

NATIONAL
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GENTLY INTO DAYLIGHT

THE psychiatrists, Bharat and Smitha Vatwani bent over the derelict sprawled under the pitiless sun in the asphyxiating street. "Come with us," they said.

They gave him food, a wash, a change of clothes, a bed in their clinic and a new lease of life. A restoration of dignity to Vijayam, 25.

"Come with us." These three words have transformed the lives of 13 homeless, mentally afflicted persons in the past year, pulled back acute psychotics from the depths of their miasma.

Why do Smitha and Bharat Vatwani do it? Merely the uncoiling of an urge to reach out

and help those too sick to ask for help. "Out of 13 persons we've rescued so far," said Bharat, "ten have been restored to society. Three, unfortunately ran away."

One of their recent cases Hemant Thakare, 35, a 'brilliant' ex-student of the J.J.School of Art, who was knocked off the rolls last year due to a mental breakdown. This led him to take to the streets, and collapse outside the Jehangir Art Gallery, where he stayed till his friends finally managed to hear of the Vatwanis.

They not only pulled him back but also helped get him readmitted to the J.J.School, where he later became a staffer.

WAY-OUT
REVATHI SIVA KUMAR

and help those too sick to ask for help.

"The wandering insane have a right to treatment, as much as others," said Smitha. And we try to give them the best therapy possible. Patient 'consent' is not necessary, for he is clearly harming 'self' or others."

For instance, Vijayam was found near a gutter, subsisting on garbage. His recovery was fast, and a month's treatment later, he dredged out his identity and address—to which he was speedily restored.

"It was like a dream when I received a telegram from a far-away, unknown place, that my son was safe and well," his father, a zilla parishad superintendent in Andhra Pradesh commented. His son whose illness had flummoxed local medics for years, is on the road to recovery—even Vijayam can write back to his saviours. "I can't forget you all my life."

The Vatwanis are no dream merchants, though, but a no-nonsense, down-to-earth couple quietly tackling their self-imposed, unglamorous

The dean reports that he is among the most punctual and professional of teachers. One of his paintings sold for Rs 8,000 at an exhibition two years ago. He has put up a brave and spirited fight against his affliction and has proved his capacity for a 'normal' role, in society," says Bharat.

The Vatwanis work in tandem with a social worker, who usually locates the patient and then helps in the cleaning and housing of the patient in their sprawling clinic in suburban Bombay.

It is no coincidence that the patients they take in are relatively young, confesses Bharat. They deliberately choose persons who have some hope of social acceptance and rehabilitation. "Otherwise we would be saddled with recovered patients who have nowhere to go. In one instance, an elderly man was cured, but did not wish to return to his family. At a loss, they almost connived at his 'escape'."

However, 56-year-old Pillai was an older man helped and rehabilitated by the couple. A



The Vatwanis help the mentally insane off the streets

Kerala migrant he was found in a post office writing letters to Indira Gandhi two years after her death. His relatives were overjoyed to have him back.

Usha Rani 40, is a similar exception. Though the Vatwanis usually don't take women in, to avoid getting into legal bottlenecks, they took pity on her emaciated, broken condition. Drawn out by a Punjabi friend, her home was traced out and she was escorted to Panipat.

All the others too have been ensconced in the family life again, their antecedents painstakingly discovered by the coordinated efforts of the entire staff at the nursing home. Sharif Mohammed, a schizophrenic meandering through a dingy street, was 'taken over' by the Muslim staffers, who probed the recesses of his memory by taking him on periodic visits to a nearby mosque, finally sparking a remembrance. He recalled his home in a remote pocket of Deoriya, Uttar Pradesh.

"When we undertake a task like this, everybody cooperates," said Smitha. "The

chemist supplies free drugs, the staffers help to establish a link with the patients, the police tap their sources."

A CID officer of Purulia, West Bengal, helped the Vatwanis find the address of Bimal Kumar Acharya, 26. Having run away from home nine years ago after failing the 10th standard, the return of Bimal was like the redemption of a forgotten promise for his incredulous parents.

Often they get little by way of financial compensation from relatives, but they say that they can 'afford' one free bed for every seven patients who 'pay' for their treatment.

Quietly efficient, unassuming, ideally cut-out for the samaritan role, the couple seems an anachronism in today's corporate-doctor age. Their sprawling clinic takes medicare to a new dimension. For Smitha and Bharat Vatwani are not merely skilled doctors, they are practitioners in the forgotten art of healing.

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

The Good Samaritans



HEALING TOUCH: DR SMITHA WITH ONE OF HER PATIENTS

By Dakshesh 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 Smitha Vatwani, who happened to be on the roads at that time, the beggar presented a classical 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 Borivli 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 trunk call to Srinagar confirmed Khalid's whereabouts and within 48 hours, the boy and his parents were reunited. The parents were overwhelmed with joy and thought of Bharat and Smitha as messiahs serving deliverance.

BASIC RIGHT

But to the two doctors, it was another chore for the day. For they had got into this habit of picking up mentally-afflicted destitutes wandering on the streets of Bombay and giving them treatment until they could get back to their senses, and hence give forth their address. Then they would find out their native place, their original home from which they had wandered out in a schizophrenic condition and help relocate them.

Why do they do it? "Because we believe that the wandering insane, who have no place to go, no shelter or roof over their head, no doctor or friend to turn to, do have a basic intrinsic inherent right to live life with dignity," says Bharat. "And we believe that as psychiatrists and as decent human beings, we should contribute towards this basic human right of the schizophrenic person," continues Smitha.

And they are well justified in

their cause, because today, five months later, Khalid is back with his parents in Srinagar pursuing further education and living a normal life.

Another recent case was that of Raneer, a woman of 35 malnourished to the bone, who was found semi-conscious on the streets of Juhu in Bombay. There was her child of four sitting and sobbing morosely by her side. They were picked up by Mother Teresa's organization and kept in their homes for destitutes. But there, after a week or two, on recovering consciousness, she suddenly turned violent. This is where they turned to Bharat and Smitha, with whom they were in regular touch, for psychiatric help.

NOBLE TASK

The Vatwanis were more than willing to help out, Raneer

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

was shifted to their nursing home and intensive psychiatric treatment was started. Eight weeks of vigorous treatment saw Raneer regain her sanity but still she was unable to speak about the whereabouts of her husband. Until one day, in the nursing home, she came across a facial cream pack of Nivea and suddenly jumped up to say that she remembered everything and that her husband worked in the company which made Nivea. Her husband traced. The tragic paradox of her situation was highlighted when her husband was found to have gone to Madras on the previous evening, because he had been told that a lady and a child were found to be sitting on the railway platform of Madras and that they could be his own.

When the Vatwanis undertake 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 Bhagtiarpur. 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 Bombay-Pune highway in an utterly emaciated condition with a broken leg and mentally in a

seeing him and wept unashamedly.

Often Bharat and Smitha 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 are 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



THE ENTIRE VILLAGE GATHER TO THANK THE CRUSADER

deranged psychotic state. This time again he was picked up by Mother Teresa'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 escorts 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 Yenidongre 46 kms away from Yavatmal. Kishen's incredulous parents and brothers could not contain their happiness at

Bharat grimly. "The lay people never care 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 Smitha feelingly.

