

# Bradlauch Hall waiting for a patron

LAHORE, Sept 24: The historic Bradlauch Hall at Rattigan Road and caretaker of its Milli Techniqui Idara have grown old and feeble in the hope of some sort of financial help which is still not coming from anywhere.

The hall was built in 1900 and was once the centre of political activities by the Lahore's Hindu population, serving as a major platform for the All India Congress to advance its ideas in this part of the then British India.

Now, the echoes of speeches by political leaders like Jawahar Lal Nehru have been replaced by the noise of occasional fluttering of the wings of pigeons shifting places in the desolate building which literally looks like a haunted house.

Bradlauch Hall is surrounded by new and old residential quarters, hiding it from the full public view. The narrow street leading to it from the main Rattigan Road is unpaved as is the small ground in front of it. The old and dingy quarters where workers used to live before independence is now occupied by poor families.

The equally dingy plot in front of the hall is a playground for children and a resting place for old women of the locality who pass time by watching visitors from their cots.

The structure of the hall is in its original shape but the corrugated tin roof and the iron pillars providing support to it are profusely rusted. Plaster from the brick walls has come off and the



floor is broken and unswept.

The dominating damp smell and the calm appear to be mysterious and give the feeling of an ancient tomb, burying glory of the past.

The side wooden gate is broken and left opened perhaps forever in the hope of the arrival of some patron some day.

The only visitors to this now deserted place are students of nearby schools who get tuition in the afternoon from some part time teachers and a few youngsters given computer training on

the platform of the Milli Techniqui Idara in the evening.

And the only so-called modern facility is the inadequate tube-light and ceiling fans whose electricity bill, too, is a burden on the old, ill but informed Muhammad Rafique Chishti, a former student of the Idara and now its honorary caretaker-cum-treasurer.

The Milli Techniqui Idara was established by some former engineering students of the Aligarh University in October 1953. They began by holding free classes in borrowed rooms of the Muslim

Model High School in February 1954 and followed the courses of the City and Guilds of London Examination in Electrical Engineering. The syllabus of the then Punjab Government Electrical Supervisor's Examination was also adopted.

But this arrangement could not advance any further because the school management asked for the classes to be shifted elsewhere. This was a real problem which soon was resolved when the authorities allotted the Bradlauch Hall to the Idara in 1957. Before

that the place was a garner of the food department and the cleaning and repairing was simply a love affair which everybody would perform as a divine task.

The Idara continued to educate young people, enabling them to serve the country and earn for themselves for many years. The service was free as no teacher would demand fee. But gradually it started fading out and the team of pioneers getting old. It finally stopped working in 1980.

The Idara's first seven-member honorary governing body was

headed by Dr Qazi Saeeduddin Ahmad. Its members included Mr Masoodur Rehman Chaudhry (registrar), Mr Abdul Wadood Khan (treasurer), Mr Ghulam Kibria, Mr R N Batra, Mr Mumtaz Husain Qureshi and Mr Muhammad Rafique Chishti (now the care-taker).

Right now, the few among the pioneers are alive but are above 80. Mr Ghulam Kibria is in Karachi and Mr Abdul Wadood Khan in Saudi Arabia.

Mr Chishti, too, finds it hard to manage the Idara's affairs



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because of his failing health. But the spirit of the initial days is still young in him. He admits that the main thing the Idara has been doing is to keep the Bradlaugh Hall under its possession.

Still, he has a plan to give a new life to the Idara by running it on no-profit no-loss basis. The Idara can be restarted by charging nominal fees from the students to pay for the salary of the teachers and the utility bills. But he stares blankly when asked as to how this would happen. —  
**Staff Reporter**