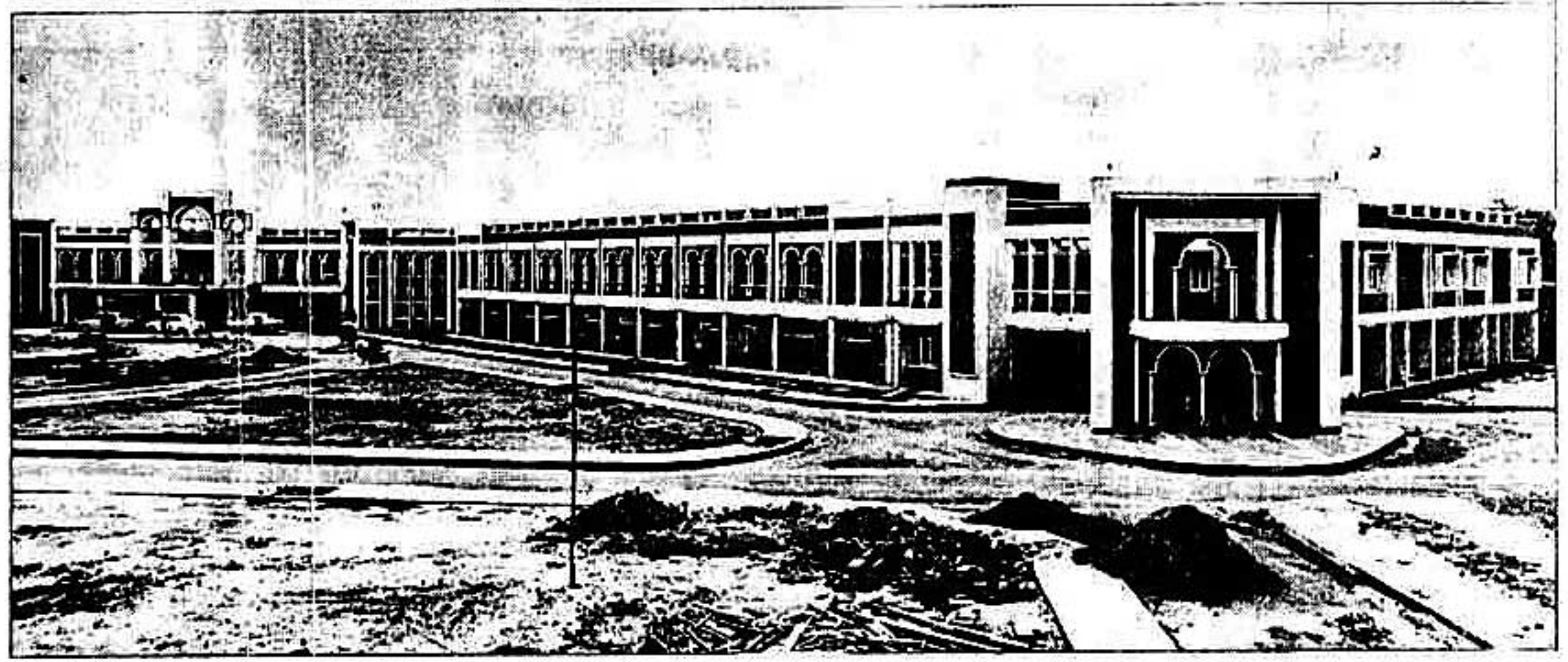


# HOSPITAL FOR HAVENOTS

BY MOHAMMAD VAZEERUDDIN



A FAINT gold light rained down on the green and brown fields as I sauntered along the bank of the placid Beas, taking in the peaceful little houses visible through thin, late verdure and the surging green of the curved white river sweeping beyond the face of nimble trees swaying to the breeze. It all seemed like fine, threaded seaweed pasted over a tinted page.

And then I halted in my tracks. Were they the groans of the sick and the dying that the air had suddenly brought to me, the groans which all but fill the atmosphere of our fair land at the best of times — groans of the poor for whom medicare is not available or, worse, if available, too expensive?

