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Eastern Jharkhand Section

ALFRED KISKU, AND LABAN RAO MATTUKOYYA

Alfred Kisku was president of East Jharkhand Region from 2000 to 2008. He has been president of Eastern Jharkhand Section since 2009.

Laban Rao Mattukoyya

The Eastern Jharkhand Section is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Northern India Union of the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists. The territory was first organized in 2001 as Eastern Jharkhand Region, then re-organized in 2009 as Eastern Jharkhand Section.

Territory: Districts of Jharkhand State are Deoghar, Dhanbad, Dumka, Giridih, Godda, Jamtara, Pakur, and Sahibganj.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): Churches 17, Companies 6, Membership 5,626, Population; 13,285,895.

Address: SDA School Campus; Karmatar Post; Jamtara Dist, Jharkhand 815 352; India.

Early History

The Santhal field was visited first by Dores Alonzo Robinson not long after he arrived as the first Adventist ordained minister sent to India in 1895. Six months later at the invitation of a Baptist minister, Elder Robinson arrived at Jamtara Station five hours late in the wee hours of the morning to have a look at his mission. Three Santhals with a horse accompanied him 20 miles into the hills.¹

Two years later, the Adventists leased a bungalow with land for farming near Karmatar Railway Station and started the first rural SDA Mission Station in India. They also started an orphanage industrial school and a dispensary in 1898. At the end of 1899, an outbreak of smallpox claimed the lives of several orphans and also Elder Brown and Elder Robinson, who had come with his family from Calcutta for the winter. Both were buried together beneath a tree in a field they had often plowed.² The school was shut down for a while.

In 1902, the Adventists opened an English boarding school in Karmatar, with Thekla Black and Ana Orr in charge. The Watchman Press moved from Calcutta to Karmatar so that older students could provide labor while learning the printing trade.³ However, because of its remote location and a lack of necessary transportation links, the printing press was moved to Lucknow in 1909.⁴

To save on rent, in 1911, the Adventists purchased several hectares of land a couple of kilometers from the Karmatar railway station and built a school and erected several bungalows for missionaries and Indian families.⁵ After the Division was organized in 1919-1920, the Karmatar campus became the headquarters for the Santali Mission and the English and vernacular schools were repurposed and renamed Santali Boys School and Santali Girls School.⁶ The schools operated on the two portions of the campus divided by a road. The church, where all worshipped together had two wings, ostensibly to keep the boys and girls separated.

The noteworthy missionary who left the earliest footprints in Santhal field was Robert James Borrowdale. Three years after their marriage, the Borrowdales sailed with their baby girl from the United States and were posted in Karmatar. Eventually both husband and wife became fluent in Santhali. Then followed many years of village evangelism throughout Jharkhand/Bihar, conducted by Borrowdale and W. B. Votaw who followed him.⁷

Borrowdale's work among the Santhals led to government approval, and he was appointed a magistrate. Pastor and Mrs. Borrowdale were greatly loved by the Santal people, and a number of children throughout the Santal field had sons named "Robert." Each day, they drew water from the "Borrowdale Memorial Well."⁸

Among the early local workers was J. M. Besra, who was stationed at Chota Solbandha. In 1934, he reported about 20 members, most converted directly from animism.⁹ The church there was organized in 1938 when Borrowdale and Union President Loasby visited Santhal territory, readying the field for Borrowdale's departure for furlough. The retired Besra was appointed as elder and Rengha Tudu as deacon. On Sabbath, nine persons were baptized at Kolyan, and in the evening, the Kolyan church was organized with Barko Kisku as the elder. Barko's retired father Bikram from Basmata was present. Bikram Kisku had started working in 1921 as a bullock-cart driver for Borrowdale. After Bible studies, he was baptized and eventually became an evangelist himself.¹⁰

In April 1943, R. Tudu conducted evangelistic meetings in Aprul with the help of four teachers from Robinson Memorial School.¹¹ The Aprul Church was organized in 1948 when W. B. Votaw and O. A. Skau visited the churches in the Santal District.¹²

After the departure of Borrowdale in 1946, Bikram Kisku was put in charge. A few years later, in 1949, the Union found it necessary to disband the churches of Ronhe and Bugri, hoping to reorganize them as soon as possible. The church in Kolyan had too few members remaining, and they were transferred to other nearby churches.¹³ The Santal Mission Station was discontinued.¹⁴

Organizational History

When the Southern Asia Division was organized in 1919-1920, the Northeast India Union included both a Bihar Mission with headquarters in Ranchi and a Santal Mission with H. E. McWhinny as president and headquarters in Karmatar.¹⁵ However, in 1921, McWhinny was transferred to Hapur, and the Santal Mission was absorbed into the Bihar Mission with headquarters in Calcutta.