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

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..."

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THE WEEKEND OBSERVER



A couple with a conscience: Drs Bharat and Smitha Vatvani talking to a young patient at their Bombay nursing home

PSYCHIATRY WITH SHRADDHA

THE tiny waiting room is crowded in the early evening hours, but Mickey and I manage to find some seating space. It is our first trip to distant Borivli, and I happen to have come along only because her confidence in local area geography is rather shaky. Also, she is a bit nervous, this being her first interview as a journalist: a rookie maybe, but nonetheless a genuine card-carrying member of the press. "Can you help him?" was the agonised appeal of some students of the prestigious J.J. School of Art. Their favourite teacher, Hemant Thakare, had slipped deeper and deeper into the throes of schizophrenia and had eventually lost his job. Worse, he had wandered from his home and had ended up living on the pavement near Jehangir Art Gallery in ritzy downtown Bombay. It is from here that his former charges took charge of him and delivered him to the Vatvanis at Borivli. Today, Hemant, a former gold medalist at the School, is back on the faculty at JJ, thanks to the personal interest shown by the Maharashtra education secretary, Mrs. Kumud Bansal, in his reinstatement. Hemant is the living proof of a miracle that the Vatvanis bring about frequently enough to make us wonder at their patience, their perseverance and, above all, their passion for psychiatry as a medium for their message. Love conquers all. Even schizophrenia, a disorder that reduces human beings to levels of existence hard to fathom unless one deals daily with the phenomenon. "Without adequate training, one cannot distinguish a schizophrenia from other derelicts on the street," says Dr. Bharat Vatvani.

Michelle "Mickey" Mathews had sought out the remarkable Drs. Bharat and Smitha Vatvani at Shradha Nursing Home, Borivli, in order to explore their fascinating work of bringing back people from the edge of sanity to normal existence. A recent fatal motorcycle mishap prevented this young Observer reporter from ever having a chance to file the story. Anjan Ray, who accompanied her to Shradha, recalls that evening and articulates the tributes she wished to pay the dynamic doctors

"But if one knows what to look for, they're fairly easy to spot. Unlike the other homeless, they do not fight for food. Often, they are found talking and laughing to themselves, lost in a world of their own. Time and space have little meaning for them. Little, insignificant events can intimidate them and turn on their latent aggression, which can make them difficult to handle." But that has not deterred this amazing couple from taking on the challenge of rehabilitation for those cases where a chance may exist, however slim. They generally do not attempt therapy outside the age group of 14 to 40, preferring to concentrate their energy and limited resources where the likelihood of success is greatest.

Apart from those whom they themselves detect and bring back from the streets of Bombay, patients are brought in by concerned citizens who are aware of the Vatvanis' mission. The Mother Teresa Home at Borivli also refers cases on occasion. In their 15-bed nursing home, four to five are usually available free to the destitute; the rest are allotted to private patients who are the primary source of funds for the psychiatrists. Much of their administrative work is handled by an M.Tech. engineer whom they brought back from the brink and

who stayed on with them as their amanuensis after he was pronounced cured. "While I'm taking notes, Mickey has started up an animated conversation with Hemant, whose shyness diminishes gradually. He takes her to the room adjacent to the doctors' consultation chambers. The Vatvanis and I follow. What unfolds is a wall full of some exquisite art, the creative output

"People often fail to recognise the onset of mental disorders in their near and dear ones. Sometimes they pretend the problem doesn't exist."

of Hemant during and after his recovery. He, too, has stayed on with the Vatvanis. Shradha is not his nursing home any longer; it is simply his home. "People often fail to recognise the onset of mental disorders in their near and dear ones," says Dr. Smitha Vatvani. "In some extreme cases, they wish the problem away and try to pretend that it doesn't exist. The social stigma of

a 'mental case' in one's family can be devastating." Many of those who have found succour at Shradha were turned out of their homes when the situation got out of hand. Several others, like Mr. X, wandered away of their own accord. X strayed to Bombay from Asansol, on the Bihar-West Bengal border; it is only after the therapy took effect that she was able to recollect her address and a message was sent to her home for her folks to come and take her away. The Vatvanis are both young. I'd guess in their mid-30s. Their idealism is laced with an understanding of the reality that they cannot possibly aid every schizophrenic on the city sidewalk. They have had to turn away cases in some instances where they didn't think a cure was possible. And once in a while, they have failed. But not without trying. And sometimes they have beaten steep odds, as in the case of Ms Y from Jalgaon who will be returning to her home tonight, personally escorted by Smitha. A new patient has just been brought in. His strange behaviour was noticed by the watchman of their building and the Vatvanis have persuaded him to come inside with some effort. For an 18-year-old, his eyes are ageless and untamed, his hair tousled,

appearance unkempt. I can tell Mickey is apprehensive, but she does a good job of keeping up the flow of conversation. The doctors speak to him gently and he seems willing to eat something and go to bed for now. Tomorrow, his treatment will begin. At Shradha, the emphasis is on medication, supplemented by lots of tender care and a clear understanding of the nature of the disorder. Trained male nurses work in shifts round the clock. The convalescent patients chip in to run the kitchen and take care of the newer arrivals to some extent; they are already on the road to regaining their rightful places as productive elements of society. "What are your ambitions?" Mickey enquires of Smitha. "We dream of having our own hospital for the destitute, a place where they can help each other get better even as they undergo therapy. A place large enough that we can multiply the present level of rehabilitation several times over." On the way back home, Mickey's eyes are brimming, the stern simplicity of the Vatvanis' sincere and unflagging efforts have touched her to the extent that she will end up writing and rewriting this feature article several times, never being quite satisfied with the result, never considering it equal in standard to the ongoing magnum opus that she has just experienced. And thus it is that I have to finish the piece for her. I wish it were otherwise; that she were still around to do this last rewrite. But not all wishes come true. I fervently hope that the Vatvanis at least will have theirs fulfilled. Mickey would like it that way. On her behalf, I dedicate this to our midst, with respect. With Shradha.

**Shradha Nursing Home
 Rehabilitating
 the destitutes**



■ PROVIDING COMFORT AND HELP: The Vatwanis with Maniben and her grandchild.

By Sheetal Mehta
 When Bharat and Smitha Vatwani first picked up Paerens, he was drinking water from the open gutters outside their nursing home in Borivli. His dirty, mud-caked body was full of scars and bruises, his clothes ragged, hair unkempt, speech slurred and unclear.
 In that state, it would be difficult to imagine Paerens as anything other than a beggar who had gone mad. But two months of counselling and medication revealed that he was a pathologist from Gandhinagar, Andhra Pradesh. He held a diploma in Medical Laboratory Technology (DMLT). A telegram to his father who is a superintendent of the zilla parishad in that area brought him rushing to Bombay - to take home a son whom he had given up as dead, after a traumatic separation of four long years.
 That was the first "road side" case treated by the Vatwanis three years ago. Since then this husband and wife team, both qualified psychiatrists have taken over 100 such road-side patients under their wings and cured them.

"When we were students," says Dr. Bharat, "we used to see people on the streets, lying near garbage dumps, hunting scraps from dustbins. They are usually passed off as beggars, but we could make out that they were not just beggars - they were people who were ill, mentally ill, who needed medical help and attention - people who could be cured and rehabilitated if they were looked after."

