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The Challenges Faced by Seventh-day Adventists in Communicating the Gospel During the Last 50 Years of British India

Introduction

Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) missionaries brought Adventism to British India in the 1890s. The first five decades of the fledgling denomination coincided with the last five decades of the British rule in the country. During this period, a series of national and international events unfolded which impacted the operation of Seventh-day Adventists missionary work.

Adventists had to face the increasingly hostile and volatile Indian national freedom movement that in some places tended to boycott anything foreign including the Christian faith. The imminent political freedom also meant that missionaries had to make important decisions for the survival of the church in future India. They had to maneuver through the impact of the First World War, the Great Depression, and the Second World War. Then, there were other equally daunting challenges such as language barriers, culture, climate, disease, antagonism from other religions, and finance.

This article highlights the various challenges faced by Seventh-day Adventists as they sought to communicate the gospel and establish their roots in a Hindu-majority nation. It employs a historical-literary method of research based on available primary sources. Historiography of the denomination in India indicates an unfortunate dearth of research in this area which lends value to the study. The study seeks to create awareness and appreciation for the work of Adventist pioneers in India and to uncover the various methods of the missionaries in communicating the gospel under difficult circumstances, which may have current application.

In describing the challenges of doing missionary work in India, M. M. Taylor penned, “The work in India is hard, and always will be hard. We must battle for every inch of ground gained, but surely there will be some stars in the crowns of the workers who have so faithfully labored there” (1924:22-23). Adventist missionaries had to bravely face daunting tasks or fail.

Challenges from World Events

The last fifty years of British India witnessed three significant world events. The first event was the First World War that had a measure of impact on Adventist missionary work. The Great Depression soon followed. As the world was still reeling under the devastating impact of the Great Depression, the Second World War struck.

The First World War

The First World War (1914-1918) delayed shipments from the General Conference headquarters. As a result, fifteen percent of the colporteur sales order could not be delivered. The late arrival of important office supplies, press machinery, quarterlies, and other items caused many inconveniences for the developing work in the country (Raymond 1915:14). Similarly, the war restricted missionaries from traveling to India for their service. For instance, by 1917, a total of only twenty new missionaries arrived in India while an equal number returned home (Shaw 1919:24; Menkel 1918:1; Fletcher 1918:14-15). This meant that a small band of missionaries had to carry multiple responsibilities as the denomination continued its expansion.

The war made traveling more difficult and dangerous. The Indian Union Mission field lost its superintendent in 1915 when Professor Homer R. Salisbury drowned in the Atlantic Ocean when his ship was sunk by a German submarine. He was pronounced lost at sea as his body was never found (1916:4; Wellman 1916:3-8). Another impact of the war was that thousands of expatriates returned to their countries which resulted in subscription losses to the denominational periodical *The Oriental Watchman*, which had a large number of European subscribers (Nelson 1915:7).

On the positive side, the war aroused interests in Bible prophecy among many people. The denomination seized upon such interests by publishing timely articles on the signs of the last days (Raymond 1915:14). Furthermore, the reduction of foreign workers catapulted more Indians to positions of responsibilities. This contributed toward the building of a stronger indigenous mission workforce.

The Great Depression

Before World War I, Adventists in Europe supported mission work in many parts of Asia and Africa. However, during and after the war, such responsibility fell on North American Adventists. Europeans also had the additional responsibility of restoring the work in Europe. The financial situation became worse due to the post-war recession and even more precarious with the 1929 Wall Street Crash that led to the Great Depression in the 1930s. This greatly affected the financial income of American Adventists so that they could no longer provide the same support to the work of the Church. The General Conference found itself in financial crisis and had to reduce mission appropriations that affected the work in India. The wages of workers were cut by 27.5 percent (Torrey 1932:4; Nelson 1936:5). The departure of many missionaries due to the military conflict in the region further worsened the financial situation as it meant a significant loss of income (Wilson 1937:2).

In an effort to save mission funds, the division urged workers to travel in third or inter class, deterred the return of missionaries from furlough, assigned multiple responsibilities to many workers, convened the division council with a reduced delegation, used large sums of trust funds including Uplift funds for regular operation, and appealed to all members to be faithful in tithe and offering (Torrey 1932:4; Cormack 1933:1). Workers were also encouraged to commute on buses instead of in private or mission-owned vehicles, to take leave to nearby hill stations, and to find cheaper apartments. Several of the annual meetings were moved to later dates (Torrey 1931:2). Thus, denominational leaders made every possible effort to weather the financial crisis.

