

BEAS HOSPITAL

Of faith, hope and charity

This model hospital is an oasis of tranquillity in strife torn Punjab, says REENA SAND.

The annual expenditure of the hospital amounts to about 1.25 crore. To meet the expenses, the management has set up a corpus fund, the interest on which provides funds for the hospital. A noteworthy point is that the Satsang has constructed this building and equipped it at the cost of just Rs 8 crore—that too in less than six years. If constructed by any other agency, government or private, the construction costs itself would have run to the tune of a minimum of Rs 25 crore. More than Rs 3 crore (in the form of labour charges) have been saved because of the voluntary seva performed out of love and faith towards Maharaji by the followers. Further, the management succeeded in curbing expenses by setting up its own brick-producing kiln.

In spite of all the good work, the Satsang, the Relief Society and the hospital have maintained an amazingly low profile. There has been almost no mention of the hospital in the media. This is because, explains an official in charge, "We are not interested in publicity. Our aim is to provide free aid to those who cannot afford it."—and not to those who don't want to spend, is perhaps the unspoken implication.

Out of the 300 beds, only 200-odd are being utilised, largely due to a shortage of qualified personnel in spite of the excellent amenities provided to the staff. This is partly because of the terrorist threat in Punjab and partly because of nonavailability of people willing to work in rural areas. However, solutions to such obstacles are being worked out, slowly and steadily.

Yet, the hospital stands as a strong and eloquent testimony to the miracles wrought by faith. An example worth emulating, it proves that humanity still exists in this little Utopia where one gets the kind of treatment that money cannot always buy.

themselves treating more than 2,000 patients. Coloured lines on the walls serve as indicators and sign boards for guiding the uneducated—different coloured lines represent either the lab or the X-ray room. The patient is instructed to merely follow a particular coloured line to reach his destination.

The neatness and hygienic standards maintained by the hospital redefine the word "a charity hospital." Bed sheets and bed linen are changed everyday (the hospital has its own laundry). Patient satisfaction is the top priority. Every patient receives hot food. The food trolleys have provisions for a bed of hot water which can be plugged in to keep the food hot. The food provided both to the patients as well as the relatives is, however, vegetarian. Even egg is taboo. There are rest rooms for the patient's relatives and food is provided at subsidised rates.

