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What North American Churches Can Learn from the Church in Pakistan

Emily R. Brink
Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

Eric Sarwar
Tehillim School of Church Music and Worship

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Symposium 2015 *Emily Brink and Eric Sarwar*

C7: What North American Churches Can Learn from the Church in Pakistan

Join this conversation between Eric Sarwar, a Presbyterian pastor from Pakistan, and Emily Brink, Worship Institute staff member, about how Pakistani worship practices can bless and inform the Christian church in North America. Learn more about how Pakistani Christian worship in a largely oral culture in an Islamic context. Several years ago Emily was hosted by Eric in worship conference in Karachi. They are now collaborating on transcribing raga-based psalms and various writing projects while he is studying in North America.

Part 1: Two Contexts

1. An eye-and-ear-opening Worship Symposium in Pakistan in 2009 (Emily)

2. Some background and comparison, especially on the psalms (Eric)
   Psalm 51 (traditional)
   Psalm 24 (contemporary)

3. Cultural and counter-cultural comparisons

North America	South West Asia: Indo-Pak Communities
A dominant immigrant culture mainly from the UK and Western Europe.	Ancient cultures, dominated by Hindus (majority in India) and Muslims (in Pakistan).
Majority Christian	Majority Muslim (97% in Pakistan)
Literate culture	Oral culture
English (French in Quebec; increasingly Spanish in US)	Urdu (similar to Hindi); Punjabi in Punjab province.
Reformed/Presbyterian presence from the 17th c.	First indigenous church established in 1853 with Reformed/ Presbyterian presence in Punjab (crosses border of India and Pakistan); area that still has greatest Christian presence.
Music: Western system, notated (hymnals)	Music: Raga-based, oral tradition (memory)
Psalm singing: once strong, now weak in many Presby/Ref. churches; stronger in Catholic and mainline Protestant churches.	Punjabi Psalms completed in 1891, with the 1908 edition. First strong, then weakening, now once more very important.
	Denominational Christian established villages along with ecumenical city neighborhoods, for protection, encouragement and practicing faith. .
Christian schools, hospitals and seminaries	Christian schools, hospitals and seminaries

Part II: Worship Practices in Pakistan

P responses:

1. Worship in response to **persecution** (Psalms, prayers and protest)

   Fasting during Lent: see [http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/fasting-a-cross-cultural-perspective-on-the-season-of-lent/

2. Worship in **pageant** (Christmas carols, Palm Sunday branches decorum, Sunrise Easter service, street meetings and open air prayer festivals in cities.)

   Christmas practices in Pakistan [http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/celebrating-christmas-in-pakistan/]

3. Worship in **praise** (singing, clapping, dancing, shouting)

   Annual Psalms Festivals / Video clip of Sialkot Convention

4. Worship and Mission: Engaging with Muslim schools and artists

   Schools: 80% of music teachers in Muslim schools across Pakistan are Christian

   Artists (musicians, recording studios, videographers, editors, social media, print media)

   Example of engaging on the ground: Muslim singers and Sufis:
   Psalms and Sufis:
   http://www.artsandchristianfaith.org/index.php/journal/article/view/10/7

C responses: Counter Cultural Worship vs Culture Accommodating Worship

In Pakistan even now, 90% are illiterate, still use own language and sing from memory
Even those who go school cannot afford school fees beyond high school:

Part III: Q/A

A Few Resources

From *Reformed Worship:* "Punjabi Psalms: An Interview with Eric Sarwar, Part 1" in *Reformed Worship* 114 (December, 2014), pp.44-47. Part 2 coming March 2015.

From the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship: www.worship.calvin.edu: search "Eric Sarwar"

PUNJABI psalms

An Interview with Eric Sarwar, Part 1

EMILY BRINK AND
ERIC SARWAR

In 2009, Emily Brink and Paul Neeley participated in two worship conferences in Pakistan co-sponsored by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW) and the Tehillim School of Church Music and Worship (TSCM). Rev. Eric Sarwar, a pastor in the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan and founder of TSCM, arranged both conferences, one at the Presbyterian Seminary in Gujranwala, and the other hosted by Christ the King Roman Catholic Seminary in Karachi.