Mentally-afflicted
 It was with this mission of rehabilitating the mentally-afflicted destitutes on the streets of Bombay that the Vatwanis set up the "Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation", housed within their nursing home also called "Shradha" in Borivli.

Right now there are four "road side" patients undergoing treatment along with other private patients. Among them is the frail, forlorn, Maniben. She tries to put up a brave front with her shy smile, but her eyes give away her hopelessness and anguish. Maniben was picked up by the Vatwanis when she was feeding gutter water to her four year old granddaughter.

Her other grandchild had died a few days ago from acute malnutrition and her granddaughter was in a "stun" state when Shradha stepped in. "The child has fully recovered

now. But the problem is that Maniben does not recollect her exact address, she keeps repeating Borivli all the time," explains Dr. Smitha.
 Last week, her husband, Dr. Bharat accompanied by a Shradha volunteer escorted Maniben to Borivli, in the hope that when she reached there, she would be able to find her house. But she couldn't.
 "We have had cases when we have traced the patient's address through just the name of a city or a village," points out Dr. Bharat. "Like, there was this young boy, Shivkumar, who only knew that he was from Benaras which is a huge city. When our escort took him there, we had no hope. But as soon as he landed at the station, it clicked. Once he was in the rickshaw, he took it right upto his house."
 In Maniben's case also we hoped that the same would happen.

Since she was a Marwari, they took her to all the areas predominantly inhabited by Marwaris. They also travelled to the surrounding villages with high percentage of Marwari population, but it proved a futile trip.



■ MISSION OF CHARITY: The Vatwanis outside their nursing home in Borivli. Pic: Anthony Azavedo.

However, for every disappointment, the Vatwanis find solace in the cases where they have managed to reunite the family with their lost, loved one. Though they usually pick up patients from in and around Borivli, they have traced their original addresses to places as far flung as Kashmir in the North and Nagaland in the East. And a large number of their cases though when picked up were in a state worse than that of beggars, come from backgrounds that are economically and academically sound.

"We picked up a chap called Shakesh while he was eating rubbish from a garbage dump," recounts Dr. Smitha. His appearance told us that he had been on the road for a long time. After two months of rigorous treatment, he was a changed man. Shakesh had done his B.Sc in Agriculture and Horticulture from Poona University and yet if you were to see him on the day we picked him up, you wouldn't expect him to be a graduate."

Neither did they expect

24-year old Dilip to be a son of a rich army officer from Nagaland, who had been missing for over two years. Dilip was also found near an open sewer, drinking muddy water, muttering gibberish to himself. Dr. Smitha found him, biscuits and persuaded him to sit in the vehicle and whisked him away to the nursing home. "You see, it is very rare that they try to run away because they are physically so unfit and under nourished," explains Dr. Bharat. "They are always hungry so they almost always never turn us down. If they run away, we do not chase them, it's their luck."

The Vatwanis do not charge their "road side" patients anything. In some cases, where they come from poor families, they continue to subsidise their medication even after they have been reunited with their families. "But there are people who are insistent on paying. Like the Poona and the Nagaland cases both paid us because they could afford it. In such cases, we accept because it provides us with the much needed funds to help others."

They usually pick up destitutes between the ages of 20 and 30. Their reasoning, the chances of younger people having one of their parents, if not both, alive, are higher. "Which

'Complaining to the police is useless. They (the family) will keep him in the house for a few days, inflict mental pain on him and throw him out at the first opportunity available.'

father or mother would not want to have their child back" asks Dr. Bharat. "The patients having living parents is important. Close or evenhood relatives are often no substitutes," he adds.
 And he speaks from experience. Twenty five year old Umesh from Rajkot was roaming the streets of Bombay for the past three years. Shrasa cared him. Since in his case, as in the case of Maniben, the address was not clear, a volunteer accompanied him. Umesh's own sister who runs a beauty parlour in Rajkot refused to accept him. It came as no surprise when his cousin brother too closed the door on him.

"Complaining to the police is useless," points out Dr. Bharat. "They will keep him in the house for a few days, inflict mental pain on him and throw him out at the first opportunity available. And when that happens he is bound to have a relapse."

When such a situation arises, the Vatwanis either take them to Mother Theresa's home where all are welcome or they are rehabilitated within the foundation itself. Umesh was admitted to Mother Theresa's home while Maniben continues to stay with the couple. Her granddaughter's schooling responsibility has also been taken up by the Foundation.

"We usually accompany patients who are not sure of their address. When they are sure, we send a telegram to their parents or relatives who come here and pick them up. In the case of women patients, either my wife or I personally accompany them."

Padma was one such case that Dr. Bharat personally escorted. All that she could remember of her past was that she was from Mulgugu. "Mulgugu is a big town in Andhra Pradesh. But we decided to take the chance. When we reached Mulgugu, we made some inquiries and there was one person who had heard that such and such a girl was missing in such and such a village. So we proceeded towards that village and five kms from the village Padma took charge of 16 Old Mahaveer Building, Ground floor, Behind P.O. Mirtu-ji (C.R.), Bombay 400 019. Tel: 430 1505, 436 2230.

and began directing us-left, right, left."
 For Padma's mother it was a moment that she had waited for seven long years. She couldn't believe that she was actually seeing her long daughter alive, right before her. "The mother was not aware of our coming, so it was a complete shock for her. Soon the whole village had gathered around us. Her mother refused to let go of my feet. It was such an emotionally charged scene whenever we have accompanied our patients the response that we received has been terrific. The blessings, the thank yous and most of all the gratitude and affection in the eyes of the parents makes it all worth it."

**BOMBAY
 News
 OCTOBER 1992**

...for Drs. Smitha and Bharat Vatwani

"Nice meeting you. Have a good day." Sudhir Madhav Phadke is pleasantly courteous as he takes his leave. In a little over five minutes, he has run through an encapsulated account of his life, all 40 years of it. A degree-holder from the VJTI (Victoria Jubilee Technical Institute), he was an assistant engineer at the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) not long ago. He was also a freelance correspondent for *Mahanagar*, he says, as well as for several other publications, including *The Washington Post*. You are impressed, until he adds that Bob Woodward (of Watergate fame) is currently in town, at Yogi Nagar in fact—a middle-class locality in the Bombay suburb of Borivli where Sudhir himself has a flat. And Woodward, says Sudhir, is collaborating with him on a journalistic assignment. The subject? "Religion, community... religion..."

HANDS-ON HELP FOR STREET-SIDE SCHIZOPHRENICS

Somewhere along the way, Sudhir's mind has tripped, making the precipitous transition from reality to the phantasmagoric world of the paranoid schizophrenic.

He's under treatment now, but it's no thanks to his family—he has two failed marriages behind him, but he also has other family members who one might have thought would care about what happened to him: a brother who's a scientific researcher, a sister who's a high-court lawyer. But nobody wants to 'get involved', it seems. When close colleagues at the BMC tried to get him admitted into the K.E.M. hospital for treatment, the hospital refused because of the stipulation that admission must be through a relative.

