
A STORY OF A FRIGHTENED HORSE, VICEROY'S WIFE AND MEDICAL CARE IN PESHAWAR

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ABSTRACT: *The main purpose of this paper is how often some little happening in life make them history. Lady Reading Hospital Peshawar is one of the best example in sub-continent when first lady wife of viceroy came here and in the beginning of the 20th century the biggest public hospital in Peshawar and the whole Frontier was Egerton Hospital built in 1854 (Gazetteer 1997-98: 259) in Shehbaz da Khu (south of the present Qissa Khawani Bazaar), which had 42 male and 12 female beds (Gazetteer, 2002: 76). S M Jaffar compares this specious and monumental building with the Mew hospital of Lahore (Jaffar S M 1945:133). And if we believe the story, all that was given a start by a frightened horse.*

KEYWORDS: frightened horse, viceroys wife, lady reading hospital

INTRODUCTION

It is often said that in order to find something you have to search for it. If you look around attentively, perhaps you will encounter a fascinating piece of heritage right in the midst of the ordinary life. Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar is an example. Lady Reading Hospital is one of the leading and largest hospitals of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is located immediately to the south of Bala Hisar Fort and west of Ander Sher Bazaar in Peshawar city, with its gates facing east, south and west. Lady Reading Hospital frequently appears in the news in connection with blasts and sad statistics of casualties. It is teeming with patients and attendants at any time of day and night.

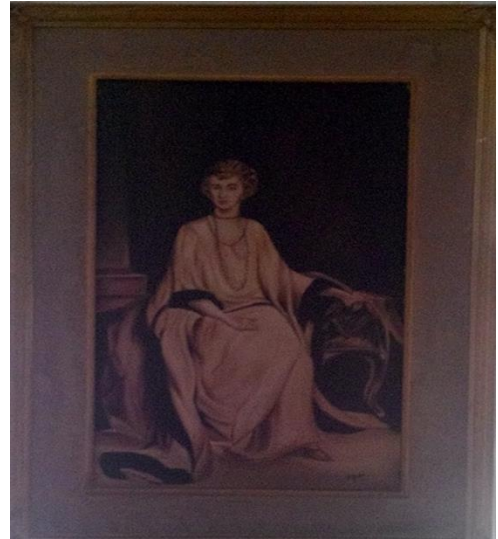
However, if you choose to explore its territory in depth, then right in the centre of the hospital you will stumble upon Bolton Block – a spacious double-storey building in colonial style, named after former Commissioner of Peshawar. Its verandah is supported by square pillars tapering in shape and it is supported and adorned by heavy guarders and beams. Inside steps lead to the verandah and rooms of the first storey, which is shielded by a balustrade of white wooden planks. The building is topped with a four-faced clock.

Looking at this remnant of old Peshawar will prompt a curious visitor to further explore the history of the hospital, which is quite interesting by it. Since the time immemorial till the advent of British Raj all diseases in the Indian subcontinent were treated by hakims - practitioners of traditional herbal medicine. Mughal time historical records points out that there were two types of hakims – court hakims and common hakims. During the British period hospitals and dispensaries were established in different cities of India and doctors were appointed for the treatment of general public. In the beginning of the 20th century the biggest public hospital in Peshawar and the whole Frontier was Egerton Hospital built in 1854 (Gazetteer 1997-98: 259) in

Shehbaz da Khu (south of the present Qissa Khawani Bazaar), which had 42 male and 12 female beds (Gazetteer, 2002: 76).

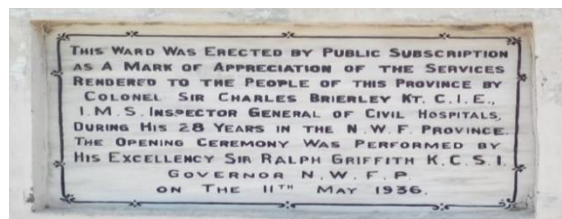
Frightened horse:

There is an anecdotal story about how Lady Reading Hospital came into existence. According to it, in early 1920s Lord Reading, Viceroy of India in 1921-26, happened to visit Peshawar. He was accompanied by his wife, Lady Reading. During their visit they lodged in Bala Hisar fort. Lady Reading, curious about the life of the inhabitants of Peshawar, wanted to see the city more closely. However, while she was returning back to the fort, her horse got frightened, Lady Reading fell and was badly hurt (Imran R I 2002: 295). There was no doctor available to tend to her on the spot; furthermore, the facilities in Egerton Hospital one of the important hospital of that time where she was taken, were also unsatisfactory. Finally, Lady Reading was shifted to Royal Artillery Hospital (presently CMH Peshawar), where she received appropriate treatment. This incident and its impact made construction of a modern hospital in Peshawar a pressing necessity for the local authorities.



Construction of Lady Reading Hospital:

A committee headed by Dr. Hakimullah Jan was constituted to establish a District Headquarters hospital. The funds for its establishment came mostly from donations – Lady Reading donated Rs. 50,000, a religious scholar named Haji Tor Qul donated Rs. 15,000, Nawab Akbar Khan of Peshawar donated Rs. 10,000. There were also contributions from the merchants of Peshawar. The new hospital intended to be a district head quarter hospital was constructed in place of camel, bullocks and elephant lines (Fil Khana) adjacent to Bala Hisar Fort (Dani A H 2002: 26). Its main building, known as Bolton



block was inaugurated in 1927 (Nadiem I H, 2007: 27-28, Khan A A 2009: 88). Initially the hospital had the capacity of 150 beds, but by 1930 it was expanded to 200 beds. Looking the requirements of the region a new tent shape high double storey building was inaugurated in 1936. The marble inscription stated that the opening ceremony of this building was performed by Sir Ralph Griffith the then Governor of NWFP the present Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. S M Jaffar compares this specious and monumental building with the Mew hospital of Lahore (Jaffar S M 1945:133).

With

establishment of Khyber Medical College of Peshawar University, in 1955 Lady Reading Hospital acquired the status of teaching hospital. From four wards – Medical, Surgical, ENT and T.B. in 1955 the hospital presently expanded to 1450 beds and 26 teaching units, with more than 4500 people receiving treatment daily in the wards, OPD and emergency combined... And if we believe the story, all that was given a start by a frightened horse.



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