The Second World War

The Second World War (1939-1945) had a greater impact on Adventist missionary work than the First World War since part of it was fought on Indian soil. One of the immediate results was that the war delayed communication between the General Conference and Southern Asia Division (SUD) headquarters. This further delayed crucial decision-making and missionary activities.

War conditions had an adverse effect on the publishing work as it increased paper scarcity and cost. In addition, the government issued a Paper Control Order which drastically limited the number of pages in any publication. L. C. Shepard, the manager of the Oriental Watchman Publishing House (OWPH) pointed out that the government reserved 80 percent of all paper manufactured in the country. The publishing house

was granted 4 tons a year (Shepard 1965:156). The reduction of pages in the denominational publications meant the loss of opportunities to communicate important messages.

The Japanese Army infiltrated parts of northeast India and ravaged Burma which was then administered by the SUD. The military conflict forced most foreign workers including missionaries to flee the country. Many missionaries found refuge in India. Communication between the Burma Union and the SUD headquarters was virtually cut off for four years (from 1942 when the Japanese invaded the country until they were driven out by the Allies in 1945) (Lowry 1942:3; Christensen 1942:8). All mission schools in Burma closed down (Morrison 1946:96). Several mission properties were completely destroyed while others suffered heavy damage. Church members and missionaries lost everything they owned. Pastors Po Shwe and Saya Po Ngwe were killed in 1942. The Japanese took many Christian prisoners, especially church elders and pastors, whom they accused of being Allied spies (Ham 1945:6; Ham 1945:13-14; Manley 1946:13, 15; Manley 1946:14).

The devastating impact of the war on missionary work in Burma created fear among missionaries in India causing many to leave. In 1943, Eric Meleen reported that out of the 89 missionaries serving in the SUD, 33 missionaries departed (1943:2). This left many mission stations without a foreign missionary supervisor. F. H. Loasby lamented, "In the stations where our Indian workers had been left more or less as 'orphans,' there was, of course, considerable perplexity and some discouragement, and in other places, also, it became necessary to make certain adjustments" (1942:3). The adjustments included overloading responsibilities on the remaining missionaries. It also meant the closure of some departments and projects (Ham 1944:24; Loasby 1942:3-4). The departure of missionaries and Europeans also reduced student enrollment in Adventist mission schools, especially at Vincent Hill School. Some schools could not fully function for fear of bombings (Loasby 1943:2-3). Prices of food and other commodities also soared, which made it difficult for boarding schools to obtain sufficient food supplies for students. As a result, some schools closed down earlier than normal. Such conditions meant the loss of many opportunities to communicate the gospel.

A Myriad of Local Challenges

Adventist mission workers were confronted with a number of challenges within the country. These included the Indian Freedom Movement, climate, diseases, language barriers, lack of workers and financial resources, the caste system, and hostilities from various religious groups.

Indian Freedom Movement

A series of events transpired that further alienated the Indian people from the British colonizers. Foremost was the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of April 13, 1919, when the British Army fired upon a crowd of Indian protesters leaving hundreds dead and injuring hundreds more. The massacre played a pivotal role in India's freedom movement, which at times became religious and anti-Christian. The political atmosphere compelled several Adventist missionaries to temporarily leave their mission stations and settle in Madras or Bangalore where the situation was calm (Lowry 1921:6).

The volatile political condition hindered the work of colporteurs as they faced "special difficulties and obstructions" (Fletcher 1922:3). Such obstacles most likely included the refusal to buy or sell anything that was considered foreign and/or Christian. The denominational periodical *The Oriental Watchman* and *Herald of Health* was banned for a short period of time with the authorities labeling it as being political in nature. H. Maxwell Kent succeeded in persuading the authorities to withdraw the ban (1939:5-6). Some Hindu fundamentalists rejected anything foreign and Christian. The Indian Freedom Movement became a catalyst that increased Hindu national pride. As a result, they sought to prevent conversion of Indians to Christianity and even to reconvert former Hindus (Mookerjee 1947:22).

The Indian Freedom Movement entered its final phase in the 1940s. The ensuing partition of the country into India and Pakistan resulted in unprecedented bloodshed that left over a million people dead and 15 million displaced. Although no Adventists died in the massacres, they faced uneasy and at times threatening situations. A few colporteurs were caught by a mob when they were out selling literature. They were spared when they identified themselves as Christians (1947:8). In some places such as Delhi, the local annual meetings and other evangelistic meetings had to be cancelled. Furthermore, the curfews imposed by the government to avoid communal riots made it risky for Adventist workers to visit church members (Kimble 1947:3).

