

Raichur-Bellary Region

N. ASHOK KUMAR

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Raichur-Bellary Region was organized in 2004 and is a part of the South-Central India Union Section in the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Territory: The districts of Bellary, and Raichur in the state of Karnataka.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): Churches, 13; membership, 1,637; population, 6,765,045.¹

Origin of Adventist Work

When the Southern Asia Division was formed in 1919-1920, since Bellary was at that time a part of Andhra State, the district was included in the territory of the South Telugu Mission.² Colporteurs (literature evangelists) had worked in Bellary from time to time, including F. O. Raymond in 1912,³ Ferguson in 1926,⁴ and L. D. Wilson in 1936.⁵

Voice of Prophecy rallies were conducted in the city of Bellary from time to time, usually in the Town Hall where hundreds could be seated. N. G. Mookerjee, with local pastors, enrolled 120 for the Kanarese VOP Bible course in 1958,⁶ and more than two hundred in other languages.⁷ One of the VOP graduates started keeping the Sabbath in 1962, and by 1964 had ten relatives and friends keeping the Sabbath with him.⁸

In 1965 the Kannada Section decided to open a new mission station in Bellary. G. Isaiah conducted a six-week series of meetings, assisted by Surrender Kumar, a Spicer student, and Dara Paul, a Spicer graduate. Towards the end of the series M. L. Apatha Rao, who was being assigned as a permanent worker to be stationed in Bellary, joined the team. Several people were baptized at the conclusion of the meetings.⁹

In 1969 S. S. Sunderaj was transferred to pioneer new work in Bellary.¹⁰ He rented a small hall, conducted some meetings, and baptized five persons.¹¹ By the time he was ordained in 1973 he had brought more than twenty into the church.¹²

T. V. Thompson, a pioneer in establishing a number of Telugu churches in Bangalore, was assigned to work in Bellary in 1970. He helped establish two Telugu congregations in Bellary, working alongside Pastor S. S. Sunderraj.

D. R. Watts, who later served as president of Karnataka Section, visited the remote village of Hirebannimatti, under Bellary on the banks of the river Tungabhadra. He brought a number of students to Lowry College for Higher Studies from this remote village in the year 1968-69.¹³ These included T. J. Lazarus, Sudhakar, S. T. Solomon, B. Devadas, S. G. Doddamani, G. Immanuel, Barnabas, Nazareth, and David Raj, who became prominent leaders in the church. A church was established, built, and dedicated in this village on September 4, 1972.

The first mention of Raichur is in 1911, when Mrs. M. A. Leman visited the Talukdar, representative of the Nizam in Raichur, and gave him some books and literature. They had a religious discussion and she spoke of the Second Advent of Christ.¹⁴ Raichur and Bellary are mentioned together in 1965 by J. M. Curnow, who stated that the colporteur A. Devadass in Raichur was many miles from any Adventist, while A. Moses in Bellary was able to fellowship with an Adventist family.¹⁵

The work at Raichur was established by Pastor J. Devasahayam, a lay preacher from Chennai who came to Raichur and worked tirelessly in the difficult climatic conditions of Raichur. His hard work resulted in a number of churches in the city of Raichur. He was well-versed in Kannada and Telugu languages.

The Central church at Raichur was built and dedicated on April 3, 1998, under the supervision of Pastor Sukumaran, Director, and Mr. Uday Wesley, Treasurer of the North Karnataka Section, along with Pastor M. Raju. They worked hard and established the new congregations and built the Raichur Central Church.

Later Pastor Cheluvvaraju, director of the North Karnataka Region, supervised the work and established a number of new companies. In the year 2001 Elder Bob Meyers and Pastor David Lamb conducted evangelistic meetings, which resulted in a number of people accepting Jesus.

Organizational History

At the time the Southern Asia Division was organized, the district of Bellary was part of the South Telugu Mission of the South India Union. In 1922 the North and South Telugu Missions were consolidated, and Bellary was part of the combined Telugu Mission. In 1942 the Telugu Mission was bifurcated again, and Bellary was again part of the South Telugu Mission, which in 1955 was renamed the South Telugu Section when all "missions" were renamed as "sections."

In 1956, as part of a general reorganization of states, India created the state of Mysore, and at that time Kannada-speaking areas in neighboring states such as Bellary were included. The enlarged section's name changed from Kanarese Mission to Kannada Section. Bellary was removed from the South Telugu Section and attached to the Kannada Section.¹⁶

The Raichur and Bellary remained part of North Karnataka Section until it was bifurcated in 2003.¹⁷ Pastor I. Thavasekaran was appointed as the first director of the Raichur-Bellary Region.¹⁸ The region workers were

jubilant, with the headquarters established in Raichur. The region headquarters was declared open and dedicated June 25, 2007, by South Central India Union President D. Padmaraj, and dedicated by Southern Asia Division Treasurer G. Robert Clive. The workers and newly appointed director toiled hard, and their hard work resulted in the building of a number of churches and establishment of new congregations.

A small school was started and, with a good reputation, grew year by year. A teacher and assistant were appointed to nurture the school. The work grew with the support of union and other donors, especially Elder Bob Meyers and Pastor David Lamb. A number of new evangelistic methods were introduced and implemented effectively.

The Raichur-Bellary Region has 13 organized churches and 17 companies, with a membership of 2040.¹⁹ The membership is growing steadily with new methods of evangelism such as digital evangelism, city evangelism, and Centers of influence and Total Member Involvement. The different departments of the church are being promoted in the local churches. The Youth Department is attracting young people to take active part in the church. The region has a challenge of re-opening the schools at Raichur and Bellary, and to develop strong Adventist-based teaching and nurturing programs to enrich the spiritual condition of the laity.

Directors

I. Thavasekaran (2003-2006); H. B. Stephen (2006-2011); S. T. Solomon (2011-2016); Ashok Kumar (2016-).

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NOTES

1. "Raichur-Bellary Region," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2021), <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=30062>.
2. R. John Moses, "Report of the South Telugu Mission," *Eastern Tidings*, June 1, 1947, 5; B. S. Moses, "South India Union: Report from Rayalseema," *Southern Asia Tidings*, July 15, 1954, 7.
3. F. O. Raymond "A Month's Tour," *Eastern Tidings*, February 12, 1912, 6.
4. "South India Union," *Eastern Tidings*, August 1, 1926, 5
5. L. D Wilson, "The Happiest Job in the Field of Our Lord," *Eastern Tidings*, June 1, 1936, 5
6. N. G. Mookerjee, "Voice of Prophecy Secretary Visits South India," *Southern Asia Tidings*, May 1, 1958, 1.
7. V. T. Thomas, "South India VOP Rally Tour," *Southern Asia Tidings*, July 15, 1958, 6.
8. J. Daniel, "What VOP Did to . . . Kannada Section," *Southern Asia Tidings*, August 1, 1964, 8.
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16. "Territorial Adjustment," Minutes of the Southern Asia Division Committee #56-610, Dec 10, 1956, 153.
17. Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventist, "Minutes of DIVEXO" (Hosur, Tamil Nadu, India: Southern Asia Division, 11-13, November 2003), 95.
18. The Raichur-Bellary Region is comprised of the Raichur, Bellary, and Koppal Districts in Karnataka State, India.
19. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Office of Archives and Statistics, *Annual Statistical Report* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day, 2018), 25.

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