

The legacy behind Shikarpur's historic hospital

Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro | 22nd June 2025

The RB Udhawdas Tarachand Hospital reflects a forgotten chapter of Sindh's philanthropic past



Main entrance to Rao Bahadur Udhawdas Tarachand Hospital, Shikarpur. — Photos by the author

Philanthropy has long been a vital force in shaping the social and healthcare landscape of Sindh. Community-driven initiatives played a crucial role in establishing schools, hospitals and community centres. The contributions of local philanthropists increased significantly over time.

Hospitals were part of the colonial infrastructure in Sindh. These were established by the British and supported by local philanthropists and religious communities.

Shikarpur was recognised as the city of philanthropists who contributed to the development of the city's social welfare, healthcare and other development works. Their philanthropic efforts provided Shikarpur with some of the best facilities and amenities in the colonial era. One of the outcomes of charitable activities was the construction of Rao Bahadur Udhawdas Tarachand Hospital.

This hospital was established through the dedicated efforts of Rai Bahadur Udhawdas Tarachand. He made every effort and collected donations for the construction of the hospital. While entering the hospital from the main road, one notices his name written on the arched entrance of the hospital. As one enters the hospital, one also notices a pedestal where once his statue stood. On either side of the pedestal are found two marble memorials with inscriptions in Sindhi and English. They read: "late lamented Rao Udhawdas Tarachand aged 73 years who died like a devoted martyr on 18th January 1943 at Sir Harkishandas Hospital in Bombay where he had gone to collect funds for this hospital founded by him for which he had dedicated his life like a devotee of divine temple."

As one moves from there to the hospital entrance, the name is found written on the floor. Everyone steps over this name after ascending the stairs. Why was it written on the floor? There could be several reasons. One possible explanation is that he wanted to set aside his pride. The names of donors are often found on the walls or floors of both religious and secular buildings in Sindh and elsewhere.

Upon entering the hospital, visitors can notice foundation and inauguration plaques prominently displayed on both the right and left walls of the main portico. These plaques often commemorate significant

milestones in the hospital's history, such as the date of its establishment and important events that contributed to its opening. They provide valuable insights into the hospital's legacy, the individuals involved in its creation and the community's collective support to sustain it. Observing these plaques can reveal how collective efforts and donations contributed to the establishment of this hospital.

One learns from the foundation plaque, fixed on the left wall of the main entrance, that it is believed to have been laid by HT Sorely, the then collector of Sukkur, on April 30, 1933. He likely played a significant role in encouraging people to contribute to the hospital's construction. Along with other prominent individuals from Shikarpur and British officials, he helped facilitate the smooth progress of the project. It is believed that the Shikarpur Municipality donated Rs 25000 and allocated land for the hospital. According to Naqsh Nayyab Mangi (2004), the author of Shikarpur: Hik Abyas, Shikarpur municipality also purchased land for Rs 23,000 for the hospital.

The second plaque on the right of the wall of the entrance provides information on the inaugural. Following the completion of the hospital, a formal inauguration ceremony was conducted on February 2, 1935. This event was graced by the presence of Lord Brabourne, the then governor of Bombay, in Shikarpur.

Before I discuss the names of the donors displayed on the plaques, I would like to mention the names of the RB Udhawdas Tarachand Hospital Construction Committee, which was constituted to ensure the smooth management of the complex aspects of hospital construction, including budgeting, timelines, and other related issues. Moreover, it could address potential challenges early on, promoting transparency and accountability until its completion. The most notable of Shikarpur were included in the committee. Its members included:

Diwan Bahadur Murlidhar JP (Chairman)

KB Allah Bux

RS Kishansing Chimansing Lulla

The collector, or their nominee

GG Drewe (administrator of Shikarpur Municipality)

RB Udhawdas Tarachand Chhabria

Seth Har Bhagwandas Dhanoomal Bathija

Seth Gobindgsing Hassasing

Seth Doulatram Mohandas Chhabria

A representative of Seth Chellasing Satramsing (either Seth Isarsing or Lachmandas)

Seth Gobindram Udhawdas Chhabria

KV Joshi (Honorary secretary, chief officer and engineer)

The sub-divisional officer

KP Soni

Moreover, the committee included honorary workers, including:

Seth Bashasing Chimansing Lulla

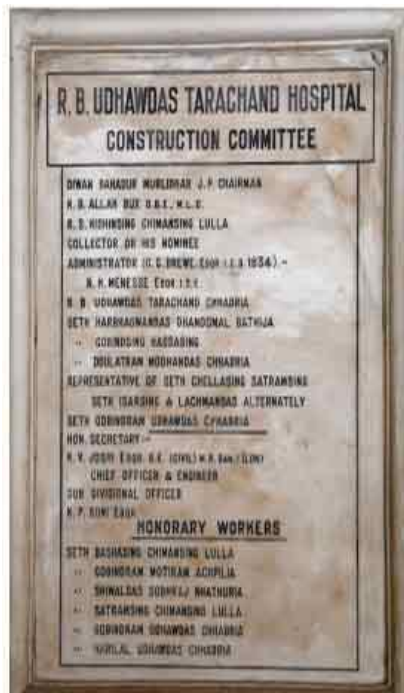
Seth Gobindram Motiram Achpilia

Seth Shiwaldas Sobhraj Khathuria

Seth Satramsing Chimansing Lulla

Seth Gobind Udhawdas Chhabria

Seth Harilal Udhawdas Chhabria



Plaque of R.B Udhawdas Tarachand Hospital Construction Committee.