Christians and missionaries in general perceived that political freedom for India was a matter of time. This made them apprehensive about the future of missionary work in the country. Delegates at the annual meeting of the National Missionary Council in Coonoor in November 1917 appealed to all missionaries to pray for the political leaders and to render their support (1917:4, 6). Seventh-day Adventists on their part sent a three-member delegation of L. G. Mookerjee, A. F. Tarr, and R. L. Kimble to meet several top political figures of future India and Pakistan in an effort to convey the denominational position on "religious liberty, non-combatancy, Sabbath

observance, and other matters” including the relationship between religion and state¹ (Tarr 1947:1-3; Tarr 1947:1,16-17). They also assured them of the continuing support and cooperation of the SDA Church to the governments. A memorandum of the denomination was also dispatched to important political leaders. It is worth noting that Adventist missionaries like most missionaries in India in general supported the British government and deplored the Indian freedom struggle due to their concern that it would destabilize the country and hinder missionary work.²

Culture

“Indian culture” is clearly a misnomer. There is not a single Indian culture but numerous cultures with vast differences. In most cases, one’s culture is dictated by one’s religious and ethnic backgrounds. India has always been one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse nations on earth. Church historian Robert Frykenberg rightly calls India a ‘mixing pot’ rather than a ‘melting pot,’ where people groups with diverse cultures, traditions, and languages mingle together but continue to maintain their distinctive features (2008:27). There are four major language families in the country namely Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, and Sino-Tibetan. Each of these have several languages and dialects as well.

The first task of missionaries was to learn the language of the people in order to share the gospel more effectively. Missionaries normally spent the first 2-3 years of their service for language learning with periodic language examinations. Despite such rigorous efforts, many missionaries found it extremely difficult to master Indian languages. Furthermore, the diversity and complexity of Indian cultures demanded diverse and complex mission strategies to share the Christian message. Outreach strategy needed to be contextualized based on the target community.

Missionaries were also confronted with the ancient caste system that permeated large portion of the Indian society. According to N. Z. Town, it was “perhaps the greatest hindrance to the progress of Christianity since the first missionaries entered India” (1929:6). It affected many aspects of community life. Converts to Adventism were usually considered out-castes. They could no longer bury their dead in the community cemetery or draw water from the well. Such circumstances forced Christian denominations to obtain burial ground and wells for church members (Montgomery 1931:19; James 1935:14).

In the early years, missionaries at times considered it necessary to accommodate the caste system in their operation of educational institutions. The first Adventist mission school in Calcutta was organized for

the high-caste Bengali girls (Wilcox 1896:574). In some places, parents from high caste communities refused to send their children to schools where they would study with children of lower castes or another religious background. In 1910, Luther and Georgia Burgess established an industrial school in north India for Hindustani boys all from Brahman and Rajput high castes. In order to accommodate caste distinctions among the students, school authorities had to draw lines to make divisions so that students of different castes could cook and eat in their assigned places (Salisbury 1913:18).

In addition, missionaries faced other equally disturbing challenges such as child marriage, female infanticide, the dowry system, the plight of widows, and the *pardah* system which confined Indian women to their private homes. These made missionary work extremely challenging.

Lack of Workers

The lack of workers was another challenge that constantly plagued all mission societies in the country including Adventists (Miller 1906:18). As a result, the small group of missionaries had to perform multiple tasks to the detriment of their health. The appeal of George F. Enoch for more workers reflected the situation. He said,

If after a few years, when one is just getting hold of the work, the health breaks, or the life is laid down under the heavy burden, and no one has been associated with the lone worker, years of labor are lost, and no one can be found who can take up the burden where it is laid down. It, therefore, seems reasonable to us in the field, to plead for companies of strong young men and women, representing the evangelical, and medical branches of our work in each of these great languages of heathenism. (1908:13)

In 1926, India had about 335 million people with only 487 mission workers including Europeans and Indians³ (Cormack 1926:7). The Foreign Mission Board of Seventh-day Adventists could not meet all the requests from India for new missionaries. Furthermore, missionary Floyd Smith lamented that students in American Adventist schools preferred South America for missionary work (1924:6). Such conditions were exacerbated by frequent changing of workers and missionary furloughs that created vacancies which remained unfilled for long periods of time. Furthermore, the geographical distance from the sending countries posed serious difficulty as it took 30 to 50 days for American missionaries to reach India.

