Magsaysay awardee recalls Baba’s words of wisdom

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Pune: On a stage in Kothrud, where three Ramon Magsaysay Award winners were present, there were countless stories of inspiration, perspiration and quite a bit of emotion too, as psychotherapist Bharat Vatwani was introduced by his friends and mentors Prakash and Manda Amte.

Vatwani heads the Shraddha Foundation, along with his wife Smrita, also a psychotherapist. Together, along with their staff, they have picked up nearly 7,000 mentally ill people from the streets, treated and housed them, and have also reunited them with their families.

Amte introduced Vatwani as a person who reminded him of his father Baba Amte due to shared values and their outlook.

“Amte studied the value of compassion in real life and taught many holy books to find out what it means to care for street dwellers, he and his wife have also adopted children who had been orphaned,” he told the crowd.

Vatwani, on the other hand, credits the inspiration he received from Baba Amte and the organization he is a part of, which is a respected name in the field of mental health and rehabilitation. “I had a 35-bed center in Dahanu. Then I came across Anandvan in a huge setup. He was the one who told me that I must dream big and do more good because there is need for it. So I invested my savings, my wife sold or pawned her jewelry and we set up a new center at Raigad, whereas about 150 to 200 patients are treated now. Baba wanted to inaugurate the center but his ill health kept him from coming,” he recounted.