THE MARTYR-MYSTIC HALLĀJ IN SINDHI FOLK-POETRY
NOTES ON A MYSTICAL SYMBOL

BY
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Ask the condition of love from the lovers —
If you don't believe me, ask from those who are like Mansur! 1)

That was the refrain of a folksong which I heard in Garhiyāsīn (Upper Sind, Pakistan) in March 1961, and I was deeply impressed by the fact that everybody in the remotest corners of the Indus valley seemed to know the name of the great martyr mystic of Islam, Ḥūsain ibn Maṃṣūr al-Hallāj, the “wool-carder”, who had been put to death March 26, 922 in Bagdad, and whose extactic cry anāʾl-ḥaqq, “I am the creative Truth”, has become one of the most famous theopathic utterances (shāṭḥ) in the history of Islamic mysticism.

L. Massignon 2) who has devoted almost his whole life to the study

1) Sindhi is the language of the Lower Indus Bassin; the name “Sind” is used in the following pages as a geographical, not a political concept, the former Province of Sind being integrated in West-Pakistan in 1955. — The main sources are: Shāh ʿAbdul Latīf, risālā, ed. Kalyān Aduwānī, Bombay 1958; Sachal Sarmast: risālā (Sindhi), ed. by O. A. Anṣārī, Karachi 1958 (= S I), Sachal Sarmast jō sirāiki kalām, ed. Maulvi Ḥākim Md. Ṣādiq Ramāpūrī, Karachi 1959 (= S II. pp. 1-343 Sirāiki, 345-377 Urdu), Ditwān-i Ashikār, ed. Makhdūm Amīr Ahmad, Sachal Adābī Academy, Lahore 1957 (= S III, Persian, 228 p.); Ditwān-i Bēdīl ed. ʿAbd al-Husain Shāh Mūsawī, Karachi 1954 (= B. p. 100-188 Sindhi, 189-340 Sirāiki, 340-352 Urdu and Persian); H. I. Sādarangānī, Persian Poets of Sind, Karachi 1956 (= PPS).

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of this greatest exponent of early Sufism has shown that, according to the oldest extant sources, Ḥallāj (born in 858) has travelled from Gujerat through the Indus valley to northern regions in 905. Sind, which had been conquered in 711 by the Arabs, was already in that time a province famous for its scholars and religious people. A certain interest in mystical speculations is likely to have grown there rather early — a large part of the population were Hindu, and there was also a deeper layer of Buddhist elements; the ideas of Buddhism and — a quite unorthodox — Hinduism may have acted as a ferment in the development of religious thought in the country during the early Islamic period: one knows that the mystical teacher of Bāyezīd Bīstāmī (d. 874) was a certain Abū ʿAlī as-Sindi ³) — and, strange enough, Indian Muslim mysticism has maintained until today this relation with the famous saint of Bīstāmī: not only that his name, like that of Ḥallāj, has become in innumerable poems a mere cipher of the unitive experience (due to his word: Subḥānī, Glory be to me!) but a sanctuary has been erected in his name in Chittagong, the most eastern point which Islam has reached in the subcontinent during the Middle Ages (a sanctuary which excels by the large number of enormous turtles in the holy tank, and which is comparable, in this respect, to the sanctuary of Shāh Jalāl in Sylhet, East Pakistan, with its holy fishes, or to Mangho Pir near Karachi with the holy crocodiles).

At approximately the same time when Ḥallāj travelled through the Indus valley, the Carmathian propaganda, starting from Bahrain, reached Sind, and there are centres of activity of this extreme shiitic sect both in the old Islamic capital Manṣūra and in Multan — L. Massignon has shown that Ḥallāj was accused of being a missionary (dāʿī) of the Carmathians, and that this accusation was one of the main reasons for the first process against him in 912. When the process was taken up again after he had spent nine years in prison he was accused of "publicity of miracles, usurpartion of God’s power which threatened both the religious law and the state, and of the proclamation of the reality of love between man and God — this relation being declared impossible by the orthodoxy" ⁴).

⁴) Anawati-Gardet, La mystique musulmane, 1961, p. 38; about the problem