



Bungalow construction with Robert Osmunson, 1929.

Photo courtesy of Gordon Christo, SUD Heritage Center.

## Orissa Section

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### UDAYO CHANDRA, AND GORDON E. CHRISTO

Udayo Chandra served as president of Orissa Section from 2015 to 2019.

Gordon E. Christo, Ph.D. in Old Testament and Adventist Studies (Andrews University). Christo is retired and working on contract as assistant editor of the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* and assistant editor of the *Seventh-day Adventist International Biblical-Theological Dictionary*. He is currently setting up a heritage center for Southern Asia Division. Some of his research on Adventist history can be seen at <https://sudheritage.blogspot.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/SUDHeritage/>.

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Organized in 1974 and reorganized in 2001, Orissa Section is part of the Central India Union Mission of the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): Churches, 181; membership, 26,820; population, 32,653,485 (online statistics)

Address: Gopabandhu Nagar; Hill-Patna Post, Berhampur; Ganjam District 760 005, Orissa, India.

## Early Contact

The first Adventist from Orissa,<sup>1</sup> Subodh Choudury, had been a Christian for seven years in Cuttack when he commenced a systematic study of the Bible. Reading through Genesis and Exodus convinced him that the seventh day of the week was the true Sabbath. Unsatisfied with the explanation of his pastors who also admitted that they knew of a few seventh-day observers in Calcutta, Choudury travelled to the city to search for them. He finally encountered an Adventist colporteur by the side of the road which led to Bible studies from evangelist P. C. Gayen. After his baptism in 1920, Choudury translated *The Coming King*, and *Vegetarianism* from Bengali into Oriya.<sup>2</sup> News about it greatly excited the General Conference publishing department, because until then Adventists had been printing in languages starting with every letter of the alphabet except "O."<sup>3</sup> Choudury returned to Cuttack as a literature evangelist himself in 1922.<sup>4</sup>

## Establishing the Initial Mission Station

In pre-independence India, Nayagarh, Ranpur and other native states of Orissa had prohibited any Christian activity. Because it stood at the doorstep to these states, Adventist leaders selected Khurda as the site of a mission station.<sup>5</sup>

Earl R. Osmunson arrived in India in 1927.<sup>6</sup> Assigned to Khurda, he initially recruited Subodh Choudury to be an evangelist and his general assistant.<sup>7</sup> In 1929 Osmunson purchased about eight acres of land in Khurda<sup>8</sup> and built a bungalow while he lived in a tent.<sup>9</sup> Osmunson also opened a school in Nathipura<sup>10</sup> from where two of the first three non-Christians he had baptized came.<sup>11</sup> Soon he had more than 15 church members.<sup>12</sup>

In 1935 the Osmunsons went on furlough.<sup>13</sup> When they returned to India the following year, church leaders diverted them to another location considered more urgent.<sup>14</sup> During Osmunson's absence, H. H. Mattison, who had had been assigned briefly to Orissa earlier,<sup>15</sup> was appointed superintendent of the Orissa Mission Field.<sup>16</sup> Mattison does not appear to have moved to Khurda,<sup>17</sup> and the union soon released him from the assignment and requested Christian Jenson to care for the program in Orissa, but that too apparently did not materialize.<sup>18</sup> The following year the union mission officers administered the mission field. During those two years the bungalow lay vacant and the church's reading room in Khurda was in the charge of P. C. Dey.<sup>19</sup>

A Miss Harms arrived in 1938 with Vera Smart and Joynath Haldar and a large supply of medicines from Karmatar to operate a dispensary. She was said to have come to the Khurda Station "after a gap of 2 years."<sup>20</sup> After she left, a lack of activity there caused the church membership to drift away.<sup>21</sup>

## Re-opening the Work

In February 1946 O. A. Skau, newly appointed president of the Northeast India Union Mission, reported that the church had done nothing in Orissa for 10-15 years. A colporteur named A. S. Bazroy,<sup>22</sup> however, had recently aroused serious interest in Binjipalli, far to the northeast, and Skau and four other leaders walked through the jungle to baptize 10 individuals and to organize a church.<sup>23</sup> In December Skau returned and baptized another five, including Barnabas Horo.<sup>24</sup>

That year H. T. Burr arrived in India.<sup>25</sup> In 1948, after two years of language study, the Burrs moved to Khurda. Burr lamented the fact Orissa had no SDA school to teach people in the local language, and that they had to send a batch of boys to Khunti with John Bazroy, the evangelist.<sup>26</sup>

