CHAPTER XI
SONDHI'S PRINCIPALSHIP
(1939–1945)

Dunnicliff was succeeded by Guru Datt Sondhi, the first old boy of the College to become its Principal. Sondhi had joined the College in 1905 and left with an M.A. degree in History in 1911. As a student he had played an important role in sports as well as dramatics and had held every important office in the College. In 1910, The Ravi wrote of him as follows: ‘the first word that he uttered was sticks....he wisely determined not to waste his time by going to school but to employ it in learning hockey, swimming, running and Mark Antony’s oration. In his leisure moments, he paints pictures, wears beautiful clothes and takes himself seriously.’* From here he passed on to the Trinity College, Cambridge where he studied for a degree in History and Economics and was elected President of the Indian Majlis. Back in 1914, he served as Principal, Holkar College, Indore for about two years and joined the Government College as Professor of Economics in 1917. He was best known as teacher of Political Science, a subject he used to teach with the help of a musty note-book which was believed to contain notes on the subject as well as hints for dramatising the ideas he wished to emphasize. On the extra-mural side, he led the movement for open air theatre, organized some international teams and worked indefatigably for the College Dramatic Club.

*After reproducing these lines the Editor of The Ravi (November, 1931) added: He takes himself seriously even now, but not only in his leisure moments!
G. D. SONDHI
Principal (1939–1945)
Sondhi was a lover of youthfulness and open air. In his morning rounds in the College estate, he used to examine plants and flowers intently and talk to gardeners at length. His ideal student was not a book-worm, but a sportsman. He had no liking for 'tedious looking scholars working in dingy libraries and seldom visible in sports fields, gardens and theatres'. He loved to discourse on the role of games in training human character and used to lay unusual emphasis on this aspect of Platonic philosophy in his classes. For him the best teacher was a smart man of affairs and not a profound scholar with sunken eyes. He propounded these views in his first Annual Report in the following words: 'A good teacher is one whose sole interests are not confined to the College. Other interests he must have beyond immediate ones, for these interests are not only good in themselves but serve to make him a better teacher, give him wider experience of life, endow him with self-confidence and enable him to impart richness to his teaching. Such work acts as an antidote to the deadening monotony of lecture work by providing opportunities for creative activity, the only satisfying activity in life'. He seemed to assume that teaching work invariably suffered from monotony and that creative activity was alien to book learning. 'To irrigate with useful and interesting work the arid regions of book learning has been my aim throughout', he stated in his last Report.

Sondhi had some insight into the problems of students and had his own solutions for each one of them. The student community of these days was afflicted with a vague and undefinable unrest. Sondhi traced this feeling to the concentration of collegiate education in large towns which compelled students to live away
from their parents. Missing the interest and sympathy of his parents, the young scholar fell an easy prey to extraneous influences and became an alien to his own heritage. This, Sondhi thought, created a gulf between the old generation and the new. The teacher, who could perhaps interpret the ideas of one to the other, discovered that his authority was repudiated sooner than that of the parent’s.

Education is essentially a bipolar process. No teacher can teach and no student can learn without a meeting of minds. Minds will not meet if the teacher is not sympathetic towards the pupils and the pupils are not respectful towards the teacher. Rising numbers had widened the gulf between the teacher and taught with the result that the College ceased to be the determining factor in the formation of pupils’ character. The proctorial system had earned a well deserved odium. It could not be applied successfully to non-residential institutions in a city of the size of Lahore. Some of the proctorial rules could not be enforced without creating legal complications. The first duty of an educational institution, Sondhi used to say, was to find creative channels for the energy of the youth and fill their leisure hours with ‘worthwhile activity’. An addition to, and diversification of, the social and cultural activities of the College to provide for all talents and inclinations would reduce the need for proctors and strengthen the students’ attachment to the College. The College will, thus, become the wholesome influence in the life of its students that it had been in the past. The Dramatic Club, the Camera Club, the Rover Crew, the College magazine and the Translation Society already provided the much-needed opportunities of self-expression to the students. A class on arts and crafts, in which the pupils learned the art of modelling was started in a disused hostel kitchen.
A Gardening Squad and a Social Service Squad were other Sondhian innovations. So were the summer camps of students and teachers at hill stations like Palampur and Taradevi. Altogether, Sondhi’s College looked like Dewey’s Activity School. It is likely that Sondhi’s ideas in this respect had been shaped by what he may have observed in his frequent tours abroad at a time when Germany and Italy were putting great emphasis on sports, athletics and dramatics as a means of keeping the youth away from politics.

