

# Arunachal Pradesh Region

DEEPAK BORO

Deepak Boro

Arunachal Pradesh Region is one of the newest church units in the Southern Asia Division, encompassing the state of Arunachal Pradesh. On June 30, 2019, Arunachal Pradesh Region had one church, membership of 367, and a population of 1,551,227.<sup>1</sup>

## Origin of Adventist Work in Arunachal

The first known Adventist to enter Arunachal was Albert Charles Brown. Albert's father had learned of the Adventist message through Voice of Prophecy (VOP) rallies conducted in the Assam valley by H. T. Burr and A. E. Rawson in 1940. He eventually

completed the lessons and left a VOP enrollment card lying around. Nine years later Albert discovered the card, went through the lessons himself, and was baptized in July 1969. At that time Albert Brown lived in the town of Sadiya, close to the border of the North East Frontier Agency (as Arunachal was known then)? Albert went to Oyan, a small town across the border in East Siang district, to share his faith with his friend Dimbeswor Lego, who had completed a B.Th. degree in 1964 from the Union Biblical Seminary at Yavatmal, Maharashtra.

Dimbeswor Lego readily accepted the message brought by Brown and was baptized on October 28, 1972, in Shillong. In January of that year the name North East Frontier Agency had been changed to Arunachal Pradesh. Dimbeswor Lego became the first person to work for the Adventist Church in Arunachal, traveling to various places on foot to spread the gospel of Christ. He was even imprisoned a couple of times for preaching the gospel. Declining any offer to transfer, he stayed at Oyan and remained a strong believer.



Dimbeswor Lego, the first person to work for Adventist church in Arunachal.

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, SUD.

Evangelism in Arunachal was not easy. It was difficult to start evangelistic work during those days because Christian missionary activities were not allowed. Bibles and related materials were strictly banned. However, a boy named Tangsa from Arunachal went to Assam Training School to study and joined a group of eight who were baptized there in January 1974.<sup>3</sup> Later that year, as a result of the work of Dimbeswor Lego and the occasional visits of Pastor Lalmhingliana and A. C. Brown, several accepted Christ and the Adventist message. Among those who were baptized in the first group were Leela Lego (Dimbeswor Lego's wife), Mrs. O. Mize, Mrs. Yayong Mize, Mrs. Yadeng Mize, Mr. and Mrs. Tasik Mize, Mr. Tago Takuk, Mr. Barnabas, and few others. They were baptized 200 kilometers away at Ranga Nadi, a river in North Lakhimpur, Assam, in 1974. Also, in 1974, Amak Gamnoh and his wife of Kiyit village, in the East Siang district, were baptized and remained faithful Adventists. Amak passed away in 2014.

In November 1976, a group of 40 Bodos were baptized near the Bhutan border and it was hoped that some of them would take the message to Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>4</sup> The next year it was reported that there were companies of believers on the borders of the state.<sup>5</sup>

In 1978 the government of Arunachal, in order to protect its unique cultural and religious heritage, passed an anti-conversion bill to prevent conversion of the local people to Christianity or to any other foreign religion. Following passage of the bill, evangelistic activity and visits of Adventist missionaries came to a halt.

## Organizational History

When the northeast was separated from the Northern Union and organized as a union in 1984, it had three organized sections (Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Manipur-Nagaland), and two unorganized territories in the states Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, which were attached to the union.<sup>6</sup> These two states were combined into a Himalayan Region and placed under the leadership of P. D. Marak at the school on Barpeta Road.<sup>7</sup> The name was soon adjusted to the Himalayan Area and recognized as a field with headquarters in Guwahati under the directorship of J. N. Topno.<sup>8</sup> In 1987 the name was changed to the Assam Region, but it still included the state of Arunachal Pradesh where there was no activity. The union action also stated that the region would be understood as attached to the union.<sup>9</sup>

In the year 1990, when the Global Mission program was initiated, Pastor C. Aitawna took charge of the Global Mission program of the Northeast India Union. Based on one of the objectives of Global Mission to enter new places, Pastor Aitawna assigned volunteers to Oyan and Pasighat in Arunachal.

In 1999 the union organized the Assam Region and the Arunachal Pradesh Region as separate full-fledged regions<sup>10</sup> and appointed K. A. Shimray as the director of the Assam Region,<sup>11</sup> and C. Aitawna as the director of the Arunachal Pradesh Region.<sup>12</sup> Soon two theology graduates from Spicer Lungaichungpou Golmei and Belum Pashel joined the workforce in Arunachal and the work of the Adventist church in Arunachal began to grow steadily. The first person from Arunachal to study theology at Spicer was Deepak Boro, now son-in-law to Pastor

Aitawna. Upon graduation in 2007, he joined the work force in Arunachal.

Initially the headquarters for Arunachal Pradesh Region was in Pasighat, East Siang District, but in 2014 it was moved to Itanagar, the state capital. The present address is: Arunachal Pradesh Region of SDA, Mowb-II, Itanagar-791111, Papum Pare District, Arunachal Pradesh.

At present there are three ordained pastors (two administrative), four regular evangelists, seven Global Mission Pioneers, and six 1000MM (Thousand Missionary Movement, India) volunteers caring for one organized church, 14 companies, and two isolated congregations. The region operates two mission schools.

## Region Directors

C. Aitawna (1999-2002), C. Tawkthanga (2002-2006), M. Romawia (2006-2011), Belum Pashel (2011-2016), Lalrohlua Fanai (2016-present).

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### NOTES

1. "Arunachal Pradesh Region," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, accessed September 14, 2020, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13212>.

2. G. J. Christo, "Adventists in the Northeast are in the Miri and Abhor Tribes," *Southern Asia Tidings*, January 1970, 13.

3. G. J. Christo, "Northern Union," *Southern Asia Tidings*, January 1974, 26.
  4. G. J. Christo, "Secretary's Report," *Southern Asia Tidings*, February 1977, 9.
  5. G. J. Christo, "Hearing God's Approaching Footsteps," *Southern Asia Tidings*, February 1972, 2.
  6. J. R. L. Astleford, "Northern Union Reorganization," *Southern Asia Tidings*, January 1984, 11-12.
  7. See the "Himalayan Region," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1985, 1986, 321.
  8. "Himalayan Area," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1987, 326.
  9. "Assam Region," *Minutes of the Northeast India Union Committee*, November 23-25, 1987, # 87-103, 52.
  10. "Assam and Arunachal as Full-Fledged Regions," *Northeast India Union Committee Minutes*, March 24-25, 1999, # 99-30, 12.
  11. "Assam Region Director," *Northeast India Union Committee Minutes*, March 31, 1999, # 99-66, 23.
  12. "Arunachal Pradesh Region Director," *Northeast India Union Committee Minutes*, March 31, 1999, # 99-62, 22.
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