

Thapa, Deep Bahadur (1940–2007)

SHEKHAR CHAND

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Deep Bahadur Thapa served the Seventh-Day Adventist Church as the first Nepali ordained minister and pioneer evangelist, along with his wife, Miron Bala Pandit, a nurse, in Nepal and other parts of northern India, Southern Asia Division.

Early Years and Conversion

Deep Bahadur Thapa was born on September 16, 1940 in Thapagaon, a small village in the Gorkha district of Nepal. He was the only son of his parents, who were simple hardworking village folk. At the age of five, while he was playing in the river, he started to drown. When passers-by noticed someone bobbing up and down in the water, they shouted out and his father, Nara Bahadur who was working in the nearby paddy field, came running and saved him. When he was six years old, Deep played around the house, set fire to the family cowshed and was trapped by the fire and smoke. Once again, his father rescued him.¹

When Deep was seven, his parents relocated to India in the hope of a better life and educational opportunities. His father found work as a laborer in a tea garden in Jalpaiguri and Deep was enrolled at the local Bengali medium school. In the year 1957, his parents decided to send him to an English medium school, Raymond Memorial in Falakata, West Bengal to learn English.² In the same year, Dr. Stanley Sturges started the medical missionary work in Banepa, Nepal. Doctor Sturges established a clinic and later on, in 1960, Scheer Memorial Hospital was officially opened.³

While studying in the mission school at Falakata, there was a conflict in Deep Bahadur's mind as to which god or goddess was the true god. He began to compare the Hindu gods of his family to the living God he was learning about in school. While on summer vacation, he witnessed closely how a Christian pastor drove out evil spirits that were plaguing a house in the village by just reading the Bible and praying to God. When he read in the Bible in John 3:16 - that God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son, that whosoever believes in Him, will not perish, but have everlasting life, he asked himself, "Which Hindu god or goddess ever did anything for me?" He decided to accept Jesus as his Savior and asked his father's permission to become a Christian. His father was mad at him. But he was baptized the next year anyway, without informing his father.⁴

Father's Conversion – First Adventist Baptized in Nepal

Deep's mother was murdered when he was in high school, and his father Nara Bahadur Thapa lived alone. After his retirement, Nara Bahadur decided to come and stay with his only son. Nara Bahadur had a habit of smoking and drinking tea. Since he had worked in a tea garden, this was common. However, since he came to live with his son, he never asked for tea or to smoke. His life completely changed after he observed the way his son lived a Christian life, and he learned about Jesus during morning and evening worship. One day he asked his son, "Will you take me in your religion?"⁵ Of course, Deep agreed, and his father became the first Nepali baptized in Nepal by Pastor James Campbell on February 17, 1973. There were only three other Nepalese Seventh-Day Adventists at the time, and all had joined the church while outside the country. Following his father's baptism, three other Nepalese citizens expressed their desire to be baptized.⁶

First Nepali Graduate from Spicer

After completing high school, Deep went to Spicer Memorial College in Pune. He supported himself through high school and college by working on the farm as a milk delivery boy and by working as a student colporteur during the summer vacation.⁷ Through his hard work, he earned himself a super-scholarship in 1966 and 1967.⁸ After studying for five years, Deep was Spicer's first graduate from Nepal. During his educational career at Spicer he worked for Hindus, held cottage meetings, and conducted branch Sabbath schools. He completed his Bachelor's degree in Religious Philosophy, and was elected the Pastor of the graduating class in 1969.⁹

Marriage and Post-graduate studies.

In 1970, Deep Bahadur got married to Miron Bala Pandit, who was a nurse from India called to work in that hospital.¹⁰

Deep Bahadur was sent to the Philippines in 1976, with his wife and children to get his master's degree in public health.¹¹

First Nepalese Evangelist

After graduating from Spicer Memorial College (Spicer Adventist University), Deep returned to Nepal as the first Nepalese evangelist in 1969.¹² He was called to serve at Scheer Memorial Hospital, Banepa, Nepal. He first worked as a Nepali translator for the American missionaries and taught health and hygiene to patients and their relatives with Pastor Charles Shultz.¹³

In 1978 when the family returned to Nepal after studying in the Philippines, Deep continued to work as a public health worker and chaplain in the hospital. Conversion of religion and preaching was forbidden in Nepal at that time, but as a team, he and his wife went to villages in the areas surrounding the hospital, immunizing children, teaching health and hygiene in the schools and running two weekly clinics in another valley. On Sabbaths, he

conducted children's Branch Sabbath School and some of those children were sent to Adventist boarding schools - to what was earlier known as Assam Training School, Jowai and to Raymond Memorial High School, Falakata. ¹⁴

While he was still at Scheer in 1979, Adventist World Radio recorded a set of thirteen tapes in the Nepali language, for use over Radio Nepal in Kathmandu with Mr. Deep Thapa as the speaker on this new health program. These programs were to be broadcast once each week over three outlets in parallel!¹⁵

