Nepal

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.

The country of Nepal comes under the Himalayan Section, part of the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day
Overview of the Country

Lying along the southern slopes of the Himalayan mountain ranges, Nepal is a landlocked country located between India to the east, south, and west, and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the north. The capital is Kathmandu.

Nepal contains some of the most rugged and difficult mountain terrains in the world. Such mountains cover roughly 75 percent of the country. They include the Great Himalaya Range, rising to more than 29,000 feet and home to Mount Everest, the highest point on earth above sea level at 8,848 feet. The climate varies from cool summers and severe winters in the north to subtropical summers and mild winters in south.

The current population is 30,327,877, divided nearly equally between a concentration in the southern-most plains of the Tarai region and the central hilly region. The principal and official language of Nepal is Nep?l? (Gorkhali). The vast majority of the population is Hindu (81 percent), but a small percentage follows Buddhism (9 percent) or other religious faiths.

Arrival of Seventh-day Adventists and the Growth of the Church in the Country

The Northeast India Union Mission, a part of the then India Union, organized in 1919 and comprised the territories of Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Nepal.

Although no Seventh-day Adventist was able to enter Nepal for many years, Nepalese who traveled outside of the country heard the church’s message and returned home with it. In 1936 Kenneth Simpson, accompanied by two Adventist medical missionaries, visited several villages of Nepal along the border, and preached to them in Hindi. It was the first time many of them had ever heard about Jesus and the Bible.

Before the World War II in 1939, J. F. Ashlock, of Shillong, reported the conversion of a young Gurkha Nepalese soldier who was able to get his Sabbaths off and hoped to return to teach Adventism to his people.

By 1942 several members of a high-caste Nepalese Brahman family, and 12 young women in Lucknow were baptized. The young women told their Nepalese relatives living at Gorakhpur, about their new-found faith, with the result that repeated requests came for more information. Pastor R. P. Morris, and Pastor Kimble finally went to meet them. They also visited Nepalgunj.

In 1951 Nepal began opening its borders to foreigners and tourists. While handing out V.O.P. cards on the border of previously unentered Nepal, Pastor George Vandeman was told, “You’re too late. I’m already on lesson thirty.” The person proved to be one of many studying the Adventist message in this way.

Until around August 1957, no Seventh-day Adventist had ever passed over the mountains to bring the message of God to Nepal. Church leaders then devised a plan to station Dr. Stanley G. Sturges, a young man from Loma Linda, in Nepal and establish medical work, assisted by two nationals from India. Pastor W. F. Storz, Dr. Sturges, and Allen Maberly travelled to Kathmandu with letters of introduction to government officials. They met both the minister for health and the foreign minister, seeking permission to open medical work in Nepal. Pointing to Banepa on a map of the country, the health minister said, “That is where we want you.” Not knowing where Banepa actually was and without having time to visit the place, they agreed anyway.

Dr. and Mrs. Sturges founded Scheer Memorial Hospital in June, 1957. Named after a New Jersey couple who donated money for the institution, the hospital officially opened May 18, 1960, and for a long time was the only general hospital serving the large population east of Katmandu.

The second radio station to be organized under the Adventist World Radio (AWR) concept was AWR-Asia. Although the Southern Asia Division began international short-wave services on Radio Ceylon back in 1950, the approach did become part of the Adventist World Radio network until 1976 when the programs broadcast in 11 different languages from Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Dacca. The first AWR broadcasts in Nepal featured Mr. Deep Thapa.

In December of 1987, Robert Lindbeck, an Australian student, and Tony Pasillas, an American student, were the first student missionaries to work in Nepal for a number of years. They taught English at an English language school at Kathmandu.


The Adventist Church formerly classified Nepal as an attached field to the Southern Asia Division. In 2013 it became known as the “Nepal Section” with Umesh Kumar Pokharel appointed as its first president. In 2017, administration renamed it the Himalayan Section. Currently, Nepal has 26 churches and 9, 349 members.

Institutions

Much of the Adventist Church’s infrastructure in Nepal surrounds Scheer Memorial Hospital in Banepa, located
miles southeast of the capital city of Kathmandu. The Adventist-operated medical center was established in 1960. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency has run several programs to help exploited children.

**Challenges to Mission**

Nepal, long under the rule of hereditary prime ministers favoring a policy of isolation, remained closed to the outside world until a palace revolt in 1950 restored the crown’s authority in 1951. It was only after that time that the country allowed Adventist foreigners in, not as missionaries, but as medical workers.

Nepalis work from Sunday to Friday and rest on Saturday “in line with their traditional Vedic calendar.” The practice applies to all organizations, schools, and even churches in the country. Thus, every single Christian denomination observes Saturday for their weekly worship, making Nepal perhaps the only country in Asia where Adventists face no challenges to observing the Saturday Sabbath.

The country has gone through seven different constitutions. The current constitution of Nepal came into effect on September 25, 2015. It declares the country as secular and grants every person “the right to profess, practice and protect his or her religion.” Nevertheless, the constitution prohibits individuals from engaging in any act that might disrupt law and order such as converting persons from one religion to another. Propagating one’s religion is punishable by law and attracts a fine of NRS 50,000. Foreign nationals engaging in such activity face deportation.

**SOURCES**


Roth, D. A. “Scheer Hospital is only SDA Center in Nepal.” *ARH*, March 13, 1980.


Simpson, Kenneth P. “At the Gateway of Nepal.” *Australasian Record*, September 21, 1942.


Vine, R. D. “This is God’s Hour.” *British Advent Messenger*, September 21, 1951.

**NOTES**


4. Ibid.


6. Ibid.

7. 

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. R. D. Vine, “This is God’s Hour,” British Advent Messenger, September 21, 1951, 1, 2.


18. Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook, “Himalayan Section,”

19. Shrestha and Oliver, “In Nepal.”

