

Jensen, Christian Johannes (1896–1985)

CHERYL CHRISTO HOWSON

Cheryl Christo Howson earned a graduate diploma in computer aided interior designing at the Dr. Bhanuben Nanavati College of Architecture for Women in Pune, India. She co-founded an interior design company in Sri Lanka and worked as a copywriter. She contributed to the morning devotional published by Women's Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the *Shepherdess International Journal* magazine, and the *Adventist Review*. She has written several plays. Currently (2020), she lives in Hosur, India while preparing for a piano exam.

Christian Johannes Jensen, pioneer missionary from Denmark, labored in Southern Asia Division for 34 years, establishing churches and schools in villages and small towns in Northeast India.

Early Life

Christian Johannes Jensen was born in Hurup, Als, Denmark, in 1896. Baptized at the age of 14, Christian's first steps in ministry was to be a literature evangelist which he did until 1916.¹ Eight years later, Christian completed his college studies,² and on December 17, 1924 married Anna Kirstine Luise Frederiksen, an earnest believer in the third angel's message³ and a graduate of Danish SDA Academy (Danish Junior College), Vejle fjordskolen, Daugaard. Prior to marriage she spent a number of years in literature evangelism and one year in Bible work. She also worked in a treatment room gaining some training in nursing.⁴

In January 1925, barely a month after their marriage, Christian and Anna accepted a call to the Southern Asia Division. On the way to India they spent two months in England in special training at Stanborough Park College (Newbold College). The couple landed in India on April 24, 1925 and began their ministry in the northeastern part of the country. In 1934 the couple was blessed by the arrival of Arnold Emmanuel Jensen.⁵ After twenty six years of marriage, serving by her husband's side, Anna Jensen died in their home in Kalimpong, West Bengal, on January 28, 1952⁶ as a result of a very painful illness.⁷

After Anna's death, Pastor Jensen went on a long furlough from September 1953 to December 1954,⁸ during which time he married Ruth Tellefsen on April 23, 1954. Ruth was a Norwegian, and had 20 years of experience in an Adventist-owned Treatment Room and 3 years in Bible work before marriage.⁹

Career and Ministry

From 1916, Jensen canvassed every year in Denmark for 9 years during vacations while he was studying, until 1924. He began work in the denomination in 1919 by assisting a minister during evangelistic efforts in winter until 1921. While he was sitting for his last college exam, Jensen received a call to go to a mission field!¹⁰ Soon

after he married Anna the couple set out for their mission appointment in Southern Asia Division and arrived in India on the 24th of April, 1925.¹¹ The couple spent their first year in the study of Hindi in Darjeeling and Mussoorie in North India.¹²

After completing the language course, the Jensens' first work appointment was in Karmatar in East India from October 1926. While there he served as a teacher in the school (Seventh-day Adventist High School) and as a pastor-evangelist until October 1928. For the next four years he served in the school and as an evangelist in Babumahal, Bihar, East India.¹³ At the Southern Asia Division Council in 1931, he was ordained to the ministry along with S. Thomas, P.J. Kelly, E.R. Streeter and V.D. Koilpillai.¹⁴

After a regular furlough in August 1932 and subsequent service in Karmatar from October 1933 to August 1935,¹⁵ the Jensens were sent to do evangelistic work in Khunti in eastern Bihar, now part of Jharkhand, in East India.¹⁶ The couple worked among the Munda tribes of Chota Nagpur,¹⁷ a plateau in Eastern India which covers much of today's Jharkhand state.¹⁸

As the work among Mundas grew rapidly, the growing church wanted to have a school of their own, the current feeder school in Karmatar being too far away, expensive, and in a varied tribal belt. The Mundas sought a school of their own, within their own tribal, language, and economic ambit, and so in 1939 they approached their new mission leader, Pastor Jensen. They did not have much money to start a school, and so they offered to support the school with rice and other agricultural products they grew on their farms and fields. Students and members offered to farm the land and grow the crops, build simple homes to live in, and work together to raise the basic facilities to live in, study, worship, and work. Inspired by the earnestness and motivation of the church members in the Munda belt, Pastor Jensen found a teacher for the school¹⁹ and initiated what turned out to be Khunti Seventh-day Adventist Secondary School.