First Nepalese Ordained Minister

During the Golden Jubilee celebrations at the Calcutta Church, Deep B. Thapa was ordained as a Minister on January 5, 1980. He was the first Nepali to be ordained. ¹⁶ But he was not allowed to read the Bible or pray for the patients. Since he was converted while attending a boarding school, he thought of having a boarding residence built for Nepalese students in Falakata. In 1986 the Northern India Union President, Dr. John Wilmott agreed to it and work started. However, the work was hindered and within 3 months, construction was halted. Deep was then sent to Ranchi to serve in the East India Section as Secretary.¹⁷

In April 1989, Pastor Deep Thapa organized special Bible study classes for the youth in the Baragain SDA Church. Twelve youth attended the classes regularly. When at the end of the classes a call was given, eight youth took their stand for the Lord. These young people were baptized by Pastor Thapa on June 3, 1989. Pastor Thapa's daughter was among them.¹⁸

In 1990 the Southern Asia Division President Dr. M. E. Cherian decided to start work in Nepal. That year the Himalayan Region was officially established in Kathmandu and Deep Thapa was appointed as the Director.¹⁹ A Book Depository was also started for colporteur work. The first Sabbath, only 10 members from Kathmandu valley gathered in a house for worship. In the same rented residence, people were accommodated to stay and take bible studies. As the days passed by, church members also increased. In 1999, work in Bhutan also started and a church was established on the border of India and Bhutan.²⁰

From 1990 to 2000 Pastor Deep Thapa was the Director of the Himalayan Region comprising the territories of Nepal and Bhutan.²¹ He went from village to village, on hillsides where he had to walk from between one and three days to get there. He walked the whole day, and when it got dark, he would ask for shelter. The people of Nepal are very hospitable and kind to travelers, so they would give him simple food and a straw mat to sleep on. One day, while walking on the narrow steep hilled path, he slipped and fell down a slope. He would have had a 30-foot fall if his feet had not gotten entangled in the roots of a tree. His journey's meals prepared by his wife consisted of roasted flat rice with peanuts and raisins and plain water. In spite of this, he never got sick or had pains in any part of his body.²²

In the year 2000, the Southern Asia Division transferred Deep Bahadur to work for Bhutan Field. There also, he travelled on foot where no buses or jeeps could go. He walked from between 4 to 6 hours to get to villages. Once, a woman dreamed that a man with a black book would come to her village and teach them the truth. When he reached there, she recognized him as the person in her dream and gladly accepted the gospel of Jesus.²³

Bhutan is a closed country, so several churches were built in villages outside the borders of Bhutan. His wife assisted in his work by serving as a cashier and would host the global mission workers, the gospel outreach workers and others who came to the house.²⁴

Later Life

In the year 2003, Deep Thapa retired from church work, but the Southern Asia Division President D. R. Watts told him to continue the work as before. One school was established in Jaigaon on the border of Bhutan, with the help of donors from Finland.²⁵

On September 24, 2007, Thapa succumbed to a massive heart attack in Siliguri. During his funeral at Falakata, he was honored for his service by the believers from Nepal, who draped the Nepali flag over his casket. Just two days before he died, he had baptized five people.²⁶

Before Pastor Thapa's death he had mentioned that wherever he preached the gospel, a church would be built. A few years after his death, his wife Miron visited Mantram, near Hasimara, and she saw a church was built there and she had the privilege to witness there on that Sabbath.²⁷

Legacy

Deep Thapa achieved so many firsts from his country; he was the first Nepali graduate from Spicer, the first Nepali evangelist to Nepal, the first ordained Nepali minister, his father was the first Nepali to be baptized in Nepal. He also dedicated 34 years of his life as a pioneer evangelist and minister to spreading the gospel through health talks and puppet ministry, while his wife Miron worked alongside him as a nurse, in villages in Nepal, India and Bhutan.

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NOTES

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2. Ibid.
3. D.A. Roth, "Scheer Hospital is only SDA Center in Nepal," *ARH*, March 13, 1980, 24.
4. Miron Bala Thapa interview.
5. Ibid.
6. James M. Campbell, "First Adventist Baptism in Country is performed," *ARH*, May 24, 1973, 17.
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8. Nora Guild, "North East Student LE's (Literature Evangelists) Take Top Trophies in 1966," *Southern Asia Tidings*, April 1967, 11; Nora Guild, "Banqueters Celebrate Past, Challenge the Future," *Southern Asia Tidings*, April 1968, 9.

9. Nora Guild, editor, "Governor of Maharashtra Gives Commencement Address Flaiz and Wilson are Sabbath Speakers," *Southern Asia Tidings*, May 1969, 8-9; J. Ernest Edwards, "New Day of Advance in Southern Asia," *Australasian Record*, May 11, 1970, 14.
10. Miron Bala Thapa interview.
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12. J. Ernest Edwards; "Reports," Minutes, Two Hundred Thirty-Seventh Meeting General Conference Committee, December 11, 1969, 69-1813.
13. Joyce McClintock, "Public Health Instruction Opens Doors in Nepal," *ARH*, February 18, 1971, 21; G.J. Christo, "Northeast Union," *Southern Asia Tidings*, January 1971, 19.
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22. Miron Bala Thapa interview.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.

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