

Bihar Region

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Formerly part of Jharkhand-Bihar Section, Bihar Region is a part of the Northern India Union Section of the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists. It was organized in 2009. Its headquarters is in Patna, Bihar, India.

The Bihar Region is comprised of the state of Bihar. As of June 30, 2020, it included four churches with a membership of 3,905 amongst a population of 123,736,389 people.

Early Work

Adventist work in the current territory of the Bihar Region began when William A. Barlow, who started working for the Baptist Santhal Mission near Jamtara in 1889, joined the Adventists as a colporteur in the United Provinces in 1899. After his baptism in 1900, without any financial support, he and his wife settled in Simultala and started the independent Santhal Evangelistic and Industrial Mission.¹ Although then described as in Bengal, Simultala is in the present Jamui District of the state of Bihar.

Barlow began his school in 1900 with two boys. Gradually, he acquired land and built a school house and a dwelling.² In 1903, he and his training school were brought under the direction of the Adventist mission.³ The first students were baptized on June 11, 1904, by J. L. Shaw.⁴ Thereafter leaders frequently visited Barlow's school to conduct baptisms and communion services. Barlow moved to Babumahal, Katoria, in the Banka District of Bihar about nine miles from Simultala into the interior because he wanted to be closer to the rural people.⁵ There in 1904 he built a schoolhouse and a church.⁶ A number of early workers received their training at Babumahal. The Barlows ministered selflessly for the Santhals, treating the sick, feeding the poor, and clothing the young.⁷ Upon his retirement in 1914, he was dubbed "the Carey of the Santal Mission" by Homer Salisbury, president of the India Union.⁸ The Adventist Church had by then taken over Barlow's schools and work, but returned a portion of the land in Babumahal on which for him to live in retirement.

The Babumahal property was developed into an elementary boarding school in 1929 by C. J. Jenson. He lived in an old bungalow for a year before building a new one. Barlow lived nearby and continued raising funds for the school.⁹ When the Jensons went on furlough in 1932, the Borrowdales took their place.¹⁰ The school was turned into a girls' school. The local authorities had so much confidence in Borrowdale that he was appointed a magistrate.¹¹

In 1937, the Borrowdales left for furlough,¹² and the Babumahal Girls' School and part of the school from Ranchi were joined to the Bihar Mission High School at Karmatar.¹³ When the Borrowdales returned in 1939, they were placed in charge of the Bihar Mission High School.¹⁴ That year, C. J. Jenson started a school at Khunti, and the Babumahal Mission closed as far as foreign missionaries were concerned. The work there was carried on by Barko Kisku, son of Bikram.¹⁵ Bikram had been the bullock cart driver for Borrowdale and in retirement served as elder of the Basmata church nearby. Bikram was ordained to the ministry,¹⁶ but the Simultala and Babumahal properties were disposed of in 1940.

The influence of the schools at Simultala and Babumahal is significant. One of the families brought into the Adventist Church by C. J. Jenson at Babumahal was the Christo family in whose bungalow in Simultala Jenson took shelter one stormy night.¹⁷ Gerald J. Christo later served as pastor-evangelist in the Northwestern Union, president of the Northeast Union, and finally president of the Southern Asia Division.

Efforts in Patna

Khagaul in Patna District was selected as the location for two new missionary families, the Saunders and the Deans. Both couples began the study of Hindi. J. E. Saunders was expected to engage in medical-evangelistic work.¹⁸ The Saunders settled into a house called Rose Villa in Khagaul, Pand, while the Deans moved into Bungalow No. 5, Khagaul.¹⁹ Upon his return from furlough, W. B. Votaw held weekend meetings in the home of Mrs. Chakravarty, a sister of L. G. Mookerjee. The attendance was very encouraging.²⁰

Patna was the scene of a major evangelistic effort conducted in the early part of 1957 by Australian evangelist D. K. Down. C. J. Jenson, who had been stationed in Patna for two years and cultivated the interest of many people, assisted Down.²¹ After the first series of meetings, Down stayed and, assisted by Prem Bazroy, conducted another series in the vernacular dialect.²² The Patna church was built in 1959;²³ however, no pastor was appointed for many years, and only a few workers of the school gathered for Sabbath school during that time.

Later Developments

In 1991, under the administration of the Jharkhand-Bihar Section, the major cities of Bihar were entered by Global Mission volunteers. Influential volunteers include Nadga Swansi, who refused to cheat in the matriculation exam. This influenced another ten young men to join the work as volunteer pastors. Another

volunteer, P. S. Bage, was instrumental in the baptism of Keshwar Kumar, who later joined the church as a volunteer and was ordained to the ministry, eventually serving as a circle leader. During this period, churches were established in Sasaram, Pachaswa, and Mohammadpur, which are still active.²⁴

Adventist work started in the Sasaram District in 1991. Whereas earlier Christian missionaries had provided aid in the form of blankets, scholarships for children's education, and other assistance, Adventists offered no charity. K. P. Singh, a medical practitioner, provided Bage with valuable assistance. The two men conducted a series of Bible studies, which resulted in many young men joining the mission to be trained to serve the church.²⁵ Eventually, the ministry of Global Mission diminished due to a shortage of volunteers, the result of the lack of funds to pay the volunteers' stipends.²⁶

The creation of the state of Jharkhand—dividing the former state of Bihar into two political divisions—had adverse consequences for the Adventist Church. After the division, Bihar lost several workers and members who hailed from Jharkhand and chose to return to the state. The church in Patna, the capital of Bihar, which once had a membership of more than seventy people, dropped to six.²⁷ Due to the lack of workers, the Church suffered till 2008 when the Bihar Region was formed. Steps were taken to address the shortage, one of the first of which was to recruit and train more volunteers.

