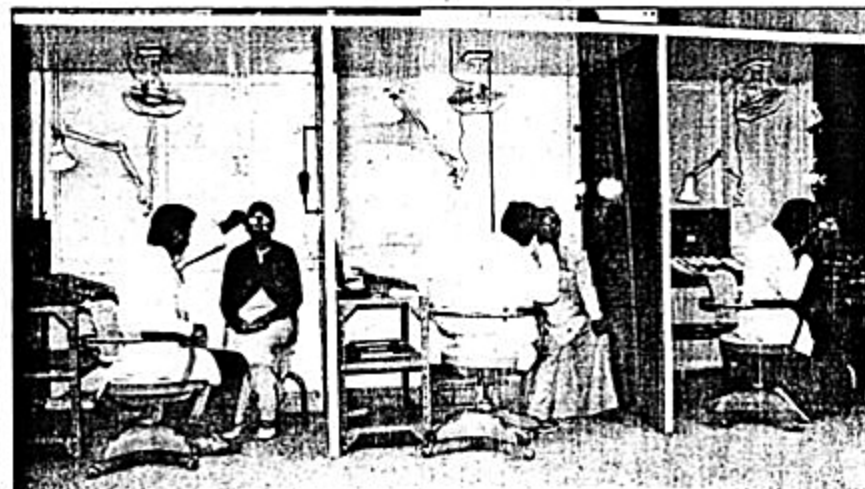


Photograph : Gurnukh Bahari

TO SERVE WITH LOVE

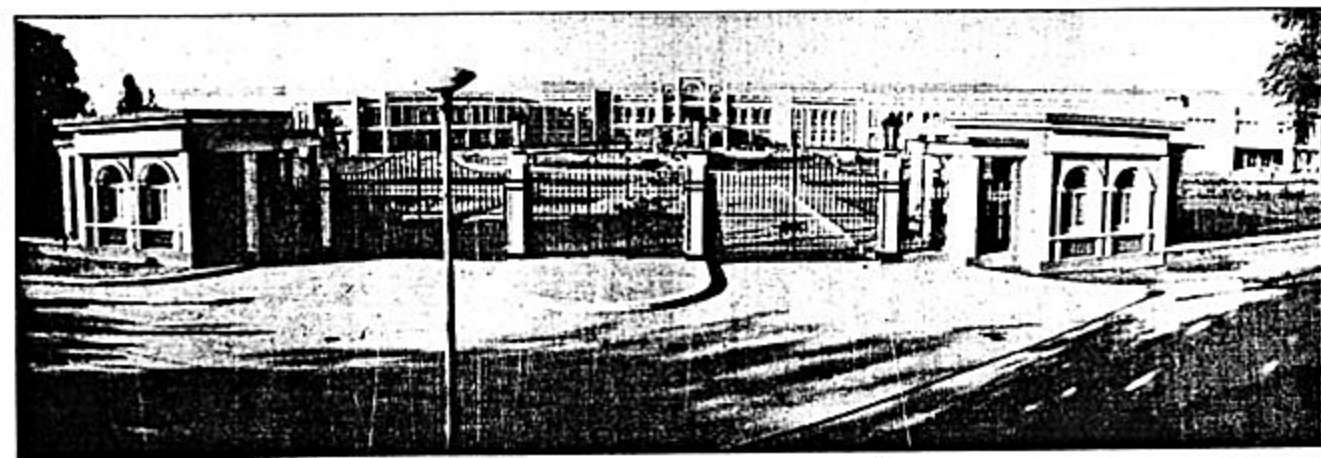
In the Maharaj Sawan Singh charitable hospital in Dera, even the common man is treated like a VIP. Equipped with some very sophisticated machines, this hospital has given free treatment to lakhs of people in the two years of its existence

RAJU RAMCHANDANI



Huzur Maharaj Charan Singh supervising the construction of the hospital.

The hospital has all modern facilities.



The soil around, crystal clear waters of the Beas, beautiful landscape, all capture the heart and mind of the visitor who has come all the way to the peaceful hermitage of His Holiness Maharaj Charan Singh, the present Sant Satguru of Radhasoami Satsang, Beas. This beautiful colony on the banks of the river Beas, known as Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, breathes an atmosphere of peace, bliss and spiritual fervour. And amidst these enchanting surroundings is the nine-crore Maharaj Sawan Singh Charitable Hospital, built brick by brick by the *sewa* of Radhasoami followers.