Sondhi set a high value on the look of the College and worked hard to improve it. A beautiful physical environment, he thought, would keep the students away from outside temptations and diversions. The College hill was an arid elevation with a parched look for decades. With an unfailing eye for landscape, Hemmy had the slope grown with a thick shrub. Sondhi carried this work further and had this slope broken into a series of terraces (bedecked with a lavish growth of flowers) providing seating and standing accommodation for 1000 to 1500 students. The Gymkhana events forming part of the Annual Sports used to be held in the Football ground in front of the Quadrangle. The arrangement was exceedingly uncomfortable to students who crowded the roof of the Quadrangle or stood on vantage points till their legs ached. The approaches of the College used to be littered with scraps of paper, banana skins and orange peels. The Gymkhana Sports were held in the Oval for the first time in 1941. The student spectators this year sat comfortably on benches commanding an unobstructed view of the field before them. A lawn was laid in front of the Library building. The site of the wrestling arena, which looked like an ugly patch in the College after the completion of the Library wing, was selected for an open air theatre. The foundation
stone of this structure was laid by Governor Henry Craik on 20 December, 1940 and it was declared open by his successor Bertrand Glancy on 7 November, 1941. It could seat some 300 students and came to be used for Rover Crew camp fires, after-dinner lectures in summer and later for film shows.

The Principal next attended to the primitive sanitation of the Quadrangle. Those who entered the College by way of the Dhobi Khana always smelt a poisonous gas from the Quadrangle latrines. The old bucket system was discarded and substituted by more sanitary fittings. The bathing arrangements in this hostel were made more acceptable to its residents by dividing the big bathing hall into a number of small bath rooms. These improvements were made possible by the discovery of two funds lying unclaimed in the College.

Another item on Sondhian programme of reform was the abolition of the age-old custom of boarders' dining at any time from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. The residents of each hostel were divided into two groups. Each group was expected to dine at a fixed hour. A limited relaxation of this rule was allowed in the case of students attending University classes in the evening. Hemmy's innovation of two room suites in the New Hostel generally known as A Class Sets was also abolished. These suites were ordinarily occupied by students accustomed to expensive living and attendance by servants. Their conversion into cubicles deprived a small minority of a coveted distinction.

The Milk Bar standing near the Chemical Laboratories was shifted to a new room built near the cycle stand. The new Bar was declared open by Sir Shahabuddin in 1945 who delighted the students with a lively account of his own days in this College when he used
to take four seers of milk and walk 16 miles a day. The supervision of the Bar was entrusted to a committee of staff and students who fixed the rates and looked after the quality of service.

Another Sondhian reform was the discarding of the venerable College gong. All strategic points in the College were fitted with electric bells. The use of a push button device installed in the College Office sent all the bells into action simultaneously. This was a great advantage for all concerned. There could be no argument about the bell having gone or not. But the shrill sound of the electric bells pierced the ears of the students like an air raid warning in the days of war.

Sondhi disliked snobbery in students. His ban on the entry into the College compound of cars used by students (1939) received full publicity in the Lahore Press. But parents could not be persuaded to deny the use of motor cars to their children. The only change that the ban brought about in the habits of car-owning students was that they began to step out of their saloons at the College gate instead of the steps of the Tower Room. The subsequent cut in petrol rationing compelled many a motorist to put back his car in garage, and it was the scarcity of fuel that made for the effectiveness of Sondhi’s ban rather than an acceptance of the democratic principle of equality.

The rise of the tobacco habit among young people gave a much needed occupation to the temperance workers. One member of this fraternity, Sant Singh, had warned the College students sometime ago against the tobacco habit as a colossal waste of national resources. He had intrigued the students with the information that a pile of gold representing the value of all the tobacco consumed in the sub-continent would reach the height of
Mount Everest. The smell of the tobacco plant, he further stated, was detested even by the donkey who invariably kept away from the tobacco field. Smoking is undoubtedly injurious to human health. But in Sondhi’s eyes it was also subversive of College discipline. Consequently, he issued a no-smoking order to students in College premises.

