any *salām* or *noḥā*.

The book is mostly a compilation of *marṣiyas*, almost 80% of the whole, dedicated to the main characters of the Karbala tragedy, including Ḥusayn, ‘Abbās, ‘Alī Akbar, ‘Alī Asghar and others. There are other poetic genres, such as *rubā‘iāt*, *na‘t*, or *manāqib*. The book ends with different *khutbas*, including one for ‘id *ghadīr*, and finally the *du‘ā* of the Twelver Shi‘is in

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<sup>675</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 94-96.

<sup>676</sup> [Mīrzā Qalīch Beg, \*Tuḥfah-i imāmiyah: salām ‘ain noḥā\* \(Shikārpūr, 1929\).](#) This title is the one given in the British Library catalogue. The copy I have examined is that of the Institute of Sindhology, University of Sindh, Jamshoro. The title does not include *salām ‘ain noḥā*, especially since it does not include any... However, there is no place and the date as stated in the introduction is 1919, instead of 1929 as it is in the British Library copy.

<sup>677</sup> The *majlis* is a commemorative assembly held in honour of the martyred members of the Prophet’s family.

Sindhi.

Mīrzā Qalīch Beg's publications on Shi'ism in Sindhi were a new building-block in the development of the Shi'i *qawm* of Sindh. Beyond his interest into Shi'i devotional poetry, Mīrzā Qalīch Beg played a fundamental role in the ongoing process of integrating Shi'i tropes in Sufism. He could thus not depart from what was the main characteristic of Shi'ism of Sindh, its entanglement with Sufi poetry. In his *Lughat Laṭīfī*, he gave the most important words and expressions of the *Sur Keḏāro* with a Sindhi explanation. It shows a picture of the Shi'i tropes in Sufi poetry at the beginning of the 20th century. The Shi'i tropes he pointed out can be classified in three parts. He starts with the military vocabulary. Many words are used for introducing Karbala as a war; first of all is *jang*, but many other Sindhi words are also used.

For example, there is the interesting word *piṛu* for Karbala which is explained as *jang jo maidān* (Beg, 1913: 133). The name of *piṛu* was also given to the place where were kept the artefacts to be paraded for Moḥarram, also known as *imāmbārā*. Beside this, another trope is that of the Prophet's offspring. Beg gives many words related to the Prophet Muḥammad's daughter and grandchildren. Fāṭima is referred to as a protective figure, she is *bībī*, the princess, or *janat khātūn*, the Dame of the Paradise. Another topic highlighted by Beg is that of *shām*. For him, Karbala is *shām walāyat*.<sup>678</sup> The word *shām* means evening, and also Syria, the 'historical' Syria that is today Syria and Lebanon. In Shi'i context, the mention of the word predicts the terrible suffering that Ḥusayn's little daughter will have to undergo upon reaching Yazīd's capital in that land.<sup>679</sup> But in Sindhi, the word *shām* is also used in a metaphorical way to express the idea of a place of refuge. It is obviously this last meaning Beg was referring to: Karbala as *shām walāyat* means that Karbala was the place where both

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<sup>678</sup> Mīrzā Qalīch Beg, *Lughat laṭīfī* (Hyderabad, 1913), p. 137.

<sup>679</sup> Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, p. 27.

Ḥusayn and through him the institution of the imamate took refuge, before to be slaughtered by their enemies.

After partition, a new thread was added to the tapestry of Shi'ism in Sindh. A number of Muslims who migrated from India in 1947, known as Mohājirs, were Shi'is, especially those coming from the northern cities including the Shi'i centres of Lucknow and Amroha, but also from Hyderabad in Dekkan. There is thus an interesting connection in relation to the encounter between the Sindhi Shi'is and the Mohājir Shi'is. Mohājir Shi'ism was an offspring of the courtly Shi'i culture expressed in Urdu. In Sindh, although the Persian school was centred in the Khairpur courtly culture, Shi'ism was mainly interwoven with Sufi poetry.

Regarding the encounter between the two Shi'isms, a key figure was 'Allāma Rāshid Turābī (1392/1973). According to Hyder, Turābī was probably the best *zākir* of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>680</sup> He was born in Hyderabad (Dekkan), and graduated from the Shi'a College of Lucknow. He migrated to Pakistan in 1949 and was much acclaimed for the thousands of *zīkrs* he delivered in many countries, and was acknowledged by the main Shi'i clerics from Iran and Iraq. Although, he was fond of Mīr Ānīs (1290/1874) and Mīr Taqī Mīr (1224/1810), Turābī was not a specialist of *marṣiyas* but nevertheless, through his many *zīkrs*, he was acclaimed as a main specialist on the issue of martyrdom. His fame attracted the interest of the rulers of the Khairpur State, who invited him to deliver *zīkrs*. Finally, the last *mīr* of Khairpur, Mīr George 'Alī Murād Khān Ṭalpūr, married one of 'Allāma Rāshid Turābī's daughters.

