



Lal Gopal Mookerjee, his brother N. G. Mookerjee, their father A. C. Mookerjee, and Marcus Mookerjee (son of Lal Gopal Mookerjee), c. 1910.

Photo courtesy of Ashok Sengupta.

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## Mookerjee, Lal Gopal (1882–1952)

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.

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Lal Gopal Mookerjee served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as one of the first Indian ordained ministers, helping to establish the work in Bangladesh and India. He was a pioneer educator, church administrator, editor, and historian, and set up the Voice of Prophecy correspondence school in India.

## Early Life and Conversion

Lal Gopal Mookerjee was born in Calcutta, August 24, 1882.<sup>1</sup> He was the son of Akhoy Coomer Mookerjee, among the first converts to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in India; and grandson of Lal Chand Mookerjee, who was the son of the first Bengali Brahmin converted to Christianity by William Carey.<sup>2</sup>

As a young man Lal Gopal received the major part of his education in the government schools of India.<sup>3</sup> One day, Ellery Robinson, a colporteur, visited the Mookerjee home in Sealdah, just a short distance from the Adventist headquarters at Bow Bazaar Street, and in three weekly visits had sold them *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *The Great Controversy*, and *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation*. The father, A.C. Mookerjee read the books and translated them for family worship every day.<sup>4</sup>

A few weeks later, a severe form of malaria struck A. C. Mookerjee's younger son, and finally on Friday he instructed his servant, "Go quickly and call Mitter," meaning V. L. Mitter, the Hindu family physician. The servant made a mistake and summoned B. Mitter, a Christian assistant to Dr. O. G. Place at the Adventist Treatment Rooms. Not wanting to lose time and trusting to providence, the family took the boy to the mission house for medical aid. As they were leaving, they heard the sound of singing. Curious, they went upstairs to the meeting. The family returned regularly for treatment of the boy and to hear more of the gospel. Eventually, A. C. Mookerjee with his two boys and Grandfather Mookerjee joined the Adventists in 1896.<sup>5</sup>

## Education and Marriage

For a short time, Mookerjee attended Rippon College.<sup>6</sup> Later, in 1906, he went to America where he attended Washington Foreign Missionary Seminary for two years.<sup>7</sup>

A cousin of Louis Kellogg, former mayor of Ripon and a senator from the state of Wisconsin,<sup>8</sup> Grace Kellogg was born February 1, 1869, in Ripon, Wisconsin. After J. N. Anderson converted her in 1895, she served as a Bible instructor in her home state until 1903 when she came to India to be a self-supporting missionary.<sup>9</sup> She worked with Samantha Whiteis at Chandernagore. While in India, she met Lal Gopal, and on February 9, 1904, he married the 35-year-old Grace Kellogg

## Early Career

While his father, A.C. Mookerjee translated and printed Adventist Bengali tracts on his own printing press and at his own expense, Lal Gopal joined the employ of the Adventists in 1901.<sup>10</sup> He served with the Sanitarium and

Health Food Company during 1902 and at the Calcutta treatment rooms from 1903 to 1905.<sup>11</sup>

In 1906, Lal Gopal and his wife, Grace, moved to East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and with their own funds established the Gopalgunj mission station. It consisted of a church, a dispensary, a school, and some living quarters.<sup>12</sup>

The couple had a son in November 1906 whom they named Marcus and who later became a physician in the U.S.A. Sadly, about a month after the birth, Grace suffered repeated attacks of various tropical diseases. She had to leave India to save her life. First having come to India in 1901 as a nurse and at her own expense, she had initially supported herself before her marriage. Now, because she had spent all her own money in developing work in India and East Bengal, her sister in Minnesota had to cable her \$400 to get her to England. In desperation, Grace asked the GC to get herself and husband to her home in Minnesota, the same as though she were a paid worker returning from the field. They granted her \$200.<sup>13</sup>

The small family sailed at the end of the year back to the US, where they arrived in March 1907. Grace recovered her health while Lal Gopal spent two years attending classes at the Washington Foreign Mission Seminary. But they just couldn't stay away from what they had begun in India. They returned to East Bengal in 1909 and resumed their work, though not in Gopalgunj, but in Calcutta for the sake of Grace's health. Nevertheless, on November 12, 1910, she succumbed to cerebral meningitis, leaving behind a 4-year-old son and three sisters in America.<sup>14</sup>

After a year of mourning, Lal Gopal Mookerjee married Clara May Loveday on August 14, 1911.<sup>15</sup> Clara May was born in 1884 to Mary Cooper and Frederick John Loveday. Her parents were both English and had three other children.<sup>16</sup> Lal Gopal and Clara continued to live in Calcutta till 1913.<sup>17</sup>

The Mookerjees then transferred to East Bengal—the place of his special burden, where Lal Gopal superintended the work in the region. In 1915 he started the boarding school at Gopalgunj, something he had wanted to do from the beginning.<sup>18</sup>