Impressed by Rev. Sarwar's leadership and how psalms were sung with such vibrancy—from memory—by young and old alike, Brink invited him to speak at the Calvin Symposium on Worship in 2010; he returned in 2012 and again for the 2014 Calvin Symposium, this time staying on to begin a Th.M. in Worship at Calvin Theological Seminary. In this interview, Rev. Sarwar introduces RW readers to a psalm-singing tradition in Pakistan that has been largely unknown in the West.

Words in **bold** *are pictured or described in sidebars. For additional information, visit* worship.calvin.edu *and type "Eric Sarwar" in the search box.*

Emily Brink: You often talk about singing the psalms in Pakistan. Have you and other Pakistani Christians always sung the psalms?

Eric Sarwar: Yes, especially in daily prayer services. Christians in Pakistan have long had daily morning and evening prayer services in addition to Sunday services. Just like the Muslims (who make up 97 percent of the population in Pakistan) are called to prayer from loudspeakers on minarets of the mosques, Christian areas also use speakers to call people to prayer. When I was a child, I used to wake up to the voice of a worship leader singing psalms, sometimes accompanied by **harmonium** and **tabla**. If people can go to church, they do; others pray at home. The most popular morning psalm is Psalm 121, composed in Bhairov, a morning **raga**.

Psalm 119:81-88 is a well-known morning psalm, though also used in the evening, sung to the raga Phari. You can hear it at *tinyurl.com/Psalm119raga*. The best-known evening psalm is Psalm 9:7-12, sung to a popular raga called Aimen Kalyan (like the Western major scale). For a link to see and hear Psalm 9 at a Tehillim Psalm Festival, go to *tinyurl.com/Psalm9raga*.

Raga

A raga uses a series of five or more musical notes upon which a melody is constructed. However, the way the notes are approached and rendered in musical phrases and the mood they convey are more important in defining a raga than the notes themselves. In the Indian musical tradition, ragas are associated with different times of the day or with seasons. Indian classical music is always set in a raga. Popular Indian film songs also sometimes use ragas. To learn more, visit *wikipedia.org/wiki/raga*. You can listen to a psalm raga at *tinyurl.com/RWraga*.

Brink: Do people still meet twice a day, every day for worship?

Sarwar: Yes, they do. As a small minority, Christians usually live close together in villages and city neighborhoods for encouragement, support, and safety.

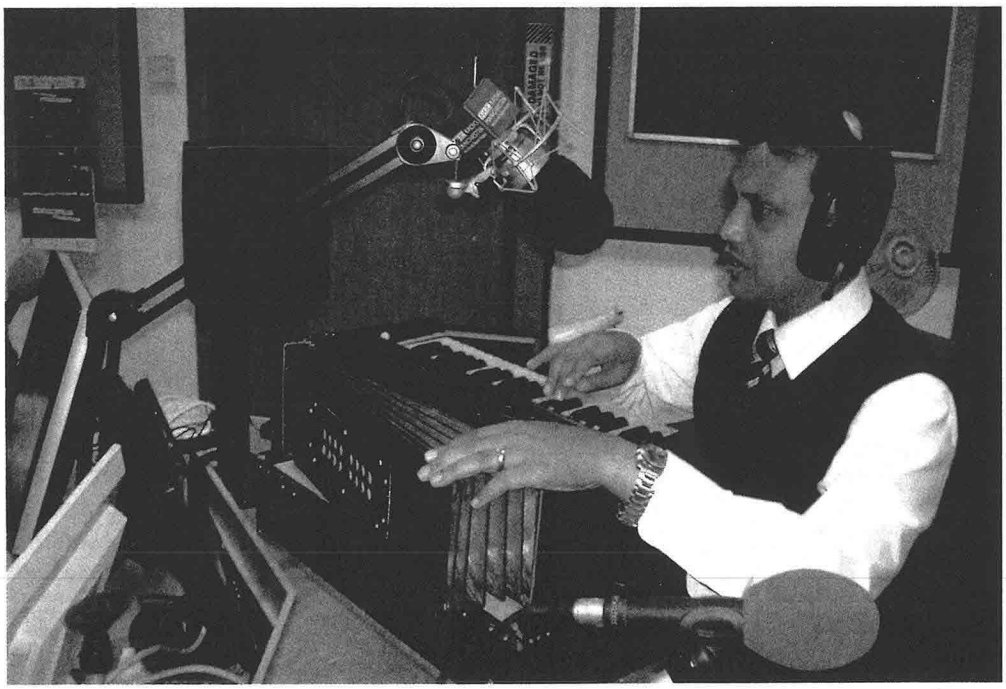
Brink: How old is this daily prayer practice of singing the psalms?