But before we move to the hospital let us go back to the source of all this. Yes, it is Maharaj Charan Singh. Born on December 12, 1916, Maharaj Charan Singh took a degree in law and practised for some years. But soon realised that the Lord had sent him to this earth for a divine mission. He was chosen to succeed Sardar Bahadur Singh in 1951.

In the Dera, Huzur Maharaj Charan Singh holds *Satsang* (spiritual discourses) in which he explains texts from the different scriptures by Kabir Saheb, Guru Nanak, Swamiji, Tulsi Saheb, Nam Dev, Maulana, Christ and saints from various religions. He also initiates seekers into his fold. He explains that initiation is no ritual. It is the awakening of the soul to seek the lord within from whom it has been separated for millions of years and is moving in the cycle of birth and death. A devotee is required to be pious and must abstain from alcohol and meat, and devote at least about two and a half hours each day in meditation.

Branches of Maharaj's *Satsangs* are spread all over the world. In Bombay he has been personally giving *Satsang* to the Sangat in early December. People come from all over, both India and abroad, to join in the *Satsang* which is very well organised. On an average 3,500 to 4,000 people are initiated every year in Bombay alone. There are over 1,200 foreigners, who come especially for the Maharaj's *darshan* and *Satsang*. For these devotees, special *Satsangs* are held in English.

According to the Master, to realise God one need not observe external formalities such as fast, pilgrimage or adopt any particular style of dress or withdraw from society. Nor does one have to shun one's household or official responsibilities. It is *sewa* (service to mankind) that is important. This *sewa* teaches one to develop humility and to do away with one's ego. All classes of people, rich and poor, do *sewa* 'together'. That's the reason why Maharaj Charan Singh started *Mitti* (earth) *sewa* where all the people willing to do *sewa* joined together

Even the general wards have special amenities like air coolers. Everything from food to medicines is free here. An average of Rs six per outpatient is spent each day

to build buildings and houses around the Dera and also help in the annual eye camps. Since the inception of the eye camps years ago, about 5,000 patients are being operated every year, mainly for cataract. This annual feature eventually led to the building of a 300-bed hospital at Beas, where all the poor and needy of the neighbourhood and rural areas are treated, absolutely free of charge, every day.

This unique institution known as Maharaj Sawan Singh Charitable Hospital, is built on a 35-acre plot. It has come to be known as a 'hospital where the common man is a VIP'. The building's architecture which is an art in itself is one of the best known structure in a rural setting.

The Rs nine-crore hospital, in its

first two years of existence, has successfully treated over one lakh outdoor patients for various ailments and disabilities, without any distinction of caste, creed, colour or race, and free of cost. In addition to this is the independent dental wing, a developed cardiology clinic and an ophthalmology department which have gained a good reputation in a very short span.

The hospital which was constructed with utmost devotion and love by the '*sewa*' of Radhasoami followers, is the outcome of the hard work of the *sewadars* themselves, who, along with a handful of few paid labourers, a few professionals like senior masons, architects, and engineers, made this dream come true. The hospital claims to possess some very sophisticated equipment (some of which is not available in India) which has been donated by followers of the Maharajji from abroad. Even the general wards have special amenities like air coolers. Everything from food to medicines is free here. A real heaven on earth! An average of Rs six per outpatient is spent each day. The average expenditure on an indoor patient, which includes meals, is Rs 30.

Unlike government hospitals there has never been a shortage for blood and no patient has ever died for want of blood. Blood donation is a voluntary and regular feature here.

A small township that has sprung within the complex houses the 800-strong staff of doctors, nurses and other voluntary workers.

The Dera recently provided shelter to 1,406 persons, who have been uprooted from as many as 108 villages in the wake of terrorism. These refugees include, Sikhs, Hindus and even Muslims.

Food, shelter and every possible amenity is provided for the needy here. Selfless work with utter devotion and dedication continues at the Dera day in and day out, peacefully, in spite of the troubled atmosphere prevailing in the Punjab. Thanks to the Guru and his *sewadars* for bringing peace to this little patch in the globe.