

# North Tamil Conference

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North Tamil Conference is a part of Southeast India Union Section in the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists. Its headquarters is in Thiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu, India. It consists of Ariyalur, Cuddalore, Karur, Namakkal, Perambalur, Salem, and Thiruchirapalli in the state of Tamil Nadu; and the district of Puducherry in the union territory of Puducherry. Statistics as of June 30, 2021: churches 84, membership 27,951, population 15,409,610.

Trichinopoly (Thiruchirapalli) was the second mission station established by Adventists in Tamilnadu after Tinnevely (Nazareth). It briefly served as the headquarters for the South India Mission during 1914 to 1915.

## Beginnings of the Work

The first hint of the Adventist message in Trichinopoly appears to be in 1910 or earlier. J. S. James, pioneer missionary among the Tamils, wrote in August 1911 that a native worker (probably a colporteur) had been working in Trichinopoly for nearly a year.<sup>1</sup> Also, a Tamil man who had earlier learned the truth in Singapore is reported to have witnessed to several of his friends in Trichinopoly.<sup>2</sup> In the beginning of 1911, on his way to Burma, W. W. Prescott stopped for a day in Trichinopoly and, accompanied by G. G. Lowry and J. S. James, met with some local believers who urged the leaders to open the work in the city. These local believers likely included the one from Singapore and others to whom he had witnessed.<sup>3</sup>

It was decided to secure a building for meetings and Bible studies and to add a local Bible instructor to the workforce. It was envisioned that Trichinopoly could develop into a central station for Adventist work in the future,<sup>4</sup> which proved correct.

G. G. Lowry and his wife had taken their Tamil examination in Trichinopoly and felt impressed to locate themselves there.<sup>5</sup> They arrived in Trichinopoly on June 20, 1911, and met those who had expressed a desire to study the Bible. These were educated young men and deeply interested in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Lowry started a Sabbath School, using the same lessons that were used in Tinnevely.<sup>6</sup> J. S. James described the group of seven as including two Lutherans and three Roman Catholics, one part of the SPG.

Several had completed high school, one was in college, and one was a school headmaster.<sup>7</sup>

In July 1912, J. S. James organized a colporteur institute in Trichinopoly, attended by local workers and those from Tinnevely, Madras, and Pondicherry. At the same time the first Tamil paper titled *The Present Truth* was being printed by a Hindu printer. It had 24 pages.<sup>8</sup>

Cuddalore is one of the district headquarters in North Tamil Conference, where there is also an Adventist church. F. O. Raymond, an early colporteur in that city, tells of female colporteurs who preceded him in Cuddalore, selling religious books and creating much interest.<sup>9</sup>

The work in Pondicherry began with a local man from Calcutta. In August 1914 Devasahayam, the translator from the office, and V. E. Peugh located in Pondicherry with their families. Devasahayam had charge of the congregation. In November seven people were baptized.<sup>10</sup> The French government had placed some restrictions on Protestants in the settlement, but the Adventist Church was given some favorable consideration.<sup>11</sup>

Maria Susai Muthaliyar from Pondicherry accepted the Adventist message and sent his two sons, Maria Dass Muthaliyar and Arockiasamy Muthaliyar to the South India Training School in Coimbatore. He also inspired Saminathan to study for the ministry. Saminathan later married Lilly and both began ministry in Pondicherry in 1921, where Saminathan served as pastor. In 1919 Adaikalasamy Latour, a former Catholic, was baptized along with Appasamy Nayakar, Arul Thevar, and Nadesa Pathar. These became pillars of the church in Pondicherry.<sup>12</sup>

## Institutions

The Nalvazhi Clinic began on November 2, 1947, at Trichinopoly.<sup>13</sup> Dr. W. G. Thomas, who started the clinic, had been baptized earlier by E. D. Thomas.

In 1961 cottage industries were begun in the North Tamil Section. Tailoring and carpentry shops were opened. The mat industry at Karur proved successful. E. G. Conley started tanning leather for the manufacture of shoes in Coonoor. The union approved a plan to develop this on a larger scale and the North Tamil Section invested Rs. 5,000 towards this promising enterprise.<sup>14</sup>

In 1967, while Pastor V. D. Edward served as president for the combined Tamil Mission in Trichirapalli, Mrs. Y. R. Samraj started a school for Adventist children in the vestry of the Trichy Church. The first students were the children of office workers and church members. Now there are two schools in the city, with two annex campuses. The school has grown to have more than 3,000 students on the main campus and another 500 on the Subramaniapuram campus. Schools are operated in Thiruchirapalli (main), Thirichirapalli (Subramaniapuram), Pondicherry (Marapalam), Pondicherry (Shanmugapuram), Panruti, Thiruchengode, Mantharakuppam, Neyveli, Salem, and Shankagiri.