Mission accomplished, the Jensens moved in July 1940 to Chuadanga, now on the western border of Bangladesh. For a year Pastor Jensen continued evangelistic work until in September 1941 the family moved to Jowai, now part of Meghalaya, Northeast India. He helped with the formation and development of Assam Training School until January 1943.²⁰ Early in 1943, while the war with Japan was raging, Jensen was appointed the mission superintendent of Assam field with headquarters at Nongthymmai, Shillong (now part of Meghalaya).²¹ A camouflaged air-raid shelter ensured the Jensens both safety and movement between their home and the mission office.²²

In November 1944 Jensons left Shillong to Jowai to serve at the Adventist Training School (Northeast Adventist College) and engage in evangelistic work in the district. After attending the 1946 General Conference session, the family returned to India in August 1947 and was posted in Kurseong, a city in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, not far from the Nepal border. In the year-round pleasant climate, the Jensens worked for one year until July 1948.²³ Ever the visionary, while traveling by train to Karmatar to attend the board meeting of the secondary school there, he spotted in Cooch Behar area of West Bengal a vast field for sale—just the right place for

relocation of the secondary school. Jenson persuaded the school board to buy the land, and eventually this property became the location of the now prosperous Raymond Memorial Secondary School at Falakata, in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal.²⁴

1948 saw the Jensens back in Shillong where he served as the superintendent of the Assam Mission, although his evangelistic work took him to various parts of the Northeast for the next two years.²⁵ As a result of Jenson's evangelistic thrust, ten persons were baptized by immersion in the town of Aijal (Aizawl), the first large Seventh-day Adventist baptism in the Lushai Hills. Many of the town's people had never seen a baptism of this sort, and stood gazing around the baptismal site.

After serving two years in the northeastern part of India, Jensons moved in 1950 to Kalimpong, an East Indian hill town in the Himalayan foothills of West Bengal. Evangelism and the newly introduced Voice of Prophecy Bible Correspondence School work kept Pastor Jensen fully involved in this new territory until February 1951.²⁶ Then tragedy struck this brave pastor who had toiled for so long in India: his wife and pastoral partner Anna died in January 1952.²⁷ Despite the pain of loneliness Pastor Jensen continued to work through 1952-1953 with the Voice of Prophecy in Karmatar. He had now served the Southern Asia Division for twenty-eight years.²⁸

Fifty-seven years old, Pastor Jensen decided to take some time off from work and left for his home land in Denmark where he met and married Ruth Tellefsen on April 23, 1954. The newly married couple proceeded to travel to the USA for the 1954 General Conference Session,²⁹ after which they returned to India in January 1955 to begin pastoral work in Patna, in Eastern India.³⁰ Church growth was slow. Even after two years, in 1957, the only Adventists in the city were two women with their children, an Indian pastor and the Jensens.³¹ Not one to be discouraged, Pastor Jensen ploughed hard, continued personal visits and studies, and fostered interest in the Voice of Prophecy. From the Jensens' Muslim landlord the little company of Adventists was able to rent a central site for erecting their meeting place.³² By mid-1959 the Patna church was under construction, scheduled to be dedicated around the first of October.³³ However, Ruth Jensen took ill and left the country in April. Pastor Jensen stayed a few months more, and left India in September 1959 to join his wife.³⁴ Soon after, the Jensens retired and spent their last years at a Seventh-day Adventist Retirement Home. On March 30, 1985, at the age of eighty-nine, Pastor Jensen passed away.³⁵

Contribution and Closing Years

Christian Johannes Jensen's 34-year long ministry in the Southern Asia Division left its impact in the whole of northeast India, including the large states of Bihar, Bengal, Assam, and the northeast. His linguistic skills helped him share the gospel to varied language groups, including those who spoke English, Hindi, Mundari, Santali, Bengali and Khasi.³⁶ Pastor Jensen worked in villages and towns in varied people groups of the Northeastern Indian subcontinent: Meghalaya, Mizoram; Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal; and Bangladesh. He laid the groundwork in cities like Patna. Although evangelism and ministry were his first love, he helped start schools in

Khunti, Falakata and Meghalaya, that continue to shine today as successful outposts of Adventist education and outreach.³⁷

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