

Archdeacon Ihsan Ullah

1858 - 1929

Sheikh Ihsan Ali came from a family of Hafiz-e-Qur'an Shia Muslims who lived in Narowal in the Punjab of what is now Pakistan. His father Sheikh Bina was a well-respected leather merchant. After Rev. R. Bateman baptized him in Multan in April 1878 he took the name Sheikh Ihsan Ullah. Like St. Paul he had formerly been a persecutor of Christians. He married Louisa from a Rajput family in December 1888, before moving to Narowal.

Ihsan Ullah was ordained deacon in 1891 and then priest in Simla in 1895 by Bishop Matthew of Lahore in 1899. Rev. Ihsan Ullah became the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Pastor at Narowal 1891-1909, and at Jhang Bar 1901-11. He took part in the crowning of King George V as the King Emperor in the Delhi *Darbar* of 1911. With John ('Praying') Hyde he was one of the founders of the Sialkot Convention in 1905. In December 1911 he was inducted as first Indian Archdeacon of Delhi. He was Canon of the Cathedral Church of the Resurrection, Lahore from 1917 - 22. He died in Multan in September 1929 at the home of his eldest son Qurban.

In his work in Narowal District he displayed outstanding gifts as an evangelist, church planter and Bible teacher. No single denomination could contain him. Rev. Ihsan Ullah believed that his ordination vows were made to God and not to the Church of England and requested freedom to minister more widely than was considered usual. In Narowal he was responsible to Rev. R. Bateman. In a letter from Narowal on 23rd May 1886 to Mr. Ireland Jones, the CMS Secretary, Bateman wrote of Ihsan Ullah as his greatest difficulty and his greatest hope. He suggested that he might be the man

who under God would lead the church into much more fruitful outreach... ‘He has received in his soul and on his lips such an anointing of the Holy Spirit as has made him a much more effective soul winner than he was before. Our people here from the soberest (Miss Catchpool) to the youngest convert hang on his lips with delight. I have the greatest hope that he will prove to be dear Bishop French’s long prayed for Indian apostle.’ By 1896 Ihsan Ullah had decided to forgo CMS allowances and rely on God’s provision through the Christians of the Punjab for Rs.40 monthly. He continued to work under Rev. R. Bateman’s direction. Bateman gave him plenty of work in connection with the Native Christian Council and his evangelistic activities were not limited to congregations of the Church of England. Bateman thought that God might well use Ihsan to wake up the Church of England as well as the native church in the Punjab. God did indeed use him to show forth his glory wherever he went.

Barkat Ullah.

Ihsan Ullah: Master Builder of the Punjab Church.

Lahore, Punjab Religious Book Society, 1959. (Urdu booklet)

CMS Archives, Special Collections Section of Birmingham University Library, UK.

Vivienne Stacey