Rao Bahadur Udhawdas Tarachand Hospital, Shikarpur.

Hospitals were part of the colonial infrastructure in Sindh. These were established by the British and supported by local philanthropists and religious communities.

The entrance walls of the hospital display donor plaques featuring the names of contributors. The hospital is named after its major donor, Rao Bahadur Udhawdas Tarachand, who donated Rs 100,000. Other contributors are also listed on the plaques, which includes the amounts they contributed toward the hospital's construction. Two donor plaques are fixed on the wall together. Some of the names on the first donor plaque includes Swami Bava Khatwalla Ramdas Saheb (Rs 501), Rao Bahadur Udhawdas Tarachand Chhabria (Rs 100,000), Seth Har Bhagwandas Dhannomal Bhathija (Rs 25,000), Seth Hassasing Tahilsing Chug (Rs 20,000), Seth Doulatram Mohandas Chhabria (Rs 15,000), Seth Chellasing Satramsing Issarsing and Lachmandas (Rs 15,000), Seth RS Kishinsing Bashasing sons of Seth Chimansing Lulla (Rs 5,000), Seth

Lalchand Tekchand Mata (Rs 5,000), Seth Menghraj Dwarkadas Nangpal (Rs 5,000), Seth Khushiram RB Udhawdas Chhabria (Rs 5,000) and others.

One can also notice the names of female donors on this plaque, including Mai Bhagwani Bai, wife of Ramchand Jaising (Rs 3,500), Shrimati Padima Bai, wife of Diwan Hassanand Bhatia (Rs 2,000), Rukmani Bai, wife of Seth Naraindas Radha Kishandas Lulla (Rs 2,501), Shrimati Ramdevi, daughter of Khushiram (Rs 1,001), Shrimati Pahuch Bai, mother of Kanyalal Dipchand and Kaki Bai, wife of Sugnomal and mother-in-law of Kanyalal Dipchand. Not only Hindu females generously donated, but also Muslim women, most notably Lady Nusrat Haji Sir Abdoola (Rs 7,000). Her name appears on the second plaque of donors of General Free Ward and Laboratory. On this second donor plaque, a few names of Hindu female donors also appear. The most notable Hindu female donor was Shrimati Kalavati Bai (Rs 1,000), wife of Gobindram. Other names include Shrimati Devi Bai, wife of Seth Tirathdas Khatanmal Sharaf (Rs 1,000) and Shrimati Vira Bai, wife of RS Sanwaldas Jaising (Rs 1,000).

Social capital played an essential role in securing donations. Rao Bahadur Udhawdas adeptly leveraged it to expand his social network and those of his friends, thereby increasing contributions. This was crucial not only for the construction of the hospital but also for its management, as the meagre resources provided by the municipality were insufficient to cover the salaries of doctors and other medical staff. To gather donations, Rao Bahadur visited various towns in Sindh and Balochistan and made several trips to Bombay. One of the donor plaques displays the names of all the contributors from the city of Bombay. This particular plaque lists the contributors along with the amounts they donated. The list is quite extensive, so I will only share the total donations. The plaque indicates that Rs 30,333 was received from citizens of Bombay and Rs 7,837 from the sale of tickets for a performance.

Various wards, halls, wings and other rooms in the hospital carry the names of the donors. The waiting hall of the hospital displays the name

Shrimati Uttam Bai, wife of Seth Daultram Mohandas Chharbia. The wards are named after Seth Lunidaram Utamchand Gabo, Seth Kewalram, Parsram, Jawaharmal, sons of Vehromal Ahuja; Seth Menghraj Dwarkadas Nagpal; Kishandevi Udhawdas Chhabria (the wife of Rao Bahadur Udhawdas Tarachand); Seth Shwindas, Gurmukhdas Karamchandani Jhangchitih Taraiwala of Taluka Garhi Yasin and others. This indicates that the donors were not only from Shikarpur town but also from various other villages and towns in the district. Taraiwala refers to Tarai village in Shikarpur's Garhi Yasin taluka. The operating theatre of the hospital was named after Seth Har Bhagwandas Dhanoomal Bhatija.

Extensions in the hospital were named after major donors, such as the Seth Hassasing Tahilsing Wing. More importantly, residences were also provided for doctors and other staff on the hospital premises.

Rao Bahadur Udhawdas Tarachand dedicated his life to serving the community by building the hospital. His concerted efforts, supported by his family, friends, and the community, transformed the healthcare facilities of Shikarpur. The construction of the hospital was made possible through donations from wealthy Hindu traders, Muslim nobles and assistance from the Shikarpur Municipality.

Kishandevi Udhawdas, the wife of Rao Bahadur Udhawdas Tarachand, also played a crucial role in helping her husband. Patients who visit the hospital cannot overlook the photographs of Shrimati Kishandevi Udhawdas and Rao Bahadur Udhawdas Tarachand, which serve as reminders of their contributions to the community. Furthermore, the donor plaques in the hospital do more than acknowledge generosity; they represent individuals engaging in philanthropy to foster relationships and goodwill within the community. By publicly recognising these donors, the founder of the hospital not only honoured their contributions but also encouraged a culture of giving, which often inspires others to participate in philanthropic activities.

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