The stringent British visa laws and procedures also complicated matters. It generally took several months to process the papers of missionaries.

T. E. Bowen explained to J. E. Fulton just how difficult it was to obtain the necessary permits from British authorities for missionaries of countries other than England. He also believed that British authorities favored other mission boards and were making efforts to prevent the Adventist FMB from entering India (1920). Such bureaucratic challenges continued until 1921, when the Foreign Mission Conference of North America finally placed the FMB in their list of recognized missionary societies. The acceptance of this list by British authorities expedited the visa process to just 2 or 3 weeks (1921:8).

Lack of Financial Resources

One of the primary reasons for the dearth of workers in India was the scarcity of financial resources that remained a significant challenge for Adventist mission. At times, workers donated their personal salaries to enable the continuation of mission activities. Adventist mission in the country was one of the highest recipients of the General Conference financial appropriation through the years. Yet, the resources were never sufficient, partly due to the incredible needs of the vast Indian mission field (Daniells and Spicer 1904:18). W. W. Prescott who attended the India Union Mission workers conference in 1910 recognized the condition in the country. He wrote,

It was saddening to receive word from America that the funds were very low, and that it would be impossible to open up new work until the treasury was replenished. There is nothing more distressing to the worker in these far-off fields than to be compelled to turn a deaf ear for the rapid extension of the work, and he sees many opportunities for entering upon new ground. It is hard to be compelled to defer and defer and defer. (1911:14)

In the early years, the General Conference supported all the missionary work in the country. The denominational leaders in India did make earnest efforts to put the work on financial self-sufficiency with a measure of success. However, “total self-financial independence remained elusive” (Langhu 2017:356). For instance, the church in India carried out self-supporting efforts in 1918-1919 when they were able to support the vernacular evangelical, medical, and educational work. The General Conference (GC) continued to support much of the work including the salaries of foreign workers, construction of mission buildings, and purchase of expensive equipment (1917:28; Fletcher 1918:14). Unfortunately, such efforts did not have a lasting impact. By the 1930s, the GC was assisting every

branch of the work except the literature work. At the SUD Council in 1937, N. C. Wilson lamented, "Our Division is probably the farthest from self-support—the most dependent on the General Conference of any in the sisterhood of divisions" (1937:2).

There were many reasons for the lack of financial self-sufficiency. Most Indian converts were poor. As a result, their financial contribution through tithes and offerings was small. The way missionaries treated Indian converts may have contributed to the situation. They built schools, provided free education, supplied students with stationery items, and catered to their other needs. They bought lands, erected churches, and furnished them without expecting the converts to contribute. Such acts, though in themselves noble, did not help the cause of the work in the country as Indians developed a receiving rather than a giving mindset. Furthermore, they failed to develop a sense of ownership of mission properties. Many parents refused to pay part or whole of their children's school fees (Lowry 1928:2-4). Missionaries recognized the problem and made earnest efforts to change such perceptions (Lowry 1928:1); however, it would take a sustained effort through the years to bring changes.

Oppositions from Families of Converts

Families and relatives of converts posed difficult obstacles for Adventist mission work. At times, they filed lawsuits against Adventists to prevent their children from becoming Christians. Most of the time they would lose the court case as it was the personal decision of their own children. Many young people endured beatings, hardships, and heartaches for the sake of their faith. Some of them were forcefully removed from their homes without the opportunity to see their loved ones again.

In 1941, a Muslim father severely beat up his son because he wanted to become a Christian. He was then isolated and starved. As a result of the ill treatment, the unnamed youth died (Steeves 1941:14). He stands as the second Adventist martyr in India after John Last. In another incident, a wealthy Syrian Christian father disinherited his son because he decided to become an Adventist. Another time, a staunch Catholic mother in Pondicherry beat up her son, drove him away from home, and hired a magician to cast a spell on him (Osmunson 1942:11-12; Ham 1945:14-15; Pierson 1943:10). Chikea was a Bengali girl of the criminal tribes of Bengal. When she expressed her desire to become a Christian, her father threatened to kill her (Barlow 1914:1). Mundari was named after the family god. When his parents found out that he was secretly reading the Bible in an effort to become a Christian, they tied him to a tree and beat him with ropes (Mattison 1924:7).