If Sudhir has anyone to thank for the fact that he's steadily getting better, it's a husband-wife team of psychiatrists who, over the last three and a half years, have picked up and rehabilitated over 100 mentally-ill persons off the streets of Bombay. Although Sudhir has a flat of his own, he has 'given it out' to someone else; and when Smitha and Bharat Vatwani found him a month ago, he was scrounging around a street in Borivli, laughing dementedly to himself, spouting gibberish without end, his hair long and matted and infected. Today, as he makes the slow climb back to reality and wellness, his 'before' and 'now' pictures (above) speak for themselves.

"Mental illness is the most neglected of all ailments—even when the sufferer is living within the secure confines of the family," says Bharat Vatwani, explaining why he and Smitha, both of them privately-practising psychiatrists, decided to help the most helpless of them all—those who are mentally ill and destitute, wandering the streets, with no family at hand or interested in getting them treated.

And, like Sudhir, they are not necessarily poor or homeless. The first person that the Vatwanis picked up was Paeres, whom they found eating out of a garbage bin just outside their nursing home in Borivli.

HEALTH HURRAHS

Applause for persons or steps to improve the

institutions that have taken innovative standard of community health



ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY: Sudhir Phadke on the day he was picked up from the streets (above). And, right, Sudhir today at Shradhda where he is still undergoing treatment



He turned out to be a pathologist, with a Diploma in Medical Laboratory Technology (DMLT), from Cuddapah in Andhra Pradesh! He'd had a past history of mental illness, had come to Bombay for a job, failed to get one, and had spent four years as a schizophrenic on the streets. His father, a superintendent of the area *zilla parishad*, had long before given him up for dead.

Then there was Shakeb Alam from Patna who had done his B.Sc. in Agriculture and Horticulture from Pune University, and had then disappeared from Pune. When the Vatwanis found him at Eksar, a residential locality in Borivli, he was bare-chested, had grown a beard, had not eaten for two days, and was talking "non-stop nonsense", says Bharat. Two months of intensive therapy and he was unrecognizable. He was eventually taken back home by his uncle who is editor of the Urdu daily, *Shama-e-Bihar*.

There is no dearth of patients in need of rescuers. A

person suffering from psychosis (which is characterized chiefly by a loss of contact with reality) may often get into the first available public transport and get off at a terminus. "Borivli being a railway terminus, we often find them sitting on the platform," says Smitha.

Others, like Paeres, actually come to Bombay for a job, fail—and the frustration and anxiety lead to chronic depression and an emotional overload. Often without close relatives in Bombay, they end up on its dog-eats-dog streets.

The Vatwanis do not wait for destitute patients to be brought to them. They go out into the streets, stop when they see a likely candidate and, winning him over with a promise of tea and biscuits, lead him, unresisting, to their car and thence to the *Shradhda Nursing Home* that they run at Borivli. "They are usually too weak and emaciated to resist," says Bharat.

After a thorough scrubdown, a haircut and/or a shave, they are generally put on intravenous therapy—drips of glucose and vitamins to cover their nutritional deficit. Alongside begins the intensive psychiatric treatment—drugs and, if needed, electroshock therapy. Two months or so later, there is virtually a transformation in these men and women: you see them as the persons they really are, not what their mental illness metamorphosed them into.

It's only then that the Vatwanis try to return them to their families. Not always an easy matter. Some, who have come from a faraway village or town, may only know its name. For instance, Padma who came from Warangal (A.P.) could only give them the name of 'Mulu'—but the Vatwanis managed to get her back home to a deliriously happy mother, her only immediate family. Then there was Shivkumar, a young boy they treated, who could only tell them he was from Benares. But once they reached Benares, it all came back to him and he took the rickshaw unerringly to his house.

"In the case of a female patient: either my wife or I was always accompanies her back home," says Bharat. "In the case of a male patient, a *Shradhda* volunteer goes along."

"At the time we return the patient to his family, we write out a detailed case history and a prescription for maintenance therapy," says Smitha, "and we ask the family to follow up with the nearest government or municipal hospital. And some of them do stay in touch. A few also mail us money orders for drugs to be sent to them from Bombay."

But they have not always been successful in re-uniting patients with their families. In some cases, relatives may simply be unwilling to accept the patient back. "When the parents are alive, especially when the mother is alive, we get a good response," says Smitha, "and this is more so in the



TWO FACES OF FUCHO: Fucho Sau, 20, from Barauni, Bihar, when the Vatwanis brought him in from the roads (left). Right, the Vatwanis with Fucho (following treatment) and a relative who came to take him back home

villages than in the urban areas, especially Bombay." If the Vatwanis are unable to return a rehabilitated patient to his family, they generally get him admission into one of Mother Teresa's homes.

But there are exceptions who remain with the Vatwanis long after they have been treated. There's Maniben whom the Vatwanis found feeding gutter water to her four-year-old grand-daughter (her grandson, aged two years, had died some days before the Vatwanis found Maniben.) The grand-daughter was herself emotionally traumatised at the time, but has now recovered sufficiently to go to a nursery school. And Maniben can smile again.

Today she helps out at *Shradhda* with the cooking and other work. "Our long-term plan is to set up a separate home for destitute patients," says Bharat. (Today they share the same premises as the Vatwanis' private patients). "If we cannot return them to their families, we can at least keep them gainfully occupied—which is an important aspect of recovery."

Space is the major problem, and the reason why the Vatwanis have to keep an upper limit of about 7 on the number of 'roadside cases' they can take in at a time. For the present, they also employ certain criteria when considering potential candidates. "We give preference to the younger ones because we feel they are more likely to have surviving parents who will take them back," says Bharat. "Also, we do not take in alcoholics or drug addicts. The criterion is that the problem should be totally beyond the person's control. In alcoholism or drug addiction, we feel, there is also a contribution to the problem, to some extent, from the person himself."

And where do the funds for all this come from? "It's mostly been our own money," says Bharat, "although now the Rotary Club of Borivli (West) is also helping with funds."

About a year ago, the Vatwanis registered the "Shradhda Rehabilitation Foundation" for mentally-ill destitutes as a charitable trust. "At that time," says Bharat, "we found that we were the only ones in Maharashtra involved in this kind of work—which shows to what extent the problem has been neglected."

The enormity of the problem is, without question, overwhelming. But the Vatwanis are trying to make that small difference that counts. It's a beginning that we applaud, and hope will be emulated, for the alternative is to be paralysed into inaction.

NIRMALA FERRAO

NATIONAL
News

JANUARY 1993

**NATIONAL
News
BOMBAY
MARCH 1993**

That faraway look in the eyes and a perpetual smile on the lips don't always mean that the person is a poet or in love. Most of the time it means that the person is mentally ill. One sees many such people on the roads and pavements of the metropolis. But looking at them as a means for 'time pass' till the bus comes or the train arrives is what most of us do. However, the Vatwanis of Borivli behave differently. They pick up these 'mad' people from the streets and bring them to their Shradha Nursing Home in Borivli. Drs. Bharat and Smitha vatwani have both done their MD in psychiatry and have been doing this social work for the last four years.