## Ministry – One of the First Indians to be Ordained

Around this time, the expatriate missionaries decided to begin ordaining indigenous workers to the gospel ministry. On a Sunday evening, June 24, 1917, at the annual general meeting of the Bengal Mission held at Entally, Calcutta, administrators Luther J. Burgess, Pettit, Comer, and W. W. Fletcher conducted an ordination service in the Free-school Street meeting hall. Mookerjee and E. D. Thomas were the first nationals to be ordained.<sup>19</sup>

East Bengal was Pastor Mookerjee's burden for many years, and he served as president of that field most of the time from 1913-1932.<sup>20</sup> He personally served as the principal of the school there until 1923. When he focused his attention on the work of the mission, his wife, Clara May, ran the school until 1926. Meanwhile in 1921 the

Mookerjees had started another boarding school for boys at Jarlirpar, 18 miles away, again with their own funds.<sup>21</sup>

Leaving East Bengal, the Mookerjees moved to Ranchi where he directed the work of the entire Bengal Mission until about 1931 when the couple went to Calcutta. Lal Gopal edited the Bengali *Signs of the Times* for several years. Around 1934, the couple transferred to Bangalore where he taught Bible courses at the South India Training School. In 1937 Mookerjee assumed charge of the newly formed Northeast India Training School at Karmatar. It combined the Santali Boys School (established at Entally in 1917 and later moved to Ranchi), and the Santali girls' school (established at Karmatar in 1913 and later transferred to Babumahal). Many consider the school Lal Gopal established as the origin of Raymond Memorial Training School now at Falakata. He headed the Karmatar institution from 1937-1939.<sup>22</sup>

In 1940 the Mookerjees returned to Ranchi, the headquarters for the Northeast India Union, where he served as director of the home missionary, Sabbath School, and YPMV departments. Lal Gopal and his wife attended the 1946 GC Session and upon their return, Pastor Mookerjee received an invitation to join the Voice of Prophecy correspondence school that was being set up.<sup>23</sup>

## Ministry at Salisbury Park

L. G. Mookerjee was one of the charter members of the Voice of Prophecy staff, having joined the school in 1947 at its very beginning. He displayed his characteristic thoroughness in helping to prepare the enormous amount of printed material necessary to launch the school.<sup>24</sup>

When it began to function and questions from students came flooding in, Mookerjee took great delight in answering them as the correspondence secretary. After his death he still continued to speak for many years through the prepared answers he had written.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the East Bengal administration had decided to exchange the locations of the newly established hospital at Jarlipur, with the school at Gopalgunj. Then they renamed the relocated school at Jarlirpur the "Kellogg-Mookerjee High School" in honor of Grace and Lal Gopal.<sup>26</sup>

The division appointed Mookerjee the director of the religious liberty and temperance departments in 1948. He served here faithfully until his health forced him to retire, although he assisted in those departments till his death. The Voice of Prophecy keenly felt the loss of Pastor Mookerjee at his retirement.<sup>27</sup>

## Later Life

Although struggling with physical problems for many years, Pastor Mookerjee's conscientious observance of health principles still enabled him to carry a full workload.<sup>28</sup> In early 1950, after giving 49 years of service to the church, Elder Mookerjee retired due to poor health. He died away two years later on February 14, 1952.

Interment took place in the little mission cemetery at Baragain near the mission hospital. Pastor E. M. Meleen, who was visiting Ranchi at the time, Dr. Shearer, and other members of the hospital staff at Baragain and from the Khunti school assisted in the service.<sup>29</sup> Pastor Mookerjee had travelled extensively during his denominational service, making friends all over Southern Asia and in many parts of the world field.<sup>30</sup>

Clara May Mookerjee passed away January 14, 1964. The Mookerjee estate in Ranchi, Morabadi Villa, was willed to the Church and houses the headquarters of the East India Section, now known as the Western Jharkhand Section.<sup>31</sup>

## Contribution

It is generally believed that the clause in the Indian Constitution that provides for the freedom to profess and propagate religion was made possible by Pastor Mookerjee's constant contact with his uncle, Dr. H. C. Mookerjee (who became the governor of West Bengal) at the time when he was directly involved in its preparation.<sup>32</sup>

Pastor Mookerjee's life of service spanned almost the entire history of the church's early history in Southern Asia, and he possessed a fund of first-hand knowledge and information such as probably no other worker has had. In addition, he had a collection of the most complete and authoritative resource material that includes photographs; a series of Sabbath School lessons from the very beginning; specimens of advertising bills, letters, tracts, and pamphlets; and many other such artifacts and documents.<sup>33</sup>

Pastor Mookerjee gave the major portion of his 49-nine years of service to East Pakistan, and Mrs. Mookerjee was the first principal of the Adventist school there and served it for many years.<sup>34</sup> When the boy's school that the Mookerjee's had started became a co-educational institution, the denomination renamed it in their honor when it gained high school status in 1946. It is now the Kellogg-Mookerjee Memorial Seminary, Jalirpar, in the Bangladesh Union.<sup>35</sup>

Those who knew Gal Lopal long remembered his zeal for truth and good in all walks of life, and his keen interest in students, fellow workers, and the humble members of the church.<sup>36</sup>

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