



From Sowing to Reaping: An Undimmed Vision

BY GORDON CHRISTO AND S. SUNDARAM

Satya had no family except his grandmother. At birth, his teenage mother died of complications. A few years later, his father was killed in an accident. The grandmother, aged, fragile, and poor, worked on the farm of the village landlord, earned what little she could, and did her best for 10 years to care for Satya—to feed and clothe him, and to send him to the local government school, which was

also a partner in the poverty that shaped that village. A little bit of addition, a little bit of reading, and a little bit of writing the local alphabet is all the education the 10-year-old got. Every Sunday, Satya washed his clothes, bathed in the nearby river, worshiped the god of the village, and then took a long nap under the tree in front of his little hut, even as his grandmother made the best meal of the week—rice with some lentils and a potato thrown in.

The old woman often wondered what would happen to Satya if her days should suddenly be cut short. At such times, she would begin to cry, though she always tried to keep a cheerful countenance while her grandson was nearby.

One hot and dusty summer day, a stranger approached the old woman's hut. He was an Adventist Global Mission volunteer, stopping more for the shade than any great evangelistic motive, but he got the attention of the old



Teacher and students from the Adventist elementary school in Mumbai, India.



Thirty-five young people attended the Pathfinder camp conducted in October 2004 by the Adventist senior secondary school in Hapur, India.

woman. She had lots of time, and the volunteer had much to say. The conversation continued day after day, and eventually included Satya as well. Some three months later, Jesus was welcomed into the hut and became the abiding Companion of the helpless two. Satya, whose name literally means “truth,” seemed to have met Truth at last. He felt himself changing from within. The Way, the Truth, and the Life has a strange way of

transforming ashes into beauty, hopelessness into a triumphal future, and death into life. Soon, Satya and his grandmother were baptized. The Global Mission volunteer did not stop there, but challenged Satya to take a long journey to the Seventh-day Adventist school at Roorkee in northern India.

Now, 14 years later, Satya has graduated from college and has become a servant of *satya*, the Truth. One little candle

lit in a distant village became a beacon of light to many such villages.

Christian education is evangelism at its best—giving hope to the hopeless, light to those in darkness, and gathering the weary, the thirsty, and the tired to the One who can shape and mold the broken pieces of humanity into God’s image, in which they were created.

The school at Roorkee still stands. It can be cited for its manicured lawns, clean and cozy dormitories, students’ tidy uniforms, and teachers and administrators’ commitment to excellence. But more than all these, the school is known as an oasis of character formation, a center of spiritual growth, and above all, an institution where God and people meet each other.

K-12 Successes

But the Roorkee school is not alone. It is just one of the 226 Seventh-day Adventist elementary and secondary schools in the Southern Asia Division (SUD). These schools enroll nearly 90,000 students, taught by some 5,100 teachers. The size of the system is an indication of its extraordinary success in



Boarding students and teachers from the Lasalgaon Seventh-day Adventist Higher Secondary School in Maharashtra, India.

meeting the goal set by the SUD education leadership 10 years ago—making the Adventist presence real in every major city and town in the division. While the goals are not quite reached, what the church has achieved in the past decade is phenomenal in terms of developing quality education and providing a Christ-centered education to thousands of students who, with their parents, would otherwise know little or nothing about the meaning and purpose of Christian education.

Higher Education—A Leap of Faith

One major development in Adventist education during the current quinquennium is the leap of faith that higher education has taken. For nearly 90 years, the entire SUD was served by only one tertiary institution—Spicer Memorial College—but today, five other colleges have sprung up in different union missions of the field. While Spicer remains the division's flagship institution, higher education has taken a sharp and focused



Morning assembly is a regular feature for schools in the Southern Asia Division. These students are enrolled in the division's largest day school, in Ahmedabad, India.

turn in five new locations. The Adventist College of Professional Studies in Surat, north of Bombay, grew out of one

man's belief in what Ellen White wrote long ago: "Something better" ought to be the watchword of Christian educa-



Students from the Adventist school in Aurangabad, India, participate in a temperance rally.

tors. Confident that this was the secret of success, the principal of the Surat Secondary School launched a college for business and computer studies, mainly to hold onto the graduates of his secondary school, many of whom were children of business men. The school grew into a college of professional studies, with tertiary programs in nursing, medical technology, medical transcription,



Adventist school building at Nagpur, India.

and allied health. Surat has the best of facilities, computers, teachers, and professional students—making it indeed a latter-day fulfillment of “something better.”

Five of the seven unions in SUD now have tertiary institutions. These schools train graduates who in turn provide faith-centered education in the secondary and elementary schools throughout the division.

Long Journey—Consistent Purpose

The 90-year-old educational work in the Southern Asia Division has come a long way—from a simple orphanage in the village of Karmatar in northeast India to large institutions that dot the entire map of India. But it still has the same purpose: to serve the hand, the head, and the heart through the One who is the Maker of all. And it still uses the same method: academic excellence combined with spiritual commitment.

While the achievements are abun-

dant and self-evident, the challenges loom ahead in three areas: training Adventist human resources to catch up with the enormous growth on all fronts, turning every institution into a school of the prophets, and expanding the school network into a viable presence in every



Gordon Christo

city and town, so that the name Adventist will be identified with education that saves and serves. Such a challenge, under God's guidance, is indeed the seed of future growth. ✍



S. Sundaram

Gordon Christo is Director of Tertiary Education for the Southern Asia Division (SUD) in Hosur, Tamil Nadu, India. **S. Sundaram** is SUD Director of K-12 Education.



In February 2004, during the Golden Jubilee at the E. D. Thomas Memorial Higher Secondary School in Poondi, India, there was a ribbon cutting to inaugurate a new science lab, girls' hostel, and worship hall.