The Santal Mission Station appears in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* from 1945. The following year, Barko Kisku is listed as director of the Station with three churches. By 1949, this had grown to six churches. That year when three churches were disbanded, the Santal Mission Station closed.

In 1951, the Santhal territory was merged with the territory of North Bengal into a North Central Mission under the leadership of Barko Kisku and M. Amirtham and with headquarters in Chota Solbandha, Sahibganj. However, in 1952, it was absorbed into the East India Mission that encompassed all of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, and Assam.¹⁶ In 1954, the Division Committee took an action to discontinue the term "Mission," and the East India Mission was renamed East India Section.

In 1996, the East India Section was renamed the Bihar Section since in 1984, Orissa had moved completely to the East Central India Union and Assam had been incorporated into the newly formed Northeast India Union. East India had been left with just West Bengal (the southern portion) and Bihar. In 1996, all of Bengal from East India joined the North Frontier Region renamed the West Bengal Section, and since only Bihar remained of the erstwhile East India Section, it was renamed Bihar Section.¹⁷

On November 15, 2000, the government of India created a new state of Jharkhand from the territory that had previously been in Bihar. The following year, the Bihar Section was renamed as the Jharkhand Bihar Section.¹⁸

With the formation of the new Jharkhand State, leaders became aware of the need to strengthen the work among the Santhals who constituted the largest homogeneous tribal community of India, counting more than 10,000,000 people. The Southern Asia Division President D. R. Watts proposed that a separate region be formed with an administration closer to the unreached areas of the Santhals.

In 2000, the Bihar Section recommended to Northern India Union the formation of a separate Region and the Northern India Union Executive Committee took an action in 2000 to form the Eastern Jharkhand Region, comprising of eight districts of Jharkhand, where majority of the population are Santhals.

Ezras Lakra, president of Jharkhand Bihar Section, announced the formation of the Eastern Jharkhand region during an Annual Camp Meeting at Daldali on April 4, 2001. Santhals rejoiced as they now had their own organizational unit and their own leader—Alfred Kisku from the line of pioneer leaders.¹⁹

Later Developments

Stephen Hembrom and a few friends joined a team of road construction workers in Mizoram. There he learned of the true biblical Sabbath and shared it with his three friends—Maryanus Marandi, Samuel Hembrom, and Nathaniel Tudu. After accepting the Adventist message, they decided to return to their native Santhal Parganas and tell their community about the truth they had found. They were not aware of any Adventist church in Jharkhand, and upon arrival, they found out Adventist churches had already been established in Kadrudih, Gadapathar, Basmata, Kolyan, Arol, Brindabon, and Bortol.

The Region office recognized their interest and inducted them as volunteers. Soon, evangelistic series were conducted, and results started to show that the field was on fire and many congregations were established. The Region organized regular annual camp meetings and brought about great revival to church members who came in great numbers. These annual meetings were held in different locations and were fully sponsored by the lay members.

Seeing the progress of the Region and the financial stability in 2008, the Northern India Union set up a Study Commission to determine the possibility of upgrading this field into a Section. The commission was headed by Pastor S. B. Bairagee, chairman and Ministerial director of Northern India Union, and Shishpal Singh, treasurer of Jharkhand Bihar Section. And at the end of 2008, the Study Committee submitted a report to the Northern India Union, and based on the report, the Executive Committee took an Action to form Eastern Jharkhand Region into a Section²⁰ and elected Pastor Alfred Kisku as the president of the newly formed Section.²¹ Pastor Hidayat Masih, the president of Northern India Union, came to Bisunpur in 2009 to formally declare the formation of Eastern Jharkhand Section.

Executive Officers

East Jharkhand Region:

Director: Alfred Kisku (2000-2008).

Eastern Jharkhand Section:

President: Alfred Kisku (2009-).

Secretary-Treasurers: Vijay Bhatti (2009-2010); S. Babul Nowrangji (2010-2014); Elias Kujur (2014-).

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NOTES

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3. "Karmatar," *Eastern Tidings*, May 25, 1905, 13.?
4. "Brother Little writes....," *Eastern Tidings*, January 1909, 6.?
5. "The new mission bungalow at Karmatar....," *Eastern Tidings*, December 1912, 4.?
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7. Cheryl Christo Howson, "Borrowdale, Robert James (1894–1978) and Leonora Champion (1896–1987)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=6GTA&highlight=Borrowdale>.?
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11. R. K. Pandit, "Village Evangelistic Effort in Aproz, Bihar Mission Field," September 1, 1943, 6.?
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14. The "Santal Mission Station," appears in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks* from 1947-1949.?
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16. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1953), 195?
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