World War II had already begun when Sondhi took over as Principal. The initial German victory in Poland was followed by a spell of military inactivity. The Government launched an economy drive and sent out circulars asking the various administrative departments to curtail all unnecessary expenditure and to give up all avoidable ostentation in order to impress the people with the gravity of the situation. Consequently, we find, The Ravi advising its young readers to discard the practice of sending Christmas greetings and New Year wishes to their friends as a measure of economy. The writers of numerous articles in The Ravi stated and restated their faith in the impregnability of Britain and confidently predicted a British victory in the end. An article entitled Britain’s Maginot Line published in The Ravi for May, 1940 stated as follows: ‘She [Britain] has no need of vast fortifications of steel and concrete, no need of dykes and defence ditches; her defences must be out in the fog, riding on the seas surrounding her’. It is unlikely that this optimism was as easily shared by those who lived on the British Isles.

The vigorous resumption of war in the Summer of 1940 created a state of panic in Lahore. The atmosphere was thick with rumours. There were many who thought that Lahore would fall shortly after the fall of Paris. When the College closed for the summer vacation in 1940, few thought it would reopen according to the
usual time-table. The expected catastrophe, however, was averted. The first issue of the magazine in the next session stated, 'to the bitter disappointment of certain holiday loving fifth-columnists, the College reopened after the summer vacation after all'. The former imperialist venture was transformed into a Peoples' War in the eyes of a small group of student politicians when the USSR was attacked by Hitler in June, 1941. With the Japanese occupation of some districts of Assam (1942), the sub-continent was exposed to the danger of a foreign invasion. The Ravi adopted a warlike tone condemning the Gandhian creed of non-violence, branding its votaries as a bunch of cowards, pleading for a philosophy of manly resistance to the enemy and bluntly stating that all resistance must be armed and violent. The Quit India movement of 1942 plunged vast areas of the sub-continent into utter lawlessness. The British supremacy was virtually paralysed. The immensity of the challenge to the ruling power gave an independent tone to The Ravi. The Ravi of the olden days should have cried hoarse for revenge, but the magazine of war days was cautious in its comments on the conduct of 'rebels'. 'We do not believe', it said, 'in condemning out of hand the men responsible for the present disturbances in India as enemy agents. The independence obtained by cutting telegraph wires and destruction of railroads will not be worth having. It will lead to anarchy, disunity and war'.

The teaching staff of the College underwent important changes in the days of Sondhi. Ganesh Chandra Chatterji left after 18 years of service to the College. The M.A. in Philosophy had been revived with his arrival in 1921. The M.A. in Psychology had been introduced and the Laboratory for Experimental Psycho-
logy completed through his efforts. A clear-headed and stimulating teacher, he often deplored the decline of students’ interest in philosophical studies, but his impassioned plea for Philosophy, however, went largely unheard. His long awaited Intermediate text-book on Psychology was published towards the end of his stay in the College. Few readers of this little volume will be able to form an idea of Chatterji’s excellence as a classroom teacher. Mrs. Chatterji was succeeded by Mrs. Ghose as tutor to women students. Chatterji’s chair of Philosophy was filled by Qazi Muhammad Aslam who had served the College since 1925 and who continued to head the combined Department of Philosophy and Psychology till his retirement in 1954. Bhai Mahan Singh was appointed to fill the professorship of Chemistry vacated by V. S. Puri. Amolak Ram Khanna stepped into the shoes of J. D. Ward. A lover of sports and a genial conversationalist, Khanna’s philosophic absent-mindedness was not particularly helpful in his vocation of teaching History which necessarily requires a more than ordinary memory. Qazi Fazl-i-Haq’s long connection with the College was terminated by his death in 1940. He had taught Persian and assisted the Punjabi movement in the College. Malik Ahmad Hussain left the College after 18 years’ association with the Department of Philosophy. At the time of his departure, he was Director of Ceremonials, Deputy President of the Union Society and Treasurer of the Seniors’ Club. He performed the duties of a University proctor in a judicial rather than an executive temper. His successor Khwaja Abdul Hamid combined philosophic erudition with strong political views. Sadruddin of the Arabic Department retired after 26 years’ service to the College. His kindness knew no limits. ‘He never reported against any student, never fined anyone or turned
away anyone out of the examination hall'. His place was taken by Inayatullah whose affable manners, rationalist outlook and thorough acquaintance with the intricacies of English grammar gave him a respected place in the College. Richardson and Wasti left the College in the same year. A vacant professorship of English was filled by M. A. Latif (1941), an old boy of the College, who came to be idolized by a section of the College community for his aristocratic manner, fluent tongue and a subtle sense of humour. But he soon left the College to take up a publicity job in the Central Government. The English Department was further depleted by the departure of Harish Chandar Kathpalia for the Inspectorate. Muhammad Sadiq who joined as Lecturer in English in April, 1940, had many fruitful years of study and research before him. A brief entry in a long Government notification announced the appointment of a future Principal of the College, Nazir Ahmad, as Senior Lecturer in Zoology with effect from 1 June, 1943. Syed Ghulam Khaliq of the History Department, like Kathpalia, went over to the Inspectorial side of the Education Department. The Principal's decision to transfer his duties as teacher of Islamic History to the Arabic Department reduced the strength of the History Department as well as the importance of Islamic History as a subject of study. George Mathai retired in 1942 and was succeeded by Vishwa Nath.