"We pick up the mentally ill, young people from the roadside and bring them to our nursing home, treat them, ask them for their address and then reach them home with an escort or call their people to collect them," says Dr. Bharat Vatwani. "We pick up only the mentally ill and not the mentally retarded as the mentally ill ones have a normal IQ and can be cured with medical treatment unlike the mentally retarded ones," adds Bharat. His wife Dr. Smitha Vatwani too accompanies him in his social work. "We have no particu-

from their homes for a long time." Nowadays, however, they prefer to pick up people only from Borivli as they are faced with space and finance constraints. "We have booked a place for a bigger nursing home near Dahisar. At present at Shradha we don't have enough beds and neither space for

A couple of psychiatrists from Borivli have initiated a programme to pick up mentally disturbed destitutes from the street and restore them back to their families.

REARRANGED DESTITUTES



The Vatwani's with the inmates of Shradha Nursing Home. lar reason for doing this. We do it for our own satisfaction," says she. Theirs is a love marriage and Bharat had met Dr. Smitha Ganla when she was a lecturer in the Cooper Hospital.

The cause of deranged behaviour is often curable. Bharat says, "Certain bio-chemicals in the brain stop producing and these people start to behave differently. Like they get depressed, talk to themselves, lose touch with the reality, start imagining things, etc." According to Smitha, "There is no particular reason for these chemicals to stop producing. It just happens. We have come across people from all walks of life. They roam the streets and are normally found missing

kitchen. We get food from outside. Also, here our private patients sometimes complain when they are put together with those picked up from the streets," adds Bharat.

They find it very easy to pick a problem destitute from a regular beggar. "These people basically are always on the lookout for food unlike a beggar who approaches you and asks for money. Then there are certain symptoms such as laughing or crying or talking to oneself, etc. When we approach them we take a few packets of biscuits with us and we also have a knack of talking to such people," says Bharat. Even legally they say that they don't have any problem. To admit a person in a nursing home all they require is a certificate from two psychiatrists saying that the person is mentally ill. "Once we start the treatment, we try to find out the address of the person. Even with few

clues we do our best to locate the man's family," says Smitha. Last year they had picked a girl from near the Ajanta Talkies in Borivli. It seems she had been roaming the streets for seven years! Her name was Padma and when they picked her up, like everybody else she was very unkempt and haggard and she could not even say where she was from and on questioning repeatedly kept on saying just Mulgu. "Ultimately I sat down with a map and located the place in Andhra Pradesh," says Bharat. There are many such incidences, for example Kutkuti. He was suffering from schizophrenia and was from Orissa but did not know the details. After some investigation, they were able to locate his home

town. Vatwani introduces you Sudhir Phadke. He looks neat with closely cut hair and is wearing bright yellow Shradha Nursing Home T-shirt. But when he starts talking, you know why he's there. "Bob Woodward (of Watergate) is my close friend as he used to stay in the next building where I live. I have written everywhere and am unhappy about the Indian Express group as they have still not paid me..." says Sudhir. The doctors inform us that Sudhir had actually written articles for Mahanagar. "I am a very good writer on sports and I would like to write an article for your magazine about the advantages of a rubber ball in spin bowling over the regular season ball..." adds Sudhir. According to Bharat, Sudhir was an assistant engineer in the BMC sewerage department and has a flat in Yogi Nagar, Borivli. "He has given his flat on leave licence. His wife and children have left him after he became ill. However, I have found out that his post in the BMC is still vacant and I want to get the job back for him once he becomes alright. I have fixed an appointment with the municipal commissioner and an editor has promised to come with me to meet the commissioner in order to get Sudhir his job back," says Bharat. Sudhir turns to me, "I used to work in the Sankhli Street office. After my wife left



Drs Bharat and Smitha Vatwani, the samaritans of Bombay.

me I gave the flat on hire and started living on the streets. They pay me regularly every month, but have you met Dwarkanath Sanzgiri, he writes on sports and he is my friend." The doctors feel he is responding well to the treatment and should be normal in a month or two.

Yet another case was that of Hemant Thakare. He was a lecturer in the JJ Institute of Arts and a gold medallist too. "He started having some problems and he put up posters and banners against the officials on the walls of the Institute. When we picked him up he was on the roads. However, he responded very well to our treatment and has now even got back his job. He now works as a social worker for us and helps us in escorting the patients back to their homes. His name is now included in the letter head of the Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation. Once we get back Sudhir's flat we want Hemant to stay with Sudhir for the first few days..." says Bharat.

On an average the Vatwanis spend

about Rs. 40-50 on a patient everyday. "We never ask for the money even after the person goes back to his people, some of them pay on their own accord. A person has to undergo the treatment (follow-up) for at least two years after he is cured. Some who have gone back send us a money order and we send them the medicines. Others who are too poor, and if they ask, we continue to send them the medicines," says Bharat. Recently, after a few articles on them appeared in the newspapers, they have started getting phone calls from people pointing out the mad people in their area. "Recently somebody called us and told us about a boy who was ill and roaming in the streets. I asked the person what his interest was in the issue. He said nothing, he just wanted to help the boy. When I asked if they could give us some sort of aid, he readily agreed and immediately sent the money once we picked up the boy." At least, they are not alone in their mission.

ABHIJIT BHADRE

Indian Express

INDIA'S ONLY NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

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● LATE CITY

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● 22 PAGES Rs 1.80

From the roadside to mainstream

Mini Pant Zachariah reports on the efforts of the Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation to resettle mentally-affected destitutes



A 35-year-old dishevelled man with his head full of pus and lice, incongruous

speech and a vacant look in the eyes was picked up in December last year by Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation from a Borivli roadside. Suffering from schizophrenia, he fancied himself to be a *Washington Post* correspondent!

Surviving on alms and savouring his delusions of grandeur, oscillating between psychotic breakdowns and brief spells of near sanity, he would have continued as a vagabond but for a chance happening.

After watching a video clipping of the foundation on cable TV, a resident of Yogenagar, from where Sudhir was picked up, informed Bharat and Smitha, psychiatrists at the foundation about him.

After two months of treatment with anti-psychotic drugs, Sudhir was ready to receive psychotherapy. The doctors helped demolish his grandiose ideas and build his self-confidence. By April, Sudhir was ready to face reality. He wanted to go back to BMC, his work place.

The Vatwanis and Ghanishyam Bhimani, Psychiatrists from Bombay University and trustees of the foundation,

started providing free medicare to mentally unstable people on the roads seven years ago.

"As students we realised the dearth of institutions for the care of the mentally afflicted. We started providing free medicare, food and shelter to these destitutes diverting funds from our private practice," said Bharat.

The first patient from the roadside was a youth who was laughing and muttering to himself. Months later, when his condition stabilised, it was learnt that he was a Zilla Parishad official's son from Andhra Pradesh. He had wandered and probably boarded a train which brought him to Bombay.

His parents who had lost hopes of finding him were thrilled when the Vatwanis reunited them. "The boy who holds a diploma in medical lab technology is working at his native place," said Bharat.

Most of these cases are of people who have strayed from their native places. Disoriented in time and space, they board any train and get off at the terminus.

Shakil Alam, a native of Patna lost his mental balance and landed up in Bombay. He was studying B Sc (agriculture) in Pune. He was picked up from Borivli station by the Vatwanis and reunited with his family 18 months later.