A young Tamil became an Adventist and decided to marry an Adventist woman. His mother did not approve of his decision and pronounced a terrible curse upon him saying, "May you have no children [which is a terrible thing in India]. If you do have children, may they all be girls. And if you have any boys, may they be blind and deaf and dumb" (Carter 1930:18). In Coimbatore, a Hindu family disowned their Christian son and performed a ritual declaring him dead and his wife, a widow (Lowry 1916:12). Missionaries rescued many such abandoned youth by providing shelter, education, and employment. Such efforts often put enormous financial strain on the mission.

Oppositions from Non-Christian Communities

Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and other religious communities posed some of the most serious challenges to missionaries and their converts. Each time a Hindu or Muslim decided to become a Christian, he or she faced the risk of being branded an outcaste and driven from the community. Examples provided here are only illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Sometimes Sikhs in the Punjab assaulted the local mission workers and threatened to kill the villagers who showed interests in becoming Christian. The situation at times became so dangerous that they had to seek police protection (Loasby 1924:12). Although seldom violent, one such opposition in 1911 led to the physical torture and eventual death of John Last, a high-caste Hindu convert, the first known Adventist martyr in India.⁴

Among the Hindus, Brahmins played a lead role in their opposition against Christians. A certain Brahmin fabricated an extraordinary story that Adventists were making special oil out of the students of Roorkee Training School by hanging them over a hot fire and collecting the oil from their body in a large pan (Simpson 1935:12-13). Hindu fundamentalists made determined effort to convert former Hindus through inducement, bribery, and intimidation. In 1918, three Brahmin youths in Tinnevely became Adventists. The conversion infuriated the local Hindus so that they held open-air meetings and urged parents not to send their children to Christian schools. They also appointed a committee to raise funds in an effort to improve their schools and offer financial assistance to their youth. Further, they offered compulsory religious education in their schools and started a Young Men's Hindu Association like the Young Men's Christian Association. They made every possible effort to reconvert the Hindus who had become Christian (1918:8).

It was not uncommon for Hindus to use violence against Adventists. Hindu zamindars prohibited Adventist missionaries from holding

meetings in their villages. As a result, Adventist workers often held secret meetings at night. Sometimes, the zamindars sent spies to beat up the attendees and brought false accusations against Adventists. Sometime in November 1922, some Hindu rogues poured kerosene oil on the roof of the mission school building at Lakkavaram. Fortunately, mission workers smothered the flames just in time before it caused severe damage. In many Hindu villages, residents were prohibited from donating or selling their properties to Adventists for the construction of church buildings (1922:10).

Local Adventist mission workers and church members often faced greater persecution than foreign missionaries.⁵ At times, they were threatened and beaten. In 1938, a Hindu mob caught Arulprakasam, a Tamil lay preacher. They then tied him to a tree and stoned him before releasing him. Daniel Bunsode, a mission worker at Thakurpadi village, narrowly escaped being murdered. As a man got hold of Bunsode's hair to kill him, he began to shake uncontrollably and lost his strength. Similarly, Arumanayagam, a Tamil teacher-evangelist, escaped a murder plot (Wilson 1938:17; Lange 1937:11-12; Skau 1938:13-14). Such were the dangers Indian workers faced.

Oppositions from Christian Denominations

Seventh-day Adventists were latecomers to the Indian mission field. By the time they arrived in the 1890s, several Christian denominations had already established their roots in the country. Some of these denominations, especially the Roman Catholic Church, posed some serious challenges to Adventist mission. Such challenges came in various forms including violence.

Family members of converts often created difficult problems for both the mission workers and their converts. In northwest India, a certain influential Christian warned his wife against following her interest in Adventism. At that time, he was actively involved in pushing for Sunday observance in the country (Brown 1899:690). An Anglican youth while attending the Adventist school in Nazareth (Tamil Nadu) became interested in becoming an Adventist. His parents persecuted him even to the point of poisoning him through the help of magicians. A Bengali Christian family refused to send their son back to the Adventist school because of his expressed desire to become an Adventist. Another Bengali Roman Catholic father attempted to stab his 20-year-old son with a dagger because he refused to cut paddy on the Sabbath (Thomas 1913:26). In some places, Adventists suffered persecution at the hands of their former churches. In Gopalgunj, Adventists were no longer allowed to bury their dead in the community cemetery (Mookerjee 1906:4).

