

India Union Mission (1910–1919)

KOBERSON LANGHU

Koberson Langhu, Ph.D. in church history and systematic theology (the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines), is an assistant professor of church history at Spicer Adventist University, India. He and his wife Sanita have three children.

The territory of the India Union Mission included India, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and Burma (now Myanmar). At the end of 1919, the union had 978 baptized members spread over 26 churches.¹ India Union Mission was operational from 1910 to 1919.

Organizational History

From its organized beginning in 1895 up through 1909, the Seventh-day Adventist mission in India was administered directly under the General Conference. During those years, it carried the name India Mission and was headed by a superintendent. The India Mission headquarters was first located in a rented building on 154 Bow Bazaar Street in Calcutta, India. In 1909, the mission briefly came under the auspices of the newly established Asiatic Division.²

From the start, the church leadership did not favor Calcutta as the mission headquarters for several reasons. First, the various Christian missions agreed that a new mission should not enter a territory already entered by another mission. By the time Adventist missionaries arrived in 1895, Calcutta already had several missions in operation. Second, the hot, humid climate contributed to health problems and caused printing materials and equipment to malfunction. Third, malaria was prevalent in the city. As a result, the mission relocated to the city of Lucknow (the capital city of Uttar Pradesh) in September 1912, where it remained until 1921. Lucknow was selected because of its beauty, telegraph accessibility, and its proximity to the post office and railway station.³ The new mission headquarters and publishing house in Lucknow were established in a building on an acre of land that was purchased and refitted using a special donation of \$10,000 from the \$300,000 General Conference Fund.⁴

By the turn of the twentieth century, the India Mission had outgrown its formative administrative structure. Consequently, a decision was reached at the 1910 biennial conference held in Lucknow to reorganize the mission into a union level entity⁵ that included the countries of India, Ceylon, and Burma. J. L. Shaw, the first superintendent of the newly organized India Union Mission, pointed out that its purpose “was to prepare the way for stronger development of the work in the field as a whole.”⁶ The union was further divided into five regional missions: the Bengal Mission, the North India Mission, the West India Mission, the South India Mission,

and the Northwest India Mission (organized in 1914). Church membership stood at a mere 593 spread over 9 organized churches and 13 companies.⁷

The initial slate of officers appointed to administer the work were J. L. Shaw (superintendent), G. W. Pettit (assistant superintendent), C. E. Weeks (secretary), M. M. Quantock (treasurer), V. L. Mann (medical secretary), and Edith E. Bruce (Sabbath School secretary).⁸ The aim was to provide each mission with a corresponding set of officers for every department. However, this was not always possible due to a lack of workers, so many missions were compelled to operate with a superintendent and a supporting advisory committee of three to four members.⁹ At the 1913 General Conference Session, Homer Russell Salisbury was appointed as the new superintendent.

The year 1915 is a significant landmark in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the world and in India, in particular. The South India Training School (the forerunner of Spicer Adventist University) was founded just four days before Ellen G. White died. Another event had rather a sad twist. The union superintendent, H. R. Salisbury, had gone to the United States to attend the 1915 General Conference Annual Council. For his return journey, in order to arrive on time to attend the workers' institutes and other meetings, Salisbury traveled by the Atlantic route from Marseilles. On December 30, 1915, a German submarine sank the S.S. *Persia*, the ship on which Salisbury was traveling. He died in the sea, and his body was never found.¹⁰ The tragic death of Salisbury left a vacuum in the leadership of the union at a time when every worker was needed. J. S. James, the vice president of the union, temporarily headed the union until W. W. Fletcher, an Australian minister, was appointed as the new president.¹¹

Salisbury had participated in the Asiatic Division Conference held in Shanghai, May 1–15, 1915. At that conference, the leaders of the Australasian Union, the India Union Mission, the Asiatic Division, and the Central China Mission agreed to merge their respective organizations into a single regional division conference of the General Conference—the Asiatic Division Conference.¹² The 1915 Annual Council approved the creation of the new organization.¹³ The India Union Mission remained a part of the Asiatic Division Conference until 1918, when the division conference was dissolved at the 1918 General Conference Session.

The dissolution of the Asiatic Division Conference temporarily placed the India Union Mission directly under the General Conference supervision. J. E. Fulton directed the mission in both the India Union Mission and the Australasian Union Conference. The 1918 General Conference session had taken initial steps toward the reorganization of the India Union Mission into a new division of the General Conference. Finally, the India Union Mission was incorporated into the new Southern Asia Division at the biennial conference held from December 25, 1919, to January 4, 1920.¹⁴

Executive Officers Chronology

Superintendents/Presidents: J. L. Shaw (1910–1913); H. R. Salisbury (1913–1915); W. W. Fletcher (1916–1919)

SOURCES

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- . "New Mission Home for India." *ARH*, May 16, 1912.
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NOTES

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Conferences, Mission, and Institutions: The Fifty-Seventh Annual Statistical Report, Year Ending December 31, 1919* (Takoma Park, Md.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1919), 10.

2. "Asiatic Division," *Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1910), 133.
3. J. L. Shaw, "Mission Headquarters," *ARH*, June 19, 1913, 19.
4. J. L. Shaw, "New Mission Home for India," *ARH*, May 16, 1912, 13.
5. "Conference Proceeding," *Eastern Tidings*, November 1910, 2-4; J. L. Shaw, "The Lucknow Conference," *Eastern Tidings*, November 1910, 1; J. L. Shaw, "Biennial Meeting of the Indian Union Mission," *ARH*, January 5, 1911, 9-10.
6. J. L. Shaw, "The Lucknow Conference," *Eastern Tidings*, November 1910, 1.
7. *Statistical Report of Seventh-day Adventist Conferences, Missions, and Institutions, for the Year Ending December 31, 1910*. (Takoma Park, Md.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1910), 12.
8. The designation "superintendent" was used for the head of the Indian mission from its beginning in 1895 up through 1915. From 1916, the designation "president" began to be used officially although it was already introduced as early as 1915. The term superintendent then came to be used for the head of the different missions. "India Union Mission," *Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1915), 154; "India Union Mission," *Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1916), 140.
9. Koberson Langhu, "The Origin and Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Southern Asia Division (1895-1947)" (Ph.D. diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, 2017), 159.
10. R. D. Brisbin, "Our Bereavement," *Eastern Tidings*, February 1916, 3; S. A. Wellman, "Homer Russell Salisbury," *Eastern Tidings*, April 1916, 3-8; R. D. Brisbin, "The Last Voyage," *Eastern Tidings*, April 1916, 15-16; "A Sad Calamity," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, March 1, 1916, 4.
11. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, vol. 4 (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962), 197.
12. "Conference Minutes," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, July 1, 1915, 16; Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962), 197.
13. Salisbury, "Visit to the Far East—3," *Eastern Tidings*, June 1915, 1-2; W. A. Spicer, "Report of Biennial Council of the General Conference Committee," *ARH*, November 25, 1915, 6.
14. J. E. Fulton, "The Southern Asia Division," *ARH*, May 6, 1920, 18-19.

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