## Organizational History

In 1910, when the India Union was organized, the Tamil Field was one of five fields in the South India Mission. From 1919 to 1920, when the India Union was reorganized into the Southern Asia Division and the South India Mission was reorganized into the South India Union Mission, the Tamil Mission was divided into two missions—the North Tamil Mission and the South Tamil Mission.<sup>15</sup> Beginning in 1923, E. D. Thomas, president of the South Tamil Mission, at the same time served as president of the North Tamil Mission. The two missions were joined to form the Tamil Mission at the beginning of 1928, when E. D. Thomas was transferred to the South India Training School.<sup>16</sup> In 1942 a study commission recommended that the territory again be divided into the North and South Tamil Missions. The North Tamil Mission encompassed the territories of North Arcot, South Arcot, Chingleput, Salam, Coimbatore Nilgiri Hills, Trichinopoly, Tanjore, Ramnad, Madura, Tinnevely (north of Kovilpatti), Palni Hills, Pudukotah State, Pondicherry, and Karaikal, with headquarters in Madurai. S. Thomas was elected president of the North Tamil Mission and M. Amirtham was elected secretary-treasurer. The North Tamil Mission had 350 members in 11 churches and six companies. The mission also had four village schools.<sup>17</sup>

The feeling grew that the division of the Tamil and Telugu fields into north and south missions was not really necessary. In 1963, at the South India Biennial Session in Bangalore, it was decided that each of the four language groups in the South India Union would have a single section, as this would make the union more compact and departments would be able to function more effectively. V. D. Edward was elected president and served for the next 11 years.<sup>18</sup>

In 1974 the field was again split into South Tamil Section and North Tamil Section. The North Tamil Section had Thiruchirapalli as its headquarters. The elected president was Manickam Dhason and the secretary-treasurer was V. Christian.<sup>19</sup>

In preparation for conference status, the executive committee of the North Tamil Section met on September 22, 1994, and voted (Action No: 94-172) to send a team of lay members to the Conference Status Study Committee to be held at Hosur. Members were Dr. Mohanalingam, Gideon, Sam Koilpillai, C. Perumalraj, and R. S. Mani.<sup>20</sup> Conference status awareness meetings were conducted in several places.<sup>21</sup> The first constituency meeting of the North Tamil Conference was held from January 11 to 14, 1995, at the Managalam Mahal in Trichy.<sup>22</sup> The first executive officers of the North Tamil Conference were: M. William George (president); M. Anbalagan (secretary); and E. Selvin Moorthy (treasurer).<sup>23</sup>

## Later Developments

In a positive sign of growth, the North Tamil Conference has become smaller over the years as territories were separated and organized into new units. In 1995 the city of Chennai was separated from the North Tamil Conference and organized into the Chennai Metro Region. In 2000 the North Tamil Conference was again reorganized when the Erode Nilgiris Region was organized. In 2002 a further reorganization took place when the Villupuram Tindivanam Region was formed.<sup>24</sup> The executive committee which met on March 11, 2009,

recommended that Coimbatore and Thiruppur be formed into a region called Kovai, Thirupur Region.<sup>25</sup> In 2011 the Southeast India Union approved the recommendation of the North Tamil Conference to form two new regions—the Vellore Thiruvannamalai Region and the Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri Region.<sup>26</sup>

The significant growth in membership of the conference is a result of evangelistic meetings. William George conducted meetings at Perambalur in 1995, immediately after accepting the responsibility as conference president. Later that year P. V. Jesudass held meetings at Kancheepuram. The Amazing Facts team from the United States arrived in the final months of the year and conducted meetings at two locations in the city of Trichy. The speakers were Richard Hayford, Rachel, and Sumb.

Meetings were organized by *Jesus for Asia* (JFA) in Udumalaipettai, Chidambaram, Thirupathur, Kulithalai, Manaparai, Jeyamkondam, Thuraiyur, Mussiri, Karur, Trichy-K. K. Nagar, and Trichy-Thiruverumbur.

Multiple village evangelistic series were planned and were executed, reaching thousands. Twenty-five villages around Karur were targeted.

In 2007 a major series of meetings was organized in Thiruvannamalai with Doug Batchelor as the featured speaker. Unfortunately, towards the end of the series, the meetings were disrupted by rowdy elements. However local conference ministers followed up with those who had been attending and established a strong congregation.

The Voice of Prophecy Bible correspondence course graduated thousands of students, beginning in 1970. In 1983 Mrs. Susheela Philip took charge as principal and was followed by Mrs. Sheela Chandran. The VOP enlarged its sphere of influence through social media networks like YouTube and Zoom beginning in 2018.

## Executive Officers

Presidents: William George (1995-1997), Simon Singaravelu (1997-2003), Sam Sudhakar (2003-2009), Edison Samuel (2010-2011), Edwin Paul (2018-present).

Secretaries: Simon Sigaravelu (1995-1997), Sam Sudhaker (1997-2003), K. V. Samuel (2003-2009), Karunanithi (2009-2011), S. Selvaraj (2018-present).

Treasurers: Selvin Moorthy (1995-1997), K. V. Chellapandian (1997-2003), Solomon Pandiaraj (2003-2009), D. S. Rajendran (2009-2011), Merlin Joe (2018-present).

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