Sudhir and Santoshi before and after treatment at Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation.

Fucho Sau from Barauni in Bihar was another person found by the psychiatrist couple on the streets in tattered clothes, a sock in one hand and stinking a mile away. Alam's relatives helped locate Sau's family which took the boy back after five months.

"We counsel the relatives that the patient will have to continue medication for some time. These medicines are available at the local government hospitals," said Smitha adding that most people follow their instructions. She, however, admitted cases of relapse.

Most pathetic was the case of Santoshi, a young woman from Ambawadi whose photo is on the foundation's advertisements displayed on suburban trains.

"She was a sight to see when we brought her here. Her tight petticoat had cut into her skin. She had lice and ulcers. After months of treatment, we located

her family. She is at home and visits the clinic occasionally for therapy," said the Vatwanis.

The foundation spends up to Rs 1,000 per month on medication and food of each patient. At any point of time, there are five or six such patients accommodated at the 20-bed private clinic of the Vatwanis in Borivli.

The money for their upkeep comes through donations from institutions, public and former patients. A major art exhibition-cum-auction is being organised by the trust from October 18 to 24, 1993 to raise funds.

The idea of the exhibition was mooted by Hemant Thakare, a lecturer at JJ School of Arts who was once in Vatwanis care. A gold medallist, Thakare was struck off the faculty rolls of the school when he had a mental breakdown.

Jobless and mentally unstable, he took to streets, collap-

ing one day outside Jehangir Art Gallery.

The foundation which took him under its wings not only treated him but also took up his case with the Education Secretary and got him reinstated.

Well-known artists - Anjolie Ela Menon, Bikas Bhatnacharya, J Swaminathan, Manjit Bawa, Jatin Das, Manu Parikh, G R Santosh, Akbar Padamsee, Prabhakar Barve and Badrinarayan among others - have agreed to participate in the auction.

"Artists are very sensitive to the cause of the emotionally disturbed," says Smitha.

The Vatwanis who have treated up to 150 deranged destitutes so far, pick up only psychotic cases now and avoid all drug addicts, alcoholics and the old. "Our aim is to help those whose tragedies are not of their own making."

Psychosis is an illness which impairs the thinking of the patient. Unable to meet the day-to-day stresses of life, he breaks down withdrawing into a world of make-believe which does not pose threats to him.

Once cured, rehabilitation of the patient is necessary not only to give him a sense of usefulness but also to ward off disturbing thoughts. "This is why we made great efforts to get Sudhir back on his job," said Smitha.

"Although P M Kale, Director engineering services at BMC, was most sympathetic, Sudhir is still to be reinstated. His file has been pending at BMC for the last four months," said Bharat.

Well-groomed, Sudhir assists the Vatwanis with odd-jobs at the foundation waiting for the BMC to clear his papers. With Kale retiring on August 1, his wait could prolong.

NATIONAL
News

BOMBAY

AUGUST 1993

BLITZ

INDIA'S GREATEST WEEKLY: OVER 3,000,000 READERSHIP

Shraddha Samarpan

Jehangir Art Exhibition

18th to 24th October 1993

NATIONAL NEWS BOMBAY / CALCUTTA

Coverage - 1 / 11

ART A LA CARTE

Shraddha Samarpan

IN one of the most simple and yet touching, humane and sensitive gestures, over 100 senior and eminent artists from all over India and abroad have come together for a common cause.

The cause of the mentally ill. In absolute altruism, with spontaneity, genuineness and selflessness writ large on their intentions, they have decided to donate some of their creative artistic works towards the cause of the mentally-ill destitute wandering aimlessly on the streets of India.

These artists have joined



DRS. BHARAT and SMITHA VATWANI with a mentally-ill destitute who was picked up from a Bombay railway station

In aid of the mentally ill who wander the streets of India

hands with Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation, an organisation inspired by and dedicated to the mentally-afflicted downtrodden meandering in the bylanes of India.

These senior and eminent artists believed that the wandering insane, who have no place to go, no shelter or roof over their head, no doctor or friend to turn to, do have a basic intrinsic right to live life with dignity, and that someone could and should con-

tribute towards this basic intrinsic right of the mentally-insane person.

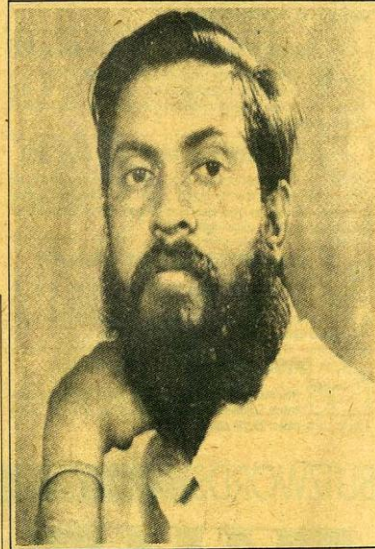
It all began with the story of one Shri Hemant Thakare, a gold-medallist lecturer of J. J. School of Arts, Bombay, who was tragically afflicted with mental illness and who in the process was knocked off the rolls from the faculty of J. J. School of Arts.

Ending up on streets, he was drifting aimlessly for one whole year until one of his students heard about Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation.

The Foundation picked him up, treated him, met the Secretary of Education and saw to it that he got his job back.

This process of rehabilitation of Hemant from a mentally-ill roadside destitute to a fully functioning lecturer in his original Alma Mater took one whole year and saw some of the senior and eminent artists of Bombay who had had a soft corner for Hemant come close to Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation.

Now Hemant, under the guidance of these social and eminent artists, is the pioneer behind the national art exhibition, "Shraddha Samarpan" and has personally gone and met all the



HEMANT THAKARE: giving back to the Shraddha Rehab Foundation

senior and eminent artists from all over India to seek their esteemed and revered paintings/sculptures as donation towards the cause.

Artists like Gieve Patel, Navjot, Akbar Padamsee, Suruchi Chand and Badri Narayan have generously contributed their work. The response has also been emotionally overwhelming.

For these senior and eminent artists unanimously empathised with the cause which Hemant personified and believed that the wandering insane who have no place to go, no shelter or roof over their head, no doctor or friend to turn to, do have a basic intrinsic right to live life with dig-

nity, and that someone could and should contribute towards this basic intrinsic right of the mentally-insane person.

This exhibition is both their commitment towards Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation and an appeal on its behalf.

As Dr. Bharat Vatwani of Shraddha said, "It is a representation of the heart-rending cry for help emanating from the wrecked souls of the thousands of mentally-ill downtrodden existing in searing starkness on the streets of India."

May the echoes of the cry not go unheard. May the efforts of Hemant Thakare not be in vain.

Business Standard

CALCUTTA THURSDAY 14 OCTOBER 1993



Art of heart

An art show for the mentally deranged by a former patient

Page 12



Growing pressure

Tobacco Board gives in to demand for raising the crop limit

Page 4

Painting for a good cause

WHEN Bharat Vatwani rescued a deranged man from the pavement outside the Jehangir Art Gallery in Bombay two years ago, he didn't expect any reward for it. Vatwani and his wife, Smitha, both psychiatrists, treated him and then helped him to get back his job at the JJ School of Art.