## ROOM FOR HOPE

I retraced my steps and went in the direction from which the "proclamations of agony" (in the words of Sartre) had come. I encountered a family, the faces of some members of which were seamed by small-pox; the eyes of some others were dull and expressionless while the figures of the rest were meagre and constrained. Then I encountered a small girl whose appearance said all: imperfect health and severe pains had apparently clouded the

greater part of her short life. But I got no chance to pity them, for the apparent breadwinner of the groaning family said: "But it is only for a short while that we need to suffer, Saabji, because from January, 1986, a big hospital will start functioning here — a hospital so big that it might attract quite a few even of the poor patients who now flock to the P.G.I. at Chandigarh."

Yes, Maharaj Sawan Singh Charitable Hospital, coming up on a 35-acre plot on the G.T. Road right in front of the Beas railway station, will start functioning in January next. The foundation stone of the hospital, whose built-up area is about 2,50,000 square feet, was laid on January 21, 1980.

Why did it need six years to build and become functional? Mr K. S. Narang, a retired I.A.S. officer who is now the Administrator of the hospital, said: "Such a big hospital would have taken many more years before it became functional but for generous and voluntary donation of labour by the satsangis, both skilled and unskilled. Besides, we took minute care of the minutest detail."

## DESIGN

For instance, Dr P. R. Sondhi, a former Medical Superin-

tendent of the P.G.I. and retired Director of Health Services, Haryana, who had supervised the construction of several hospitals in Haryana, collaborated with Dr Tampler, Professor of Hospital Architecture in the University of Georgia in the U.S.A., to make sure that this hospital was so designed as to be of the utmost utility to those visiting it.

But what did the design of a hospital have to do with utility? Mr Narang replied: "The front side of the hospital will house the outpatient department. The inpatient wards will have 300 beds and will be located east to west to prevent the summer sun from heating up the rooms and to ensure that the winter sun will warm them. Besides, all wards are air-cooled."

The outpatient and emergency departments are at right angle to this ward block and the entrance is at the point where these two departments meet. Behind these blocks, the departments of radiology, physiotherapy, maternity, as also the laboratory, operation theatre, kitchen and laundry, will be located. A boiler room to produce steam for the kitchen, a pharmacy where all intravenous solutions will be prepared, a power substation providing 1,200 KVA connec-

tion, the central store and an incinerator will be located at the rear of the building.

## EYE DISEASES

Mr Narang said: "As the plan for the hospital grew out of the eye camps that have been held now in Dera Baba Jaimal Singh for 19 years, specialised treatment for eye ailments will be provided by the hospital. Besides, 80 out of the 300 beds have been earmarked for those suffering from eye diseases and modern equipment, both indigenous and imported, will be available to them."

Surgery, paediatrics, gynaecology and obstetrics, otolaryngology, traumatology,

orthopaedics and cardiology will be the most noteworthy departments. A coronary care unit and provision for treatment of tropical diseases are also contemplated. A highly streamlined intensive care service and an operation theatre the air in which will be filtered to prevent pollution will be the other highlights.

## ENDOWMENT

A modern central sterile system department will feed five operation theatres. The emergency department will be able to attend to 10 persons at a time. The need for a resuscitation room near the emergency ward, modern laboratories and a blood bank

has not been overlooked either. Quarters inside the hospital complex for most members of the staff are commodious and comfortable.

I recalled to myself the meeting I had had with Maharaj Charan Singh, Head of the Radha Soami Satsang, the brain behind the hospital, a man with a healing touch. Religion consists in doing justice, in loving mercy and in making our fellow creatures happy and healthy. The saint of Beas is not a stained-glass image but one who works for his fellowmen and endeavours to establish a new relationship of loving kindness among them, regarding every individual's

need as a sufficient claim on his generosity.

All the same, the journalist in me could not refrain from asking a rather delicate question. Since the hospital is primarily, though not wholly, meant for the poor rural folk, where would the money come from to keep it going? Mr Narang said: "An endowment fund of Rs 10 crore has been created. It will yield an annual interest of about Rs 2 crore with which the hospital can easily be kept going."

While the hospital will no doubt prove to be a boon to the people not only of Beas but of

the whole of India, it will be different from many other hospitals in one respect: the spirit of sacrifice that it has already aroused in many.

For instance, Dr Joshi is one of the best known heart specialists in India who was earning about Rs 20,000 per month in the Birla Institute of Chest Diseases in Delhi. He chucked the job and has come to join the Maharaj Sawan Singh Charitable Hospital where he can never hope to earn as much as he did earlier. But if money-making were the end-all and be-all of life, so many poor people of Beas would not work free for the construction of the hospital, would they?