Adventists faced persistent opposition from other missionaries and societies in nearly every place. The primary reasons for their opposition seem to be theological differences and frustration or fear of losing their church members to the Adventists. They resorted to publishing articles and tracts in which they criticized Adventist doctrines, especially the Sabbath (James 1911:15). A Christian lay person in Simla published a pamphlet titled, "Seventh-day Adventism Exposed." In Lonavla, a Methodist Episcopal Church lay preacher wrote articles against Adventists. Missionaries also taught their native Christians and workers to speak against the Sabbath and wrote articles against the doctrine. They circulated Dudley M. Canright's criticisms against the SDA Church (Menkel 1917:7; Brown 1919:2; Miller 1906:1).

Missionaries and pastors often attacked Adventists through their sermons and lectures. In Simla, several ministers of different denominations publicly preached against canvasser H. A. Skinner urging the people not to purchase his literature. In Mussoorie, a missionary lectured on the topic "The Saturday Sabbath, a Jewish Heresy" (Poley 1912:17). In 1906, the Scotch Mission in Gopalgunj called for a 3-day Bengali Christian Conference of different missions. On the final day of the conference, several people spoke against Adventists and their beliefs. They even accused L. G. Mookerjee of using bribery to win converts. Besides, they distributed tracts against Adventists. W. W. Miller who attended the conference along with L. G. Mookerjee, J. C. Little, B. N. Mitter, and A. C. Mookerjee wrote, "We now have a better idea of what kind of people Bengali Christians are than we ever had before; we have more to fear from the heathen who profess Christianity and are tutored by the churches than we have from the heathen who still worship their idols" (Miller 1907:15). The situation was no different in Bombay as Carl A. Hansen reported that "the churches are fully united in one thing, namely, in keeping each other posted as to our moves, and in sparing no means to fight the truth" (Hansen 1906:4).

Adventists by necessity often mentioned the role of the Roman Catholic Church in their preaching, particularly in the historic change of the Sabbath and Sunday law enforcement in the last days. This often prompted some Roman Catholics to respond. Dores A. Robinson was conducting public meetings in a town hall in Darjeeling. The authorities asked him to stop preaching against the Catholics. When he refused, he was asked to move his meetings to a hotel room. The Catholic leaders also tried to persuade the editor of *Darjeeling Standard* to write against the Adventist missionaries. However, he refused and instead, asked Robinson to write a summary of his talk for his newspaper (Robinson 1899:495). Catholic bishops also tried to prevent their members from becoming Adventists through inducement with social and material benefits or threats of excommunication and

lawsuits (Skau 1937:4; Skau 1938:6-7; Israel 1939:6-7). The Catholic Church in Bombay published articles in their church paper and urged Catholics to pray for a young Catholic woman who they claim, “has been led astray by the Seventh-day Adventists” (Enoch 1922:4-5).

Syrian Christians generally took pride in their alleged ancient heritage and tended to view modern religions with prejudice and skepticism. They also placed much importance on cemeteries and church buildings. Seventh-day Adventist mission in the early years often lacked such facilities. As a result, most Syrian Christians did not find Adventism an attractive option. When some of their members converted to Adventism, they got upset and made it an issue of public discussion in newspapers, lectures, and market places (Meleen 1937:14; Nelson 1939:13).

At times, Christian opposition to Adventism took some form of violence. In 1922, the pastor of a local church in Neyyoor (south Travancore) warned his members from attending Adventist meetings. When they refused to heed his warnings, he organized a mob who disrupted the meetings by throwing stones on the roof and hurling all kinds of false accusations against the Adventists. As a result of the strong opposition, they were compelled to close the meetings (Thomas 1922:6). At other times, opposition was more subtle. In Ootacamund in south India, some people informed the police that C. Stafford was an American spy, a Christian Scientist, and was collecting subscriptions for the Christian Science hospitals (Knight 1916:9; Stafford 1916:3-4).

Medical Challenges

Climatic conditions, poor hygiene, lack of medical knowledge and facilities, and a number of other factors meant that mission workers often succumbed to diseases. Church leaders made earnest efforts to combat the health crises.

Climate

The hot Indian climate remained a challenge for most overseas missionaries who were accustomed to cooler climate in their home countries. The hot summer usually lasted eight months (March to October) while the winter lasted four months (November to February). At times, the thermometer hit 65 degree Celsius (150 degree Fahrenheit). William Lenker lamented that the Indian climate was his “greatest obstacle” (1896:123). Similarly, Does A. Robinson described it as a “steam bath” and that it deterred some people from serving as missionaries in India (1898:639). In

1897, a sanitarium was opened in Calcutta. However, due to the unfavorable climatic conditions in the city, it became a practice to move the sanitarium to the cooler hill station of Mussoorie during the summer months. Such an arrangement continued until 1908 and exerted a heavy toll on the finances of the sanitarium (Ingersoll 1904:34; Shaw 1904:14).