Well, one good turn deserves another. Hemant Thakare, the man who was once picked up from the pavement, is today putting out a giant art show to aid the Vatwanis in their work with the mentally deranged. Thakare has worked round the clock to get more than 120 artists to take part in the show. Shraddha Samarpan, an exhibition of paintings, etchings and sculptures, which opens at the Jehangir Art Gallery and the Artist's Centre on October 18. The proceeds from this exhibition will go to the Vatwanis' Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation.

The list of artists who have contributed to the cause reads like a veritable who's who of the Indian art world. There's S. H. Raza, Sakti Burman, Ganesh Pyne, Paritosh Sen and Akbar Padamsee. Besides that there will also be Manu Parekh, Krishen Khanna, Krishna Rao, Arpana Caur, Anjolie Ela Menon, Bhupen Khakhar and Vivan Sundaram.

Not all the paintings will be auctioned. About 20 odd paintings will be up for auction while the others will be sold at predetermined prices. Prices vary, but the average is estimated to be around Rs 20,000.

The money raised by the show will be used by the Vatwanis to open a 50-bed hospital-cum-vocational training centre to rehabilitate mentally ill destitutes. For several years now they have run a small centre, the Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation, where they cured beggars and other destitutes picked up from the streets. Now, thanks to Thakare they may be able to enlarge their vision.

Although the Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation was officially registered two years ago, the Vatwanis have been rehabilitating the "wandering insane" since 1987.

It all started when the Vatwanis chanced upon Vijaun, a young man, who constantly haunted the garbage cans near their nursing home. Both Bharat and Smitha decided to treat him. To their surprise they found that this man who had subsisted on waste from the bin was, in fact, highly educated. The successful rehabilitation of an educated person was a positive reinforcement, says Smitha, and soon the Vatwanis were on the look-out for their next patient.



Vijaun (top) and paintings at the show (above): aiding the mentally ill

Today, they have cured nearly 200 such cases. The Vatwanis have derived inspiration in their efforts from Mother Teresa. Says Bharat: "Just as Mother Teresa's Shanti Daan is for the destitute and dying, Shraddha Rehabilitation's Foundation is for the destitute and mentally ill." Often the two institutions have collaborated in the past by referring cases to each other.

The destitutes the Vatwanis pick up are mainly psychotics with a majority suffering from schizophrenia. According to them, it is easy to distinguish the psychotic from an ordinary beggar. Says Bharat: "Unlike the normal beggar who will grab you if you offer money or food, these people are fearful. Also, you will find them laughing or talking to themselves, or conducting imaginary conversations. If one extreme is

violent behaviour, at the other extreme, they may not speak at all and display extreme paranoia."

So cut off from reality are some of these people that they just wander out of their houses, getting on to trains or buses. Which is how they end up in urban centres or terminus points.

The treatment for these cases primarily consists of a course of anti-psychotic drugs along with nutritional inputs. The first step, however, is to clean the patient since invariably they are in an unkempt condition. Also, most of the patients picked up suffer from skin diseases or from diarrhoea and have to be treated for these too. Sometimes the mental illness is so acute that the patients have to be tied down or locked up.

But once the new clinic materialises, there will be no bar on age. The plan is to set up a separate clinic here for mentally ill destitutes while the present clinic will be only for private patients. If the show is a success, Hemant Thakare, in his own small way will have done his bit for the mentally ill.

"It is only after two to three weeks,

when their physical and mental health has improved that we question them about their whereabouts," says Smitha. The facts divulged are reconfirmed after a month when the patient's condition has further stabilised.

The rehabilitation programme includes getting the patient back home and uniting him with his relatives. Alternatively, they try to find their patients jobs. It is only when the patient has recovered that the relatives are contacted, as otherwise they could stop the treatment midway. This itself is a difficult task since the destitutes don't always remember a proper postal address.

Very often the cured patient has a relapse as they fail to take the prescribed medication. Apart from medication, counselling has an equally important role. Most of the patients lack the confidence to go back to society, says Smitha. Thakare, for instance, initially refused to go back to his teaching job and had to be pushed to accept the month's trial offer that the dean of J J School made. Even today, he is on mild medication and lives at the nursing home where he helps out by escorting destitutes back home.

Another success story for the Vatwanis is Sathir Phadke, who worked as a sub-engineer with the Bombay Municipal Corporation for 16 years. Bharat and Smitha have not only helped Phadke recover the flat he was duped of but have also helped him get back his job.

Of course, there are plenty of failures and these cost a lot. It needs at least Rs 3,000 for a minimum of two months treatment. And usually the treatment costs much more as patients can take a long time to recover. Escorting patients back to their homes is an additional financial burden. At present, the Vatwanis rely on donations from Rotary and other organisations as well as from the families of patients they've treated.

Although initially, the Vatwanis only took on one destitute at a time as they had only a five-bed clinic, they now house eight to ten destitutes in their 20-bed clinic. The remaining beds are kept for private patients. Bharat also prefers to pick up destitutes in the age group of 20 to 30, since it means a higher turnover.

But once the new clinic materialises, there will be no bar on age. The plan is to set up a separate clinic here for mentally ill destitutes while the present clinic will be only for private patients. If the show is a success, Hemant Thakare, in his own small way will have done his bit for the mentally ill.

Shraddha Samarpan

Jehangir Art
Exhibition

18th to 24th October
1993

NATIONAL NEWS

Coverage - IV

SPECIAL FEATURE

THE WEEK

hold the key

Maharashtra
How to prevent earthquakes

FAR FROM THE MADDING STREETS

A psychiatrist couple in Bombay restores the dignity and sanity of destitute schizophrenics

MUD-CAKED and clad in tattered clothes, Vijay was a familiar sight at Borivli in suburban Bombay. As familiar as the dustbin he lived next to and ate out of, often fighting for leftovers with stray dogs. Most passersby did not give him a second look. A few paused, to laugh at the 'mad man' who spoke gibberish. Only one man stopped.

"I had seen him every day for two weeks. Once I saw him scooping water from the gutter into a coconut shell and drinking it," says Dr Bharat Vatwani, a psychiatrist. Dr Bharat asked Vijay to join him for a cup of tea. They then hopped into an autorickshaw which took them to Shraddha, his nursing home for the mentally disturbed. After an overdue bath, the malnourished Vijay was fed glucose, calcium and vitamins intravenously for a few days. He was simultaneously put on a course of anti-psychotic drugs. Vijay had been driven to the pits not by poverty but by schizophrenia, a mental disorder marked by disconnection between thoughts, feelings and action. In common parlance the disorder is called 'split personality.' After two weeks of treatment, Vijay started speaking coherently and behaving normally. And he poured out his story. A science graduate, he was a resident of Cuddapah in Andhra Pradesh and had come to Bombay in search of a job. He was staying at an uncle's house in Chembur. One fine day he strolled out and did not go back.

"Sometimes a victim of schizophrenia may be staying just a few blocks away from home but is unable to make his way back," says Dr Bharat.

He believes that Vijay became a schizophrenic because of the ignorance of his family and lack of proper medical treatment.