The first annual administrative meeting for Orissa convened in Binjipalli March 24-26, 1950. Union president F. E. Spiess, accompanied by Pastor Borrowdale and Pastor Lange, delivered several talks and dedicated the newly-constructed church. Pastor Burr presented the history of the congregation.<sup>27</sup>

## Mission Abandoned

In 1952 administrators merged Orissa Mission along with the Bengal Mission and the Bihar Mission into the enlarged East India Mission (Section) with headquarters in Ranchi. Burr remained in Orissa. However, the following year he moved away from Khurda to Ranchi to serve as acting president of the East India Mission. In 1954 he transferred to Shillong when elected president of the Assam Section. No replacement came to Khurda, and the mission station once more became deserted. By now church activity in Orissa was mostly in the northeast, and the union attempted to sell the Khurda property.<sup>28</sup> Eventually a paper mill company leased it for five years and then renewed the lease for another five years.<sup>29</sup> The lease seems not to have been renewed after that, and the church nearly gave up hope of recovering the property.

## Local Pioneers

Bikram Kisku, a Santali who graduated from the Training School in Ranchi in 1929<sup>30</sup> and who served the church for 36 years, came from Orissa.<sup>31</sup> He was active in the Baripoda and Raikodjhoron areas. A. S. Bazroy, a colporteur, started the interests in the Binjipalli area,<sup>32</sup> and his son John Bazroy helped pioneer Adventism in the Sambalpur and Kotpad areas.<sup>33</sup> U. C. Das is associated with the churches in the Kotpad area and also served as the first VOP director/translator. He was greatly instrumental in reclaiming the bungalow at Khurda for the Adventist Church.<sup>34</sup>

## Later Developments

In 1974 the church appointed M. D. Moses as director of the union region that included a portion of Orissa. The reclaimed property at Khurda served as headquarters. In 1975 Moses established a boarding school in Khurda

with nine boarders, eight day students, and two staff members.<sup>35</sup>

Pastor Prem Nath Bazroy participated in starting the churches in and around Devadala

Pastor Anando Ganto worked in Devadala, Bolangir and other areas. Pastor Ch. Devasahayam evangelized in Kurigam and Kashinagar.

## Organizational History

Though some Adventist Yearbooks from 1949 onward describe an “Orissa Mission Field” as organized in 1927, the unit at Khurda was listed from 1933 on as “Khurda Station,” and only from 1938 onwards as the “Orissa Mission Field” which included the Khurda Station and a village school at Nathipara. The “Orissa Mission Field” was delisted in 1939. In 1949 the yearbook once again mentions the Orissa Mission Field and continued to do so until the large East India Section of the Northeast India Union, organized in 1952, absorbed the territory.

In 1970 when church leadership merged the four unions of India into three, they assigned the state of Orissa to the newly reorganized Central India Union which attached Orissa temporarily to the Andhra Section for administrative purposes.<sup>36</sup>

In 1973, at the request of the Northern Union, the three districts of northeastern Orissa (Mayurbhanj, Sambalpur, and Sundargarh) reverted to the East India Section of the Northern Union.<sup>37</sup> Leadership removed the districts remaining with Central India from the Andhra Section and combined them with the five districts of Maharashtra into a “Union Region” and appointed M. D. Moses as director.<sup>38</sup>

This union region voted in 1974 never appeared in the Adventist Yearbooks It gradually morphed into the Orissa Region as leadership removed the Maharashtra districts and merged the whole of Orissa. Adventist Yearbooks from 1988 on identify the Orissa Region as being organized initially in 1974.

In 2001 the Central India Union recommended the reorganization of the Orissa Region into Orissa Section, a request approved by the Southern Asia Division.<sup>39</sup>

## Executive Officers

Khurda Station / Orissa Mission Field

Earl R. Osmondson (1927-1935); Howard H. Mattison (1936); Harold T. Burr (1948-1953)

Union Region/Orissa Region

M. D. Moses (1974-1975); P. Devaprasad (1975-1979); Ch Paul (1979-1981); J. V. Prasada Rao (1981-1984); P. N. Bazroy (1984-1986); S. Mohan Rao (1986-1989); J. S. C. Barla (1989-1992); N. D. Samson (1992-1996); K. R. Jones (1996-2001).

## Orissa Section

President: K. R. Jones (2001-2005); Paka Jesuratnam (2005-2009); Sudhir Kumar Jena (2009-2015); Udayo Chandra Chintada (2015- 2019); Mangalgiri Ganapati Rao (2019- ).