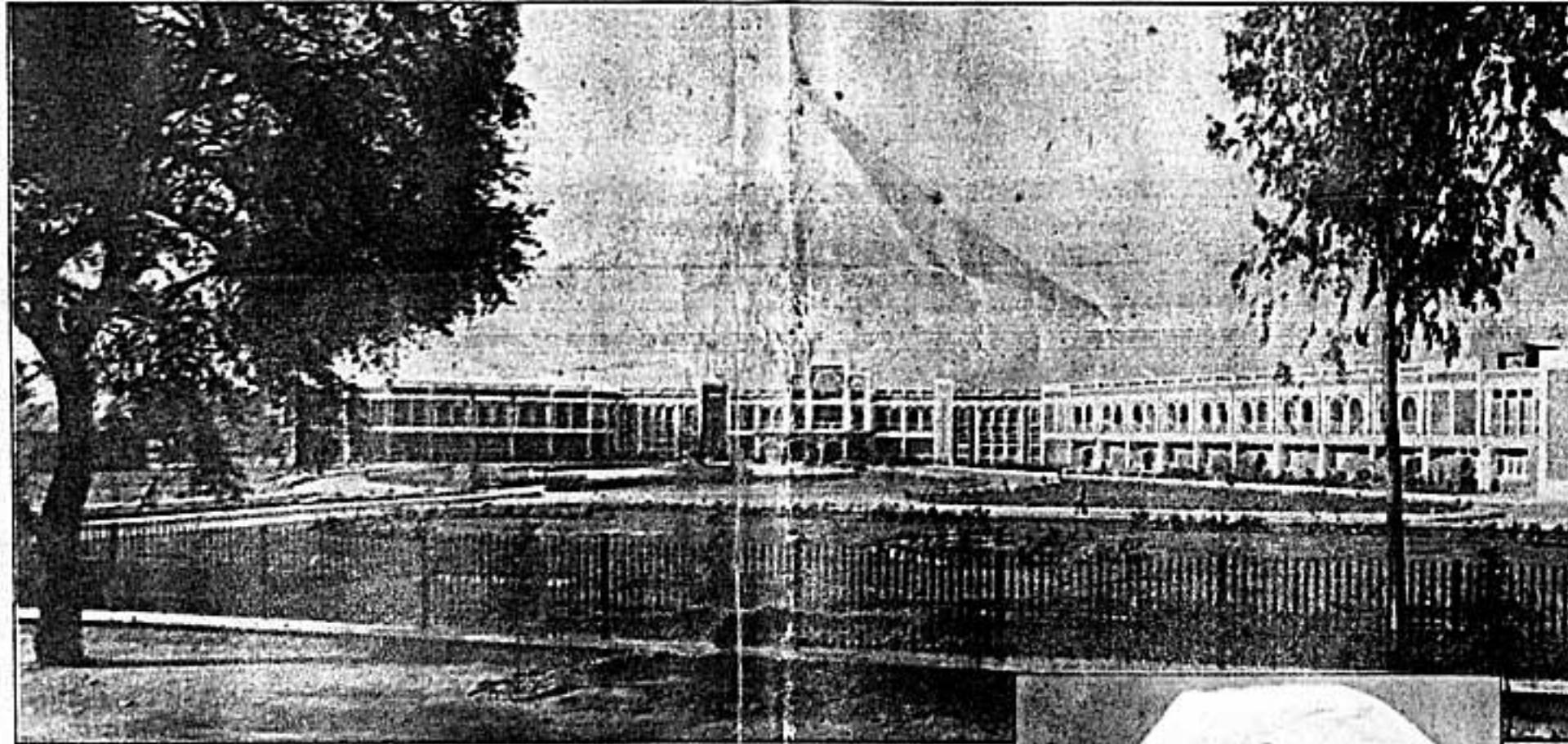
Although the stamp of the Satsang can be felt—by way of the softspoken Radha Soamis working there and the life-sized photographs of the past and present masters—the doors are wide open to people of all communities and religion.

The patient care is, however, just one-half of the story. The hospital complex includes a residential colony for the staffers. Apart from the housing quarters, it also has a day-care creche for working mothers, a school for the children, hostels for bachelors and nurses, a shopping complex and a canteen. Security is stringent. The building is so designed that every section of the complex can be sealed off at any time from the others.

charging a single rupee. The diagnosis and consultations are free. So are medicines, operations and post operative care. Even the numerous blood tests, pathological tests, X-rays—the usual conduits for making money—are free of charge. "Every patient here is a VIP. He has to just walk in with his problems and leave the rest to us," explains an official. In its three years of existence, the MSS hospital has already treated more than five lakh patients for various ailments comprising of chest diseases, fractures, eye problems and their ilk.

Well-equipped both with personnel and equipment, the hospital possesses instruments which even the government hospital at Chandigarh did not have till recently. Apart from the general departments like ophthalmology, ear, throat and nose (ENT), there are also departments dealing with traumatology, orthopaedics, gynaecology, pediatrics and obstetrics. However, the hospital does not have departments to treat cancer, heart surgery and brain-connected ailments. A deliberate omission, point out the hospital officials, as the administrative body felt that presently, there was a greater need for providing to the people of this area basic medical support for common medical problems and minor sicknesses. Thus, the primary aim of this hospital is to provide essential medical relief to the rural folk before embarking on specialised treatments.