Diseases

Closely related to the adverse climatic conditions were the threats of numerous diseases such as malaria, cholera, leprosy, smallpox, and plague which claimed many lives. On December 29, 1899, missionaries Dores A. Robinson and Frederick W. Brown succumbed to malignant smallpox that broke out in the orphanage at Karmatar mission station. These two pioneers like all others in the mission would have survived had they agreed to be vaccinated. However, they considered it a denial of their faith in God's protection and refused the vaccination. John Shaw lamented, "It is useless to contend that the climate in India is as favorable to the foreigners as Europe or America. We have two graves in India which thus far witness to our efforts, and we must not be discouraged if there are others to mark our way among these unwarned millions. They are appeals, silent appeals, for more men and means to push and hasten on the work" (Shaw 1905:14-15).

During the years 1910-1930, at least fifteen missionaries (and their children) died from diseases such as cholera, dysentery, malaria, and smallpox.⁶ Many Indian Adventists also succumbed to these and other diseases (1912:8; Lowry 1912:11-12). Several missionaries returned home due to illness without completing their term of service, some even returning after only a few months or a year or two of service. R. D. Brisbin in 1918, reported that out of 180 missionaries who came to India, sixty-one missionaries (one-third) returned home due to health reasons (Brisbin 1918:6). C. L. Myers, GC Secretary, reported at the 1932 GC session that about 51 percent of missionaries sent to different parts of the world returned home permanently after the first term of service (Torrey 1932:3; Lowry 1932:6). Further, G. A. Nelson pointed out that during the 1932-1936 period, 79 missionary families from the SUD returned home out of which 28 missionaries or 35.4 percent were due to health reasons. Nervous breakdown accounted for the return of 11 missionaries⁷ (1937:14).

The lack of knowledge and personal health care seems to have contributed to the poor health of the missionaries. V. L. Mann urged his fellow missionaries to follow basic health principles (1915:2-3, 1918:3). J. E. Fulton mentioned the example of Bishop J. M. Thoburn who served 46 years as a missionary in India. Thoburn often pointed out that missionaries could

be healthy if they only followed basic health habits (1920:13-14). Brisbin concurred with Mann on this matter when he stated, "We are safe in saying that the climate of India is *not* to blame for all of this" (A Serious Wastage:6).

Measures to Combat the Health Crises

Adventist missionaries established sanitariums, hospitals, treatment rooms, dispensaries, and small medical centers in many places with varying degrees of success. They struggled with sanitarium efforts but had better success with hospitals and small health centers. Most health centers consisted of a single room with little equipment and operated by one or two workers. Medical workers believed that their primary duty was to share the gospel. They considered medical work as an entering wedge for the gospel ministry. This is not to conclude that conversion was always the end goal. They also perceived their work "as part of the Gospel or the Gospel in action" (Langhu 2017:281).

Medical missionaries and nurses not only treated their patients at the medical centers but often visited the villages for health check-up and treatment. At times, their medical tours lasted several days and weeks (Mann 1914:9). Although most people asked for medicines, the missionaries preferred hydrotherapy treatment. They treated all kinds of diseases such as cholera, smallpox, boils, blindness, malaria, sore eyes, and skin diseases which were common among the people. Both the elites and the poor of the society received treatment. Many people who could not afford to pay the medical costs were also given free treatments.

The denominational leaders passed several measures to solve the health crisis of missionaries. In 1934, the division committee extended the term of service to 8 years for married missionaries and 6 years for single missionaries (1934:2). In order to minimize illness among workers, they made routine medical check-ups mandatory, usually during workers meetings. They also urged all workers to get immunization for smallpox, typhoid, cholera, and plague (1931:43). Typhoid fever vaccination for mission workers was carried out during the biennial meetings in 1914, the first of such vaccination drives undertaken by the church. V. L. Mann warned that failure to be inoculated was "a serious offence." He arranged another vaccination program for typhoid and cholera during the 1916 biennial conference. The biennial council urged that all mission workers along with their respective family should undergo a yearly medical check-up at a mission hospital (Mann 1914:1-2; 1916:11). The denomination also established the Mountain Mission Home in Mussoorie, a hill station where missionaries could spend their vacation to renew their health instead of

returning to their home countries. Yet, these earnest efforts did not solve all the problems (1925:4).