A recent publication by a Sindhi scholar, Khādim Ḥusayn Sūmro, still gives the Sur Keḏāro as the source of Sindhi *marṣiyas*. More than half of the book is devoted to the Sindhi

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<sup>680</sup>See for example Hyder's detailed analysis of Turābī's *zīkr*: Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, pp. 40-42. He also claims that Turābī's fame was so powerful that he was represented as a member of the *ahl al-bayt*.

text of *Shāh jo risalo* with an Urdu translation.<sup>681</sup> The second part proposes almost 70 authors of Sindhi *marṣiyas*, with a very short biographical notice and the quotation of a few verses. Of course, Sūmro gives excerpts from Šabit, Sachal, Bedil or Beg. Although they are the most popular poets of Sindh, Sūmro treats them like the less known *marṣiya* authors.

His main wish obviously is to give access to Sindhi *marṣiyas* to the Urdu-speaking inhabitants of Sindh. In the second part, Sūmro introduces the *marṣiyas*' authors, and gives an Urdu translation of excerpts of their works. The book can be seen as an attempt to bridge Shi'ism expressed in Sindhi and Shi'ism expressed in Urdu from northern India and Dekkan. Nonetheless, the Mohājirs still sing Mīr Ānīs's *marṣiyas* in Urdu, in Karachi, Hyderabad, and in all other cities of Sindh where they settled after partition.

### Conclusion

The *marṣiya* appears simultaneously in the literature of Sindh both in Persian and in Sindhi. There is evidence of the role played by Kāshifī's *Rawḍat al-shuhadā'*. It was translated into Sindhi in the 18th century and one can find Sindhi versions in different collections. In Shāh 'Abd al-Laṭīf's *Shāh jo risālo*, the chapter *Sur Keḍāro* definitively incorporated the motif of Ḥusayn's martyrdom in Sufi poetry. This is obviously a watershed in Sindhi Sufi poetry and also in Sindhi literature. Furthermore, in giving a detailed description in Sindhi, Shāh 'Abd al-Laṭīf claims that martyrdom, or sacrifice in general, paved the way for union with God, known as *fanā' fī'llāh* in Sufi parlance. One can say that martyrdom thus became a trope. But beyond the issue of literature, two events can also explain the spread of the *marṣiya*.

First is the decline of the Mughal empire after Aurangzeb's death. The following invasions largely contributed to the spread of insecurity into Sindh. Second, in the late 18th

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<sup>681</sup> Khādim Ḥusayn Sūmro, *Sur Keḍāro awr Sindhī marṣiya kī mukhtaṣar ājmālī tārikh* (Sehwan Sharif, 2000), p. 15-110.

century, a Baluch clan, the Ṭalpūrs, who were Twelver Shi'is, seized power and ruled Sindh. As soon as they seized power, they started to patronise Shi'i poets and Shi'i ceremonies. A number of the Ṭalpūr dynasty members were themselves poets and the main specialist of *marṣiyas* in Sindhi flourished thanks to the liberality of the Ṭalpūr rulers of Hyderabad. Šābit 'Alī Shāh rouse to fame and still today, his *marṣiyas* form the bulk of the mourning songs performed for Moḥarram. After the British conquest of 1258/1843, the Princely State of Khairpur became the last territory of Sindh where the Shi'i poets were patronised.

In this context, the word *marṣiya* was used for any work of literature devoted to the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn and his family at Karbala. Sometimes, the vernacular Sindhi word *vāvilā* was also used. In the wake of Shāh 'Ināyat's martyrdom, one can probably observe a shift where the figure of martyrdom is a Sufi, but whose martyrdom is framed on the pattern of Imam Ḥusayn at Karbala. It started with Dalpat Sufi's *Jang Nāma* centred on Shāh 'Ināyat, and it was more fully articulated with Sachal Sarmast focusing on Manṣūr al-Hallāj's martyrdom.

In the early 20th century, there was an attempt to build a Shi'i *qawm* in Sindh through the publication of *marṣiyas* and *noḥās*, and the involvement of the leading Shi'a of Sindh in a wider process spreading all over colonial India. Later, despite the coming of North-Indian Shi'ia after 1947, who were Urdu speaking, the main characteristic of Sindhi *marṣiya* is still its embodiment of Sufi poetry, although one cannot deny the parallel development of a distinct tradition, enhanced by some powerful Shi'i families from interior Sindh. The latter is today only expressed in Sindhi since the use of Persian has totally vanished.