Secretary/Secretary-treasurer: Ponuel Ponda (2001-2002); Sudhir Kumar Jena (2003-2005); Priya Nath Gantayat (2006- ).

Treasurers: N. Venkateshwara (2001-2005); Ramesh Mishal (2006- ); I. D. Vicas (2015- ).

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## NOTES

1. W. H. Stevens, "Commencing Work in Orissa," *Eastern Tidings*, November 15, 1920, 4, 5.
2. G. G. Lowry, "Orissa-A New Mission Field," *ARH*, January 24, 1929, 12.
3. W. H. Stevens, "The Publisher and Colporteur Work," *Eastern Tidings*, January 15, 1922, 8. The list of languages Adventists published in appeared in the 1922 Adventist Yearbook (pages 204-206). It shows that the letter "O" was still an exception.
4. W. H. Stevens, "The Publisher and Colporteur Work," *Eastern Tidings*, January 15, 1922, 8.
5. H. G. Woodward, "Report of the Northeast Mission," *Eastern Tidings*, January 15, 1937, 7.
6. Expatriate Workers List, Southern Asia Division Archives.
7. "S. Choudry: Helper for Mr Osmunson," Minutes of the Northeast India Union Committee #864, April 1, 1929.
8. "Khurda Station—Land For," Minutes of the Northeast India Union Committee #916, August 11, 1929.
9. "Notes," *Eastern Tidings*, March 1, 1930, 6. See also H. T. Burr, "Orissa Mission, India," *ARH*, April 10, 1947, 16.
10. P. C. Dey "Among the Oriyas," *Eastern Tidings*, December 1, 1932, 6, informs us that Uchaba Naik was one of them.
11. W. H. Stevens, "The Publisher and Colporteur Work," *Eastern Tidings*, November 15, 1922; E. R. Osmunson, "Our Newest Mission Station," *Eastern Tidings*, June 1, 1933, 4.
12. R. S. Fernando, "Northeast News-O-Graphs," *Eastern Tidings*, December 1, 1941, 7.
13. "Khurda Station," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1936), 214.
14. H. G. Woodward, "Report of the Northeast Mission," *Eastern Tidings*, January 15, 1937, 7.

15. See Khurda Station, *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1933).
16. See "Orissa Mission Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1938), 210.
17. H. T. Burr, "Orissa Mission, India," *ARH*, April 10, 1947, 16.
18. "Khurda Station," Minutes of the Northeast India Union Committee #1852, January 27-30, 1936.
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20. F. H. Loasby, "Northeast Union Report 1938," *Eastern Tidings*, February 1, 1939.
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22. H. T. Burr, "Orissa's First Annual Meeting," *Eastern Tidings*, May 1, 1950, 4, 5.
23. O. A. Skau, "Experiences from the Jungles of Bihar and Orissa," *Eastern Tidings*, January 1, 1947, 4.
24. O. A. Skau, "Experiences from the Jungles of Bihar and Orissa--2," *Eastern Tidings*, February 15, 1947, 4.
25. "Gleanings," *Eastern Tidings*, December 15, 1946, 8.
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27. H. T. Burr, "Orissa's First Annual Meeting," *Eastern Tidings*, May 1, 1950, 4, 5.
28. "Sale of IFA Property, Khurda Rd," Minutes of the Northeast India Union Committee #6958, September 11, 1954.
29. "Khurda Rd Property," Minutes of the Northeast India Union Committee #59-321, September 18, 1959.
30. W. A. Barlow, "Among the Santali People," *ARH*, July 15, 1915, 18.
31. C. B. Guild, "Northeast Holds First Biennial in Five Years," *Southern Asia Tidings*, February 1, 1966, 1, 8.
32. H. T. Burr, "Orissa's First Annual Meeting," *Eastern Tidings*, May 1, 1950, 4, 5.
33. Ibid.
34. "Power of Attorney to U C Das," Minutes of the Central India Union Committee, December 4, 1973, #73-196, 43.

35. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, second rev. ed. (1996), s.v. "SDA High School (Khurda)," refers to Moses as the director of the Orissa Region.
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38. "Union Region," Minutes of the Central India Union Committee, December 9-11, 1974, #74-232, 49; "M D Moses, Director Union Region," # 74-233, 49. The Adventist Yearbooks merely referred to territories administered directly by the union.
39. "Orissa Section Formation," Minutes of the Central India Union Committee, July 16, 17, 2001. Minutes of the Southern Asia Division Executive Committee 2001-183, August 10, 2001.

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