Sarwar: The history of Protestant Christianity in Pakistan goes back to the mid-19th century, when



Tabla and Harmonium

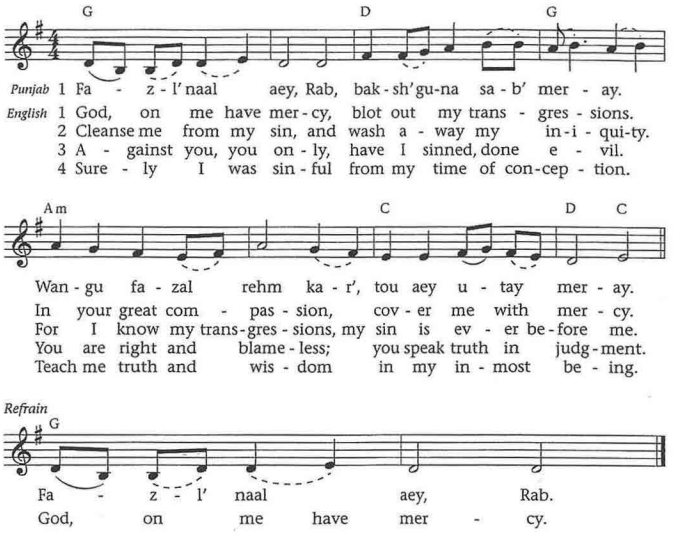
Picture of tabla (two hand drums played throughout Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh) and of Eric Sarwar playing a harmonium (like a boxed accordion) during a BBC interview in Manchester, England.



it was still part of India under British rule. The Church Mission Society from England invited North American Presbyterian missionaries to begin work in **Punjab** (meaning "a land of five rivers"), a fertile area encompassing part of both Pakistan and India, with a distinct language and culture. In 1853, North American Presbyterian missionary Robert D. Clark responded to that call and began his ministry in the city of Amritser, India. From there it spread to Sialkot, a city in Pakistan famous for exporting sports goods, also recognized during the 2014 Soccer World Cup in Brazil.

In 1855 another North American missionary, Andrew Gordon, joined Clark in the city of Sialkot. The firstfruits of their efforts were among the Hindu "untouchables," or Dalit outcasts. After the first conversion of a man named Ditt, mass conversions followed, including entire villages. Of course, there was a need for worship and songs in the people's own language and musical style. So in 1890, the United Presbyterian Church (US) formed a Psalm Committee in Pakistan.

PSALM 51



2 Kyun jo sab buryai apni mai man lainda,
mera jo gunah hai meray agay rehnda.
Refrain

3 Aey khuda main tera gunah keta bhari,
teray hi hazor wich badi keti sari.
Refrain

4 Taan tou apni gall vich sacha ho har halat,
rasti zahir hovay karain jad adalat.
Refrain

5 Main ve paida hoya vaikho vich buryai,
mainu vich gunah dey jamya meri maae.
Refrain

Words: Psalm 51:1-6, Imam Din Shahbaz (1845-1921), tr. and adapt. Eric Sarwar (b. 1975), Emily Brink (b. 1940) © 2014 Eric Sarwar, admin. Faith Alive Christian Resources

Music: traditional Punjabi melody

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Hear this online at www.reformedworship.org