Missionaries began training nurses as early as 1897 soon after they started the first medical center in Calcutta. Korada Bose and Nanibala Biswas, two early Indian converts, were among those who received such training (Langhu 2017:132). The nurses' training programs became better established beginning in the later part of the 1910s. Foreign medical workers were also expected to enroll for a course in tropical disease in order to be more effective in treating their patients (1929:12; Cormack to Beddoe 1927). In 1945, a pivotal decision was made to train Indian nationals as medical doctors to serve in mission hospitals. The Christian Medical College in Vellore agreed to accept three or four Adventists for medical doctors' training annually. The first batch of Indian Adventist medical doctors entered denominational medical work in post-independent India. A fully credited nurses' training school was also established at Giffard Mission Hospital (Flaiz 1945:9; 1946:8; Rao 1946:4-5; Binder 1947:6). Such progress helped Adventists to better tackle the health crises.

Most medical missionaries in India were women. With few qualified medical doctors, nurses were compelled to perform some of the medical work normally carried out by male doctors (Scholz 1910:17). The lack of trained medical doctors was one of the biggest challenges facing Adventist medical work. The few missionary doctors were overloaded with work demands. When they return to their homeland on account of sickness, transfers, or furloughs, the only solution was to close down the hospital or downgrade it to a dispensary under the charge of an Indian medical worker, usually a nurse. There was not a single national Adventist medical doctor serving in the mission hospital across the division during the pre-Independent period (Kelly 1943:3; 1944:8).

The outbreak of World War II exacerbated the problem further as many missionaries including medical workers returned home due to the military conflict. Dr. H. C. Menkel, Dr. Joseph Johannes, and two nurses, Emma Binder and B. Gore, were the only foreign medical missionaries who remained in the country. Surat Hospital and Simla Sanitarium managed to remain open. However, the mission hospitals at Narsapur, Chichoki Mallian, Bobbili, Karmatar, Rangoon, Gopalgunj, and Nuzvid were closed (Flaiz 1945:9; Ham 1946:54). After the war was over, several medical missionaries returned to India to resume their service. However, most of the hospitals remained closed.

Conclusion

As shown in this article, the last fifty years of British India were challenging times for the Seventh-day Adventist mission. Missionaries were confronted with a myriad of obstacles both internal and external. The health crisis in the country posed a serious threat to Seventh-day Adventist mission. Such obstacles often impeded the growth of the denomination; yet they made earnest efforts to share their message with the Indian people. It was not possible to find a one-fit-solution for all their problems. However, they strove to find some solutions one step at a time.

Endnotes

¹ The political leaders consisted of Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Acharya J. B. Kripalani, Dr. John Matthai, and M. A. Jinnah.

² A. W. Cormack, the SUD president, argued in 1930, that although people try to overthrow established government through non-violent means, violence is still unavoidable. He stated that “the spirit of anarchy and rebellion is abroad in the land, seeking to take advantage of the opportunities of the troubled situation” and urged missionaries to pray for the government authorities.

³ North America with a population of 125 million people had 7,512 Adventist mission workers.

⁴ Last was converted to Adventism in 1908 following which he engaged in singing and preaching in the streets of Patiala, the capital of an independent native state at his own expense. He usually sang a song of his own composition and then delivered a message. The police arrested him after his Muslim neighbor’s complaint about his preaching. He was released as no charges were brought against him. He was soon arrested a second time in May 1911 being falsely accused with the death of a sick Muslim woman in the same building where he lived. The police stripped him of his clothes and beat him. He was placed in a solitary cell without receiving any medical treatment for his wounds. His wife tried to secure his release but failed. On May 10, 1911, 5 days after his arrest and beating, John Last died inside the jail (Burgess 1911:11).

⁵ This is most likely due to the respect and admiration most Indians had for westerners on account of their education, wealth, and lifestyle.

⁶ Frieda Christine Barlow died of acute dysentery; John C. Little and Gardiner Kellogg Owen of cholera; Gerald Enoch of malaria; and Charles F. Lowry and William Charles Morris of smallpox.

⁷ L. G. Mookerjee drew up a list of missionaries who died in service in the Southern Asia Division from 1895 to 1944. This list is not necessarily complete but was drawn up from available records.

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