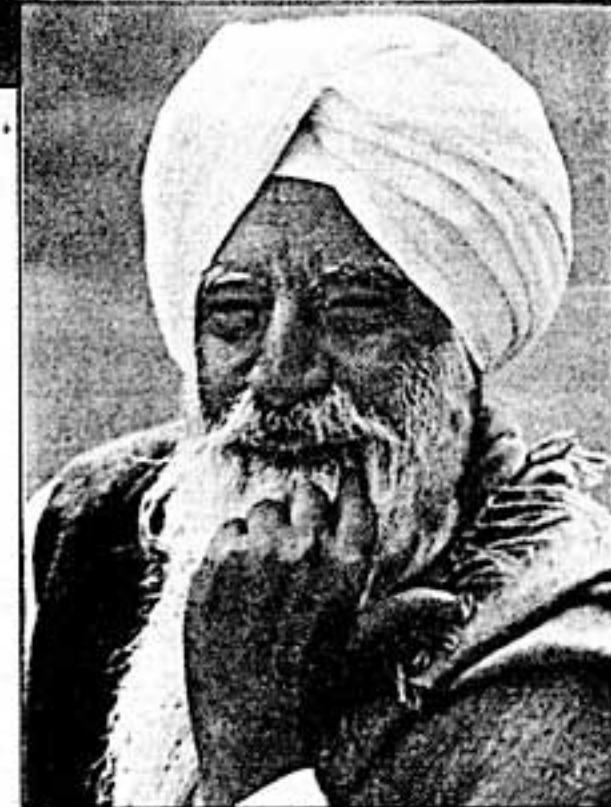
Well-equipped with auditoriums and an operation theatre, the hospital has a well-stocked library with more than 150 journals from all over the world. The architectural planning



of the hospital takes minor details into consideration. The entire building consists of only two floors to facilitate easy movement of the old and infirm. In almost every ward, a set of windows open to a well-manicured lawn, teeming with flowers. Each bed has a headset attached to it with three channels to tune into. There are bedside monitors, neoventilators and a central oxygen, air and suction system. A paging system, similar to the one used in an aircraft, keeps the doctors just a beep away. There's a gym that has apparatus designed to exercise every part of the body.

The Out Patient Department (OPD) staff, equipped to handle 600 to 800 cases per day, find

Guided by love and faith for their guru, the softspoken Radhasoamis working here have given patient care a new dimension. An example worth emulating, it proves that humanity still exists in this little Utopia where every patient is treated like a VIP.



The majestic hospital building (top) and its founder, the late Maharaj Charan Singh (above)

THE SHEER BEAUTY OF THE structure makes it impossible for the eye to miss it. The squalor of the village and the dusty highway around highlights the multi-arched grey and white edifice. A little sign board—dwarfed into invisibility by the huge, wrought iron gates on which it is hung simply reads Maharaj Sawan Singh (MSS) Charitable Hospital.

Just an hour's journey from Amritsar is situated the little village of Beas. In spite of the turmoil and upheaval that Punjab is witnessing, Beas has remained an oasis of peace. And it is here that the hospital is situated.

At a glance, the majestic building resembles anything but a hospital. Huge lawns flank the driveway. Marble flooring, acrylic chairs, well-lit and well-ventilated corridors and a huge bright lobby welcome the visitor. The massive 3,20,000-square feet hospital is situated on a 35-acre green meadow. Built on ex-army land, amidst a profusion of flowers, this hospital is a remarkable feather in the cap of the Sardar Jagat Singh Medical Relief Society—the administrative body of the hospital functioning under the aegis of the Radha Soami Satsang, Beas.

The Satsang, founded by Baba Jaimal Singh, is a religious organisation. The late Maharaj Charan Singh—or Maharaji as he was affectionately known—had been constantly undertaking social welfare projects. The Medical Relief Society has been conducting eye camps for the last 20 years. In fact, it was the eye camps that were the genesis of the hospital. Maharaji realised that the population needed more than just a once-a-year eye camp, point out his followers. Thus was born this hospital which aims at providing the best basic medical facilities to the people of this area.

The 300-bed hospital, which has been functioning since 1986, metes out medical aid without