I.D. Shahbaz



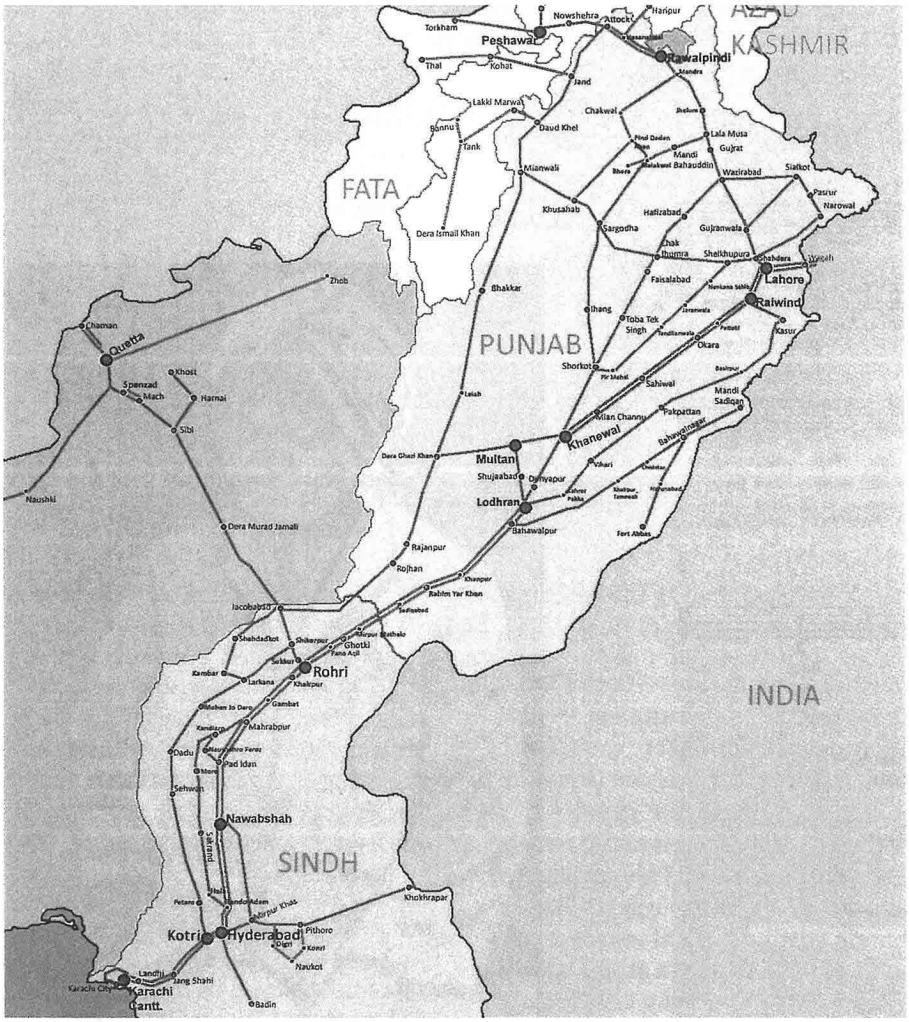
Their first step was to translate a few English psalms and hymns to be sung to Western tunes in the national Urdu language, but it was not successful, because the new community of converts were ethnic Punjabi and illiterate. So the Committee organized a competition for poets. Imam Din Shahbaz, a gifted poet and a convert from Islam who worked in an Anglican church, won the competition and was commissioned by the committee to write the psalms in poetic form. They asked him to translate some samples into Urdu, but these also failed to reach the people. So then the Psalm Committee made the decision to use the ethnic Punjabi language.

I.D. Shahbaz worked so hard, day and night, on this translation project, that he lost his sight in the middle of the project. But his passion was so great that he continued with the help of a young companion, Babu Sadiq, who read the psalms to him and wrote down the Punjabi poetry that I.D. Shahbaz gave him. His translation was based on Urdu, Persian, and English. When eventually compared with the Hebrew, his work was found to be so excellent that it seemed God had given the psalms in the Punjabi language. The biggest proof of that, even after a century, is that no one has found any poetical or theological problems in his translations.

The Punjabi translations were formed into 405 parts, all using the same meter (*Dadra*: with six beats, 123 456; and *Kehrwa*: with eight beats, 1234 1234.)

Brink: It sounds like they followed the pattern of the Presbyterians in the UK and U.S., who had also divided the 150 psalms into more than 400 separate songs. So now the Punjabi texts were complete. What about tunes for them?

Sarwar: The Committee knew tunes were needed in oriental or indigenous styles, and they decided the tunes should be composed in **ragas**, the traditional set of notes, like scales or modes, on which all



Map of Punjab

Cities listed in this article can be found on this map of the Punjabi area of India and Pakistan.

music in the IndoPak subcontinent is constructed. For this purpose, a professional Indian singer, Radha Kishan, was found. He claimed that he knew all sub-continental ragas, hundreds of them. He went to I.D. Shahbaz and offered to compose a few samples. When I.D. Shahbaz approved the match of new tunes based on particular ragas, the songs were then sung in front of the Psalm Committee, and one member notated the melody on paper in Western notation. When I.D. Shahbaz was satisfied with the results, the psalm was released for printing.