Frequent and extensive changes in the teaching staff interfered with the smooth working of the College. Lectureships remained unfilled for months on account of the difficulties of finding substitutes. It is a melancholy reflection that the educational service came to be increasingly filled with mediocrities as the country advanced politically. As long as the superior services were
monopolized by the members of the ruling race, an educational career appeared to be a natural opening for talented sons of the soil. After the introduction of the Reforms of 1919, distinguished university graduates began to aim at ‘higher’ services, preferring even minor executive positions to a career of genteel poverty in the Education Department.

The Department itself was peculiarly organized. The college, school and inspectorial jobs were borne on the same graded cadres. Prized jobs and quick promotions were generally reserved for headmasters and inspectors. This had a corrosive effect on the morale of the College lecturer who cynically gave up his teaching job as soon as he was confronted with reasonable prospects of improving his lot by crossing over to the school or inspectorial side of the service. The colleges were, thus, being slowly impoverished of the better run of teachers. True, the Government College was more fortunate. It was able to pick and choose from a large number of candidates rejected by other departments or from teachers working in other colleges. But this amounted to a competition between mediocrities. The situation could have been remedied by the creation of a better paid and separate cadre of college teachers. But every proposal for giving higher wages to teachers ran into difficulties. The colleges are part of the complicated bureaucratic machinery and the college teachers cannot be treated very differently from other employees of the State. But think of the cost of low-paid teachers to the community! The exorbitant bill may be deferred: it cannot be written off.

Dunnicliff had sent up the student population to 1300. Sondhi felt strongly on this subject and pursued a policy of pruning numbers. His cut and dried
formula which admitted of no exceptions was this: Larger numbers mean larger classes; larger classes mean less individual attention and less individual attention means more problems of discipline. He was able to bring down the College enrolment to 1050. But just as war time petrol rationing had helped his ban on the entry of students' motor cars in the College, the circumstances of the War which had sent thousands of eligible young men to the defence services aided Sondhi's campaign for reducing the density of the College population.

The girls constituted a 'dreadful minority' in the College. Occasionally there was a solitary girl in a class full of boys who sat nearer the professor than her classmates. Some Romeos opened the classroom door when the girls entered, dusted their chairs with clean handkerchiefs and even offered to lend them their notes. But all these chivalrous gestures left the girls unmoved who accepted these little acts of kindness sometimes disdainfully, but always without any expression of gratitude. The 'ladies lounge' was situated in an odd corner beneath the noisy flight of stairs. Its doors and windows were provided with thick curtains creating purdah conditions for its inmates. Early in 1942, the girl students staged a variety concert and a play of their own. The invitees did not include a single boy student. A section of the male population of the College was aghast at the gratuitous affront and lodged a vigorous protest against this 'wanton act of discrimination'. But girls made no amends. Mrs. Sondhi tried to break, in her own way, what her husband called 'awkward reserve between the sexes', by inviting small groups of boys and girls to afternoon parties. The polite tea table contacts could not produce the desired results. Invitees parted company as soon as they were out of the Principal's Lodge.
Some students were heard to say that the girls received greater attention than the Firstees who were now left unmolested in admission days. This was not the case. A Firstee encircled by his tormentors was still a familiar sight in the College and the annual ice cream party at the Swimming Bath where a certain amount of tank water with salted ice cream was forced down the throats of the newcomers still a tradition of the Quadrangle. Sondhi, however, frowned on extravagant practical jokes against the Firstees. He posted a horde of stewards in the premises who stood like veritable guardian angels to the newcomers.

