THUS SPAKE:

**SHRADDHA - The Faith in Humanity**

I was sitting in a restaurant with my wife and saw this young man outside, on the road. Was disheveled. Looked mentally ill. He sat beside a gutter and drank a coconut shell - full of gutter water! That moment I said to myself, I have to do something.


Initially work was started in a small 2 room tenement where the doctors would give in-house treatment to only 2 to 3 mentally ill roadside destitutes at a time.

Realizing the need for official registration, the doctors applied for the same with Charity Commissioner and obtained it in December 1991.

As word of mouth spread, a rare stroke of destiny which changed the entire face of the Foundation happened. Few students of J.J. School of Arts approached the doctors and requested them to assist and help out their lecturer who had been rendered destitute by mental illness, and had lost his job and was wandering around in the area of Jehangir Art Gallery. The doctors happened to help out and took him under their wings. Over a period of 3 to 4 months he improved and the bond between him and the doctors became almost like family. Shradhha Foundation decided to attempt to rehabilitate him in totality and try and reinstate him in his job. They approached Smt. Kunud Bansal, the then Secretary of Education and made an emotional plea on his behalf. After a few months of bureaucratic hurdles the lecturer was back at his job at J.J. School of Arts. Since the case became well known amongst the Art fraternity, colleagues, friends and senior artists came out with the idea of a fund raising art exhibition of Jehangir Art Gallery, to support the cause of the Foundation. 150 artists from all over India and abroad chipped in including famous names such as Bikash Bhattacharjee of Calcutta, Anjolie Ela Menon from Delhi, S. H. Raza from Paris and Adimoolam from Chennai. The exhibition held in October 1993 was a runaway success and generated funds, from which the Foundation purchased a small exclusive plot in Dahisar for its rehabilitation activities. Well meaning organization and well wishers chipped in and thus was born a separate psychiatric institution which could house, treat and rehabilitate 30 mentally ill roadside destitutes at any point in time. This institute was inaugurated in March 1997.

Work continued smoothly, with patients being regularly assisted off the roads & being treated & reunited with their families, and awareness about mental illness continued to grow in society due to the efforts of Shradhha Rehabilitation Foundation.

In an attempt to grow further, the Foundation decided to raise funds and expand from the existing 2 storyed 50 bedded structure to a 4 storyed 50 bedded building with appropriate infrastructure and facilities.

While this attempt to raise funds was going on, another chance episode changed the course and the direction of the activities of the Foundation. The trustees of SRF happened to visit Baba Amte’s “Anandvan” at Varora near Nagpur. So moved were they by the enormity and the quantum of the social work undertaken by Baba Amte and his son Prakash Amte (whose work was located in a remote tribal area of Hemalkasa in Gadhchiroli district) that they decided to go for a bigger project which would become a landmark institution in the treatment, care and rehabilitation of mentally ill roadside destitutes - just as Baba Amte’s Anandvan had become for leprosy patients. After scouting for innumerable plots they finally came across this plot at Karjat in December, 2004.

This huge plot of land for the rehabilitation work admeasures 6.5 acres and is 2 km away from Karjat station. Shradhha Rehabilitation Foundation hopes that this will be a first of its kind pioneering effort in the field of rehabilitation work of mentally ill roadside destitutes involving as it will agriculture, dairy, poultry and fish farming.

This institution is already operational, is housing and treating 50 mentally ill roadside destitutes currently. Shradhha Rehabilitation Foundation hopes to house 110 patients in this new set up.

We were humbled when we saw the work SRF is doing. Had lunch there. The vegetables we had - were grown in the farms of SRF. Our stomach and heart - both were full!

Dr. Vatvani was interviewed by Dr. Dushyant Bhudikar and Dr. Shyamkant Chotiker on 16th July 2006 at the SRF - Vengao - Karjat.

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