Outlook

Presently, Adventists are active in twelve out of Bihar's thirty-eight districts. Progress is being made and there are several projects in the pipeline to renovate churches and schools. A new church has recently been established in Gaya, the birthplace of Buddhism.

The leadership of the Bihar Region has expressed a need for a high school for the children of church members. Encouraging the participation of prominent church members, who work for the government, would more fully realize the region's potential.

Organizational History

When the Southern Asia Division was organized in 1920, the Bihar Mission was organized with headquarters in Ranchi, separate from the Santal Mission, which had headquarters in Karmatar.²⁸ In 1921, the Santal Mission was absorbed into the Bihar Mission with headquarters in Calcutta. By 1927, the Bihar Mission was divided into the Chota Nagpur Mission (unorganized), with headquarters in Ranchi, and the South East Behar Mission at Karmatar. Its stations included Babumahal, Basmata, Jagadishpur, Karmatar, Maharajpur, and Taljhari. The first two stations are in present-day Bihar.

In 1932, to cope with economic depression, the North East Union was downgraded to mission status and the Southeast Behar Mission was divided into mission stations, only one of which was in Bihar—the Babumahal

Station. In 1937, the Northeast Mission was restored to union status and the Bihar Mission was re-organized with headquarters in Karmatar. The stations listed were only Karmatar, Babumahal, Khunti, and Ranchi.

In 1952, the East India Mission was organized. It encompassed all of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, and Assam.²⁹ In 1954, the division committee took an action to discontinue the term "mission" and the East India Mission was renamed the East India Section.

In 1996, the East India Section was renamed the Bihar Section, as in 1984 Orissa had been transferred to the East Central India Union and Assam had been incorporated into the newly formed Northeast India Union. The East India Section had been left with just West Bengal (the southern portion) and Bihar. In 1996, all of Bengal, was joined the North Frontier Region, which was renamed the West Bengal Section. Since only Bihar remained of the original East India Section, it was renamed the Bihar Section.³⁰

On November 15, 2000, the government of India created the new state of Jharkhand from territory that had previously been in Bihar. As a result, the Bihar Section was renamed the Jharkhand-Bihar Section.³¹

The Northern Union recommended the formation of the Bihar Region to the Southeast Asia Division on April 8, 2008,³² and following approval, Alex Dang was appointed the first director.³³

Executive Officers

Directors: Alex Dang (2009-2015), Anil Mona Lakra (2016-present)

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2. H. H. Votaw, "From Our Missionaries," *The Welcome Visitor*," February 15, 1905, 1.

3. Advisory Committee of Seventh-day Adventists, March 29, 1903, 15, Southern Asia Division archives.
4. "Brother Shaw spent a pleasant Sabbath...", *Eastern Tidings*, June 1904, 24.
5. W. A. Barlow, "Simultala," *Eastern Tidings*, November 1905, 7.
6. W. A. Barlow, "Simultala," *Eastern Tidings*, September 1904, 35.
7. Frieda M. Haegert, "Christina Ulreika Haegert Barlow obituary," *Eastern Tidings*, August 15, 1926, 4.
8. L. G. Mookerjee, "Until the Day Dawn," *Eastern Tidings*, November 15, 1942, 5.
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10. G. G. Lowry, "News Notes," *Eastern Tidings*, August 15, 1932, 11
11. H. G. Woodward, "Report of the Northeast Mission," *Eastern Tidings*, January 15, 1937, 6.
12. F. H. Loasby, "In the Santal Country," *Eastern Tidings*, September 15, 1937, 7
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22. D. K. Down, "Patna Mission," *Australasian Record*, September 2, 1957, 11.
23. C. N. Abraham, "Recent Public Relations Contacts," *Southern Asia Tidings*, October 1, 1959, 3.

24. Alex Dang, telephone interview by Santosh Kumar, October 23, 2017.
25. P. S. Bage, telephone interview by Santosh Kumar, October 24, 2017.
26. Anil Lakra, telephone interview by Santosh Kumar, November 22, 2020.
27. Santosh Kumar was the pastor of the church at the time. Membership later increased to twenty.
28. See "Santal Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1921), 128; "Santal Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1922), 133.
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33. "Dang, Alex – Appointment," Northern India Union Executive Committee # 2008-48, July 29-30, 41, Southern Asia Division archives.

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