Parental complaints against the inaccessibility and inhospitality of College teachers were well-founded, but easy to explain and understand. The tutorial groups of former days were smaller and the tutors were economically better off. But the majority of poorly paid teachers in the 40's lived at long distances from the College. They could neither receive their wards at home nor entertain them to their own satisfaction. Still it was necessary to bring the two together as frequently as possible. Consequently, Sondhi revived the old rule requiring the tutors to be present in the College in the recess period to meet their wards. He also appointed a small consultative committee to advise in matters of student welfare and discipline. This was probably meant to supersede the Seniors' Club.

Sondhi also implemented the old proposal to earmark the Quadrangle for the boarders of I and II year classes. Too young to be allowed to live as they liked, these classes needed greater guidance and closer supervision. A separate hostel of their own ensured them the advantages of supervised study, regulated hours of work and early morning physical exercise.
Discussions about the problem of student indiscipline were kept alive by recurring incidents of juvenile delinquency reported by responsible individuals from time to time. The Vice-Chancellor wrote a letter to the colleges drawing attention to an incident in which some college lads were alleged to have molested unaccompanied ladies in a certain locality. This type of unsocial conduct was by no means rare in a certain class of students. This letter was editorially noticed by *The Ravi* in January, 1940, the Editor pointing to the Firstee and the idle rich as the villains of the piece. The Firstee was unable to hit back and the charge against him was unfair and unkind. The blame on the idle rich was perhaps better placed. *The Ravi* for May, 1940 had many hard things to say of students belonging to this class. Some of the charges framed against them make interesting reading: Their aesthetic taste, we are told, was highly developed while their literary taste was practically non-existent; they spent a good part of their time in make-up and the rest in display; they allowed their nails to grow and occasionally tinged them red; they wore gaudy clothes, frequented cinemas and restaurants and kept on scrutinizing their features with the help of small mirrors which they invariably carried in their pockets.

Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan came to the College (1939) to have a look at the students who had offered to go to the countryside to explain Britain's War aims to small groups of village folks. He was not impressed by the calibre of the volunteers and observed that everyone of them lacked the hypnotic eye. Similarly, the Army authorities were disappointed with college students they interviewed for recruitment to the defence services. A report from the G.H.Q. stated: 'the students are not mentally alert, they lack the power of observation and curiosity concerning subjects of everyday
interest. They fail to assimilate what they learn or give lively answers to questions and are generally slow in their reactions.

Of the various teaching departments, that of English went understaffed as usual. The method of initiating students into the problems of literature by classroom discussions was virtually given up. The M.A. students patiently submitted to the ordeal of writing notes prepared by their teachers. The admission of third division B.A.'s to the M.A. English class was discontinued and Honours work was entrusted to fewer teachers. The Department of Urdu was overcrowded but became reconciled to this state of affairs. The total number of students taking up Hindi, Punjabi and Sanskrit reached the record figure of 100 in 1943. The Professor of Sanskrit was found to deplore the decline of his subject and advocated admission of a dozen students to the College on the condition of their taking up Sanskrit. A senior student was appointed to assist in the teaching of Hindi and Punjabi. The study of Arabic was on the wane, 29 being the total strength of all the four undergraduate classes taking up this subject in the academic session 1943-44. It was difficult to explain why the popularity of History at the post-graduate level was accompanied by falling of interest in the subject in the B.A. and F.A. classes. The reduced number of History students enabled the department to spare one of its teachers for the teaching of Economics which was introduced at the Intermediate level in 1943. The research activities of some Science departments were greatly hampered by the difficulties of obtaining chemicals and apparatus. A fruit preservation class was started in the Department of Chemistry in 1939 and its Intermediate classes were split into two sections in the same year. A three weeks' summer school in Botany was
arranged (1943) in which the plants of Dalhousie and Chamba were collected and studied. War years were boom years for trained Psychologists who acted as technical advisers to the various army selection boards. There was hope that this would encourage larger admissions to M.A. Psychology.

