

Southern Asia Division

By John M. Fowler

The wide network of schools operated by the SDA Church throughout Southern Asia aims to reach out and touch the lives of thousands of children scattered throughout India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Burma, Nepal, and Bhutan. Within our schools are thousands of non-Christian students—a huge field for evangelism. Most of these students attend the day-school system operated by the church, which operates on a self-supporting basis in large cities and provides Christian education to young people who would otherwise never come to know about Jesus.

The history of Christian education in Southern Asia is a story of undimmed vision, growth, and challenge.

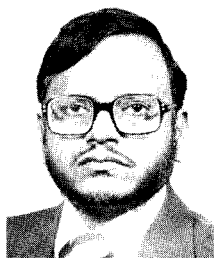
The vision began way back in 1895—just a few years after the first missionaries arrived in Calcutta to carve out a niche for the three angels in this vast undivided subcontinent. One of history's great famines had struck with devastating fury the northeastern plains of India, leaving thousands of orphans. The pioneers of the Adventist church gathered as many orphans as they could in the remote village of Karmatar—170 miles northwest of Calcutta. Out of this orphanage, the Seventh-day Adventist education system took shape. It has spread around the division field until we now have 363 elementary schools, 36 secondary

schools, three junior colleges, two senior colleges (one operating a Master's level program), and scores of church schools dotting the map of Southern Asia.

If the vision was certain, the growth is staggering. The Seventh-day Adventist school system in Southern Asia caters to more than 70,000 young people. Ten years ago, the figure stood at 21,000. At that time the school system employed about 1,000 teachers. Today the figure is more than 3,200.

An important feature of the educational scene in Southern Asia is the examinations conducted by the division department of education. Two types of examinations are conducted: Division High School Certificate examination at the end of the tenth standard of studies; and Division College Eligibility Certificate examination at the end of the twelfth standard of studies. The latter provides eligibility to attend denominational colleges. One of the main reasons for conducting these examinations on an external basis is to overcome the difficulties caused by government examinations that fall on Sabbath, making it difficult for our young people to complete high school. In the past five years nearly 1,800 students have taken these examinations.

Major landmarks of the quinquennium include the various evaluation



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teams that took stock of the educational scene in Southern Asia. As a result, Master's degrees in religion, education, and business administration were introduced at Spicer Memorial College, and arrangements were made with Andrews University to facilitate its conferring the Master's degree on Spicer Memorial College programs. Bangladesh Adventist Seminary was authorized to begin a two-year junior college program.

Five schools were allowed to offer the preuniversity course, thus making them fully recognized secondary schools. Four other schools were recognized as incomplete secondary schools. The evaluation and self-study instruments employed in the division have begun to bear fruit in ensuring quality education and academic planning.

The quinquennium also saw great strides in additional facilities—a new plant in Goalbathan, Bangladesh; additional library and science facilities at Spicer Memorial College; new structures at Lowry Memorial, E. D. Thomas, Flaiz, and Lasalgaon high schools; a new church building at Chuharkana, Pakistan; and many new church schools. The development of Bible textbooks is another major landmark during this period. Thanks to liberal assistance from the General Conference Department of Education, all our schools are able to have Bible textbooks for every grade.

Lakpahana Adventist Seminary in Mailapitiya, Sri Lanka, provides junior college education. In 1982 Bangladesh Adventist Seminary at

Goalbathan, near Dacca achieved the status of a junior college.

The chief higher educational center in the Southern Asia Division still remains Spicer Memorial College, in Poona, which now has a student population of 930.

When the college began its four-year program some 30 years ago, the total student population amounted to a mere 46. At that time only three major fields were offered: religion, education, and business.

The 1984-1985 bulletin offers majors in 27 fields and minors in 41 areas. The college has a faculty of 114, of whom 21 have doctoral degrees and 65 have Master's degrees.

One of the major achievements of higher education in Southern Asia has been the establishment of a graduate program at Spicer.

In 1980 graduate study in religion, education, and business administration was introduced.

Arrangements between the college and Andrews University have provided for the latter to issue degrees for the graduate programs conducted by the college. The first graduates are already in the field, giving leadership to various activities of the church.

The graduate program will be further strengthened by additional facilities now being built on the college campus: a science complex is in progress; library facilities are to be expanded, leading to quadrupling the present facility; and ground for a new church building was broken recently by General Conference President Neal C. Wilson.

The story of the Adventist school system in Southern Asia cannot be told only in bricks and mortar, programs and policies, products and services. When all is said and done, the measure of the Adventist school must ever be on a higher plane. "It is the degree of moral power pervading the [school] that is a test of its prosperity."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 31, 32.

Our schools continue to pursue that moral excellence. Defective though they may be, SDA schools are still the only place of refuge for our children. While we thank God for His guidance and blessings during the past five years, we must be conscious of the challenge of the future: to develop a Christ-conscious core of Adventist teachers; to reach for quality even as the pressure of quantity looms large; to put Christian education within the reach of all; to make our schools Adventist in the true sense of the word; to place the Word of God at the core of the curriculum; and to retain our schools as a true representation of the church.

Toward this challenge, Adventist schools in Southern Asia resolutely direct their efforts.

**NEW CHURCH, PAKISTAN
Adventist Seminary and College.**