But then the Committee faced the question of which alphabet to use for printing the texts. They decided to use Roman Punjabi, so the Western missionaries could at least sing along. The first seven psalms were completed in 1882, with installments following, until by 1891 all 150 psalms were completed. So within 10 years, the entire book of psalms was translated into Punjabi lyrical poetry and tunes for them were composed in indigenous classical ragas.

Brink: I can't help but think of the Reformed process in the 16th century, when installments of the Genevan Psalter were released under John Calvin's direction; he too found an excellent French poet followed by excellent contemporary French composers to complete the first French metrical psalter.

Sarwar: That shows the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. And even now my work is to tell this story of how God prepared the psalms for the Punjabi people, to strengthen their faith. God is using me to share this story with Western churches. I learned this story when studying at the Gujranwala Theological Seminary (GTS). Paul Burgess, a missionary from Scotland and librarian at GTS, gave me a copy of the 1908 hymnal *Punjabi Zaboor* (Psalms), even though I didn't know how to read Western notation. He handed it over to me in hope that someday I would be worthy of this treasure and carry on the heritage of psalm singing in Pakistan.

It saddens me that the new Presbyterian hymnal *Glory to God* as well as *Lift Up Your Hearts* have not even one example of the Punjabi psalm-singing tradition, and I hope my telling this story may serve as a bridge between our two traditions.

NOTE: See *RW* 115 for the rest of the story. Learn what God is doing among Christians in Pakistan today, and look for more samples of Pakistani psalmody.



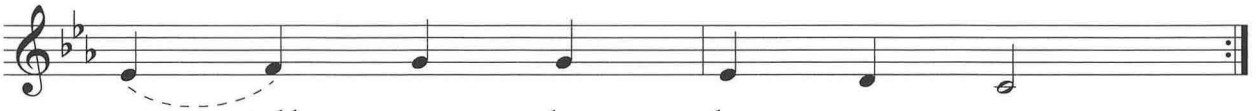


Emily R. Brink is senior research fellow for the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Eric Sarwar is a pastor in the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan and founder of the Tehillim School of Church Music and Worship.

Psalm 24


Processional Fanfare
1.
2.
Punjabi Bad - sha, Bad - sha, Bad - sha, Bad - sha. sha.
English He is King. He is King. He is King. He is King. King.
Refrain
Rab Khu - da - wand Bad - sha hai oh jal - al da Bad - sha hai.
God our Lord, is King of glo - ry. He is King of glo - ry.
Stanzas
1 U - chay ka - ro serr dar - wa - zay,
1 Lift up your heads; lift up your gates.
2 Who is the King of glo - ry?
3 Lift up your heads; lift up your gates.
4 Who is the King of glo - ry?
u - chay ho sab da - ro.
Lift up your doors, lift up your doors.
Who is King, King of all per - fec - tion?
Lift up your doors, lift up your doors.
Who is King, King of all per - fec - tion?
Jan jal - al da bad - sha a - way,
That the King of glo - ry come in
Might - y is the Lord in bat - tle,
That the King of glo - ry come in,
That the Lord is the King of hosts,





2 Eh jalal da badshah kon hai?
Kon badshah kamal da? (repeat)
Rab jo jang wich hai zor awar,
Oh badshah jalal da. (repeat)

3 Uchay karo serr darwazay,
uchay ho sab daro, (repeat)
jan jalal da badshah away,
serr tadd uchay karo. (repeat)

4 Eh jalal da badshah kon hai?
Kon badshah kamal da? (repeat)
Lashkaran da rab Yahowa,
Oh badshah jalal da. (repeat)
Refrain

Ostinato drum pattern:



Words: Imam Din Shahbaz (1845-1921); Eng. trans. Eric Sarwar (b. 1975) © Eric Sarwar 2014
Music: from the Thhat Asawri Indian raga family, in *Punjabi Zaboor* (1908); arr. Eric Sarwar, 2014