The working of the Union was modified by Sondhi in important respects: It became necessary for all candidates to a Union office to have participated at least in one debate and the number of candidates contesting the Vice-Presidency and Secretaryship was limited to eliminate frivolous candidature. In the election of 1942, the candidates were forbidden to canvass by election cards; they were only allowed to display a few hand-written bills. Election speeches were introduced at the same time. Three years later the student Vice-President of the Union came to be designated as President. The change was formal, not substantial. The Union remains the first concern of the Principal whether he is called President or Patron.

The debaters of this period, according to a Ravi report, could be broadly divided into two categories; those who dished up deep philosophical ideas and overawed the audience by their mastery of Johnsonian phrases and those who reduced the art of debating to a mockery by using their native wit to hide poverty of reasoning and sustained irrelevancy. It was not only the good speaker who was cheered. Buffoonery earned louder applause. A group of politically-conscious students delighted in running down Hitler and Stalin on the rostrum, describing the former as an Austrian corporal and the latter as the son of a cobbler. To the staff versus student debates was added the novelty of boys versus girls debates.
Some of the propositions debated by the Union were: ‘religion is essential to human happiness’; ‘parliamentary government has proved a failure’; ‘the end can never justify the means’; ‘evolution and not revolution should be the ideal of progress’; ‘the future of the world lies in the federation of republics’; ‘every man has a right to take his own life’; ‘as long as politicians rule the world, it will remain chaotic’; ‘if students were professors and professors students, the professors would learn more from students than students do from professors’; (in this debate, the students acted like model pupils by voting in favour of teachers); ‘age is no criterion of wisdom’; ‘the unity of India is a myth’; ‘poets are a nuisance’; ‘students have a right to strike from examinations’; ‘it is better to be the master of an ugly woman than to be the slave of a beautiful one’.

The prize debate and annual recitation continued. Debating had again fallen on bad days. Many of the practice debates were discontinued. So was the sending of debating teams to other colleges and universities. The division of debates into ordinary and extraordinary dates from 1942. The distinction between the two was not always clear. A writer in The Ravi tried to improve upon this classification by suggesting that some debates were deserted and others forlorn! The Young Speakers’ Union modified its procedure. Its debates were thrown open to all members of the audience and the counting of votes was conducted by Tellers appointed in the parliamentary fashion (1939).

It was customary for the newly appointed editorial staff of The Ravi to meet in the Manager’s office at the beginning of the session. This meeting found no difficulty in preparing a catalogue of the omissions and
commissions of the outgoing editors and of the new features intended to be introduced by the new team. But old ways were too firmly established to be disturbed and The Ravi remained what it had been. It was, however, in these years that this journal started two new columns, one listing books purchased for the Library during the term and the other reviewing important books of the month. In 1942 was announced a monthly prize for contributions dealing with student problems and suggesting the most practical ways of solving (or escaping) them. The subject made no appeal to the contributors and was soon given up. In 1945-46, Urmilla Sondhi, daughter of the Principal, was appointed Chief Editor of the College magazine, being the first woman student to occupy this office. We also find the Editor of The Ravi castigating ‘perverted minds’ who had started a campaign for the exclusion of Keats’ Last Sonnet from a prescribed text-book (edited by a professor of this College) on the ground of its obscenity. He expounded the ethics and psychology of obscenity and advanced the astounding proposition that if the sonnet in question was obscene, there was little else in English literature that could not be called obscene. The rapidly changing political conditions within the sub-continent and abroad nearly cured The Ravi of its Anglomania. A panegyric upon Gandhi, entitled, ‘O! thou the sage of Wardha’, that could not have appeared in The Ravi five years earlier, was allowed to be published without much ado.

The Urdu section of The Ravi for these years is rich in translations of English short stories and plays. The authors of its articles on literary criticism freely borrowed Western standards for evaluating the stock of Urdu literature. Their writings lacked breadth, not ingenuity.
In the brief space of six years covered by this chapter, as many as three members of the editorial staff on the Urdu side, namely, Manzoor-ul-Haq, Hamid Ahmad Hamid and Mubarak Masood died in office. A handsome portrait of Hamid Ahmad Hamid will still be found in the Common Room of the New Hostel of which he was a resident.

The Seniors’ Club had ruled the social life of the College for about a decade. Regarded as the College elite, its members entertained exaggerated notions of their own prerogatives. Garrett and Dunnicliff had held the Club in high esteem. But Sondhi viewed it as a remnant of an undemocratic age. He pulled it down from its eminence by throwing its membership open to election. The Seniors quibbled over the propriety of the procedure adopted by the Principal. Sondhi brushed aside their arguments and rebuked them for setting a bad example to the juniors.

