Even in today's selfish world, there are people like Smita and Bharat

The Good Samaritans

HEALING TOUCH: DR SMITHA WITH ONE OF HER PATIENTS

By Dakshes Parikh

KHALID was a boy walking insane on the streets of Bombay. He was dishevelled, muttering and laughing to himself. Lost in his own dream world, in tattered and ragged clothes, unable to make any headway in the surrounding world of sanity, he had been on the cruel roads under the scorching heat for 45 days.

To the lay person he would have looked like another beggar amongst the countless beggars thronging the streets of Bombay. But he was different. Mentally different.

To the psychiatrists Bharat and Smita Vatwani, who happened to be on the roads at that time, the beggar presented a classic case of schizophrenia, a mental illness which temporarily makes a person lose touch with reality.

LOVING CARE

Immediately, without wasting time, they picked him up, brought him to their Shradha Nursing Home in Borivali in Bombay, gave him a bath, clean clothes, food and shelter, and started appropriate psychiatric medication on him.

After some days of gentle persuasion and loving care, all that they could elicit from Khalid was that he was from Srinagar, Kashmir. One week of further treatment saw Khalid suddenly remembering his neighbour's telephone number in Kashmir. It was a golden opportunity which Bharat did not want to let go. An urgent truck call to Srinagar confirmed Khalid's whereabouts and within 48 hours, the boy's family were reunited. The parents were overwhelmed with joy and thought of Bharat and Smita as messiahs serving deliverance.

NOBLE TASK

The Vatwanis were more than willing to help out, Rane.

When the Vatwanis undertook such a noble task, others do help out. Social workers, social organisations, the police, medical colleagues, and above all their ex-patients do contribute their worth and chip in.

REHABILITATION

In one instance, during the Ayodhya turmoil, three of their ex-patients volunteered and escorted Rajendra, a boy who hailed from Bihar, all the way to his native place in Bhopalpur. They did this without any financial considerations and despite the grave personal risks involved.

In another instance, Bharat undertook a trip to Pune to trace the antecedents of Gangadhar, a boy of 20, who had been picked up on the superhighway in an utterly emaciated condition with a broken leg and mentally in a severe state and wept unashamedly.

Often Bharat and Smita get nothing by way of financial compensation. But this does not impede their burning desire to continue. "We never started this for financial gains and we want to continue our work as we have so far, on an absolutely charitable basis. Our only considerations and guiding force is the humanitarian aspects involved," they say.

How many mentally-afflicted derelicts have they picked up so far? Thirty-two. Out of which four have run away, three are with us and 25 have been relocated to their parents and are living a normal life," is their modest claim.

LABORIOUS

"But this is only a drop taken away from the ocean of insanity wandering out there," says Bharat grimly. "The lay people never dare to bother or even look at the schizophrenic woman with her mud-caked face, stinking clothes, hair all matted up, lying half-naked on the street. Nobody seems to give a damn. There is so much to do that we are awed by the enormity of the situation," adds Smita feelingly.

Nevertheless, the Vatwanis carry on, undaunted, in their self-imposed laborious and unglamorous task of tending to and catering for the mentally-afflicted destitutes on the streets of Bombay.

THE ENTIRE VILLAGE GATHER TO THANK THE CRUSADERS

damaged psychotic state. This time again he was picked up by Mother Theresa's workers and handed over to the Vatwanis for rehabilitation.

The local police of Bombay have also got wind of the social service activities of the Vatwanis and have given encouragement and a helping hand wherever possible. In Kishen's case, an appeal by them saw Kishen and his efforts being given lodging in the police quarters in Yavatmal in Maharashtra. Official police vehicles were lent to trace the location of Kishen's native place, a remote village called Yendongre 45 kms away from Yavatmal. Kishen's incredulous parents and brothers could not contain their happiness at

seeing him and wept unashamedly.

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And when reminded of the magnitude of their task, they have the words of Robert Frost to look up to—"Miles to go, promises to keep, dreams to fulfill, before we sleep."