Young in years and full of ideas and activities, the Majlis-i-Iqbal was assisting the Bazm-i-Sukhan to a peaceful demise. It held a Tamsili Mushaira on 21 February, 1940, reproducing the atmosphere of the Mughal court and the idiosyncrasies of its principal literary figures in the first half of the nineteenth century. Some weeks earlier it had held a Persian Mushaira and heard Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj’s paper on Agha Hashar. For some unexplained reasons, the Majlis reverted to its original name of Urdu Majlis. But the change was temporary. The Arabic Society, the oldest society in the College, faithfully adhered to its tradition of disallowing papers written by outsiders to be read at its meetings. The Inter-collegiate Psychological Association was superseded by the Psychological Seminar
organized to discuss the lives and works of distinguished Psychologists. The newly-formed Adult Education Committee started three literacy centres in the College. One of these functioned exclusively for the benefit of women and was looked after by Mrs. Sondhi. The larger part of the expenditure incurred on literacy centres was met out of voluntary contributions. The enthusiasm for adult literacy, however, could not be kept up for various reasons. One of these was the utter paucity of suitable reading materials for those who had finished the Primer. The College tried to overcome this deficiency by publishing a magazine called Dost. Edited by Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassam, it was distributed free to the literacy centres in the city.

All sorts of dramatic activities flourished in the College and were assured of the Principal's patronage. Sondhi had a partiality for Punjabi plays and was critical of the plays produced by the College Dramatic Club. The Sondhi Translation Society was formed under the presidency of Muhammad Sadiq to prepare suitable plays for performance in the College. It prepared simple and easy translations of five well-known European plays in 1943-44 and excelled this record in the next year. These translations were appreciated in the province and outside. In 1942, the secretaryship of this society went to a girl student, Safia Abdul Wahid. In the same year was formed the East and West Society which produced several papers bringing out the points of contact between the Eastern and Western cultures. The recorded titles of important papers read by its members were: 'marriage in East and West'; 'Indian and English films'; 'Tennyson's In Memorium in the light of Eastern thought'; 'the influence of the West on the women of the East'; 'the art and science of kissing in the East and West'. Dickenson's Fine Arts
Society organized an exhibition in December, 1943 which exhibited both paintings and photographic studies. Pakistan and Partition of India were the major subjects of discussion before the nascent Political Science Society, which renamed itself as Current Affairs Society, after a couple of years. Its president, B. R. Sharma, came out with a scheme for the partition of India into 26 homogeneous linguistic and cultural units. The Discussion Group, limited to 25 wise men of the College, kept track of constitutional developments. The Students' Help Society, later called Students' Welfare Society, was formed in pursuance of a Union resolution. It collected the sum of Rs. 1,253 in the first year of its existence and distributed the entire amount among the needy students of the College. By the end of 1943, the College could boast of 20 Sports clubs, 14 societies concerned with academic subjects and 9 cultural societies.

It is surprising that the sporting record of the College was exceedingly poor during the term of its sportsman Principal. The Government College lost on this front because rival colleges achieved greater success in attracting sportsmen of merit and because some of the finest sportsmen of the College joined the war services. Cinema goers in the College had no aptitude for sports and the majority of science students could hardly find time for systematic practice of games.

Among the improvements made by Sondhi in the College estate in his last years at the College was a lawn with a low brick wall in the courtyard of the New Hostel that came to be used for common dinners and other celebrations. The slope between the main College building and the playground in front of the Quadrangle was turned into the Scholars’ Garden meant for the exclusive use of the teachers and scholarship-holders. Unauthorized entrants had to pay a small fine. A
memorial to Sondhi, known as the Sondhi Fountain, was raised out of funds collected by the participants of summer camps. This fountain was opened by an old boy, Justice Abdur Rashid, at a formal ceremony in which syrup gushing out of the mouth of the 'lion' was served to the guests. Completed a few months before Sondhi’s departure, the Principal did not feel elated at the monument and called it the ‘grave’ of his hopes.

Sondhi’s term of office expired in June, 1945 and his release from the educational service brought him the more congenial assignment of Sports Advisor to the Government of India.