After getting Vijay's postal address, Dr Bharat contacted his father, an ex-zilla parishad superintendent, and asked him to take his son home. "Initially, he was reluctant because he believed Vijay would continue giving problems. But we reassured him that his son was all right. When he came, he was very happy to see the improvement in Vijay," says Dr Smitha Vatwani, Dr Bharat's wife. A gold medalist in psychiatry, Dr Smitha was a lecturer in Cooper Hospital before she married Dr Bharat.

"Psychiatry still has a stigma attached to it. Very few private hospitals and nursing homes admit such patients. Nurses are afraid of the patients



The hug and smiles say it all. Dr Bharat with a patient (top): a recovered Vijay with his father (below)

of beds. Patients are often refused admission if they are not accompanied by a relative. Private hospitals that do admit psychiatric patients place many restrictions on them.

Realising that there really was no place for the mentally-disturbed destitutes, the Vatwanis decided to set up Shraddha. Vijay was the first patient to be admitted. In the two years since it was founded, around

and refuse to give them injections. Even doctors are not willing to take care of psychiatric patients. They feel it will upset other patients," explains Dr Bharat. Admission is difficult even in the government hospitals owing to lack

200 patients have been treated at Shraddha. However, it cannot accommodate more than eight patients at a time. The Vatwanis also treat other psychiatric patients separately. While both categories of patients are housed



PHOTO: SANJAY PANDYA

in the same building, they are kept in separate wards. "Relatives of other patients do not like destitutes to be kept in the same ward," explained Dr Bharat.

SCHIZOPHRENIA could happen to anyone. Like it did to Hemant Thakare, 32, a gold medalist from the prestigious J.J. School of Art. A brilliant student, one of his paintings was presented to the Maharashtra minister of education. Hemant joined his alma mater in 1986 as an assistant lecturer in fine arts. His warmth and commitment made him a favourite with the students and the staff.

Gradually, however, the confident young man became psychotic. "I don't know what happened. I couldn't teach," recalls Hemant, whose family is in Amravati. In 1989, his service was terminated. Hemant had been sharing accommodation with another person in Vashi. Taking advantage of his mental state, his roommate slammed the door on Hemant's face and he found himself on the streets. Scared and lost, he drifted to the Jehangir Art Gallery and started living on the steps outside.

The Vatwanis usually approach a potential patient with a warm smile which is accompanied by a friendly gesture like putting an arm around the person's shoulders and offering him or her a cup of tea. If the offer is accepted, he or she is brought to Shraddha.

Some of his students who visited the place brought him food and clothes. The workers in the gallery who found him harmless if a trifle strange, always got him released when he was picked up by the police. But once he spent eight days in jail. "They used to take me to court. The magistrate used to ask me something; then they would let me go," remembers Hemant. His family is not bothered about him. "Not even one member of his family has come to meet him," says Dr Bharat.

Hemant's students who had heard of Shraddha, took him there. "I don't remember coming here," says Hemant. "He refused to eat the first few days. We had to sedate him and give him IV," says Dr Bharat.

Hemant's condition improved gradually. His ex-colleagues and students visited him often to cheer him up. After he had recovered completely, the Vatwanis went to the education secretary and requested that Hemant be reinstated. "We knew he loved teaching and was very good at his work," says Dr Bharat.

Their efforts paid off and Hemant was back in J.J., a year after he had been sacked. Now, he is due to be promoted as lecturer. Hemant loves to spend time at Shraddha, helping the doctors. He has escorted around 15 people to their homes in different parts of the country, after they recovered. "It is wonderful to see the joy of the family when they are united. I understand what they are going through," says Hemant. "I don't feel different from anyone else now. Yes, I want to get married," he adds with a smile.

It hasn't always been smiles though at Shraddha. Recently, a phone call was made to the institution asking someone to go and pick up a young woman from Wadala railway station. When they saw her, the doctors realised that she was the same patient they had sent to Mother Teresa's Home in Santa Cruz, two years ago. She was first picked up from Dahisra where she walked around stark naked with a pack of stray dogs at her heels. After 20 days of treatment she revealed that she belonged to Vellore in Tamil Nadu. But no more information was forth-



Wedded to the cause. The doctor couple outside Shraddha

THE METROPOLIS

O N S A T U R D A Y

BOMBAY, WEEKEND OCTOBER 16-17 1993

28 PAGES WITH PERSPECTIVES RS. 2

THE METROPOLIS RECOMMENDS

MAIN EVENTS

The colours of sanity

The mentally ill are, generally, rejected by society. But the art world is making a special effort to help. **Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni** reports on a new exhibition in town



PAINTING

Shraddha Samarpan, an exhibition of contemporary Indian paintings and sculptures is a coming together of 139 eminent artists from India and abroad for a worthy cause—the mentally ill destitutes

JEHANGIR ART GALLERY & ARTISTS' CENTRE, OCT 16-25, 11 AM-7 PM

“Our Foundation has specifically selected one section of the mentally ill,” says Dr Bharat Vatwani, psychiatrist and founder of the Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation, Borivali. “We have been trying hard to treat those who are destitute and are found wandering aimlessly on the streets. We make every effort to rehabilitate these people.”

The Foundation is now involved in a unique undertaking—an exhibition of paintings and sculptures by 139 well-known Indian artists from all over the country and abroad. Called ‘Shraddha Samarpan’, the show will open at the Jehangir Art Gallery and the Artists’ Centre on October 16. “All the artists gave a ready response to our appeal for donating one canvas or sculpture for the show,” says Dr Smita Vatwani, also a psychiatrist with the Foundation.

“We have been able to organize 16 centres for collecting these works of art in the country and also tap the resources of Indian artists based in Paris,

From Paris come the canvases of Akkitham Narayanan, Sakti Burman (who crossed the mind-boggling highest price of Rs 5 lakhs at the recent Helpage auction), Chitrovanu Mazumdar, son of the legendary Nirode Mazumdar of the Calcutta Group of 1945, the equally legendary Syed Haider Raza and the firebrand, peripatetic, V Vishwanathan, painter and film-maker.

How the organizers reached these distant benefactors is a mystery one would rather not unravel. Suffice it to say that the most representative work of these *omigre* gentes will be in *Shraddha Samarpan*. The eminent artists’ *samarpan* would obviously not have been accomplished without some *shraddha*. “We have been in touch with the art world in one way or another,” says Dr Bharat Vatwani. “So this is a cause dear to our hearts. There couldn’t have been better rapport between us and all these generous-hearted artists.”

It is impossible when assessing this kind of venture to men-

phicist Krishna Reddy, represented by one of his inimitable prints. Reddy has not been to India for a long time. One remembers the child figure in some of his prints and the divine aura of light (the child derives from Reddy’s own daughter when she was younger). It is a kind of imagery which immediately relates to the objects of the Foundation.

Nearer home there are expressive heads by the husband-and-wife team of Altal and Navtej. There is a very impressive painting by Rini Dhimal showing two figures. Rekha Kodwilya contributes a typically muscular work. T Vaikuntham sends his colourful, folk art-oriented works.

How widely the net of the organizers has been thrown is proved by the inclusion of Delhi artists—ranging from Sankho Chaudhary and Krishen Khanna to Ramkumar, Anjolie Ela Menon and Vivan Sundaram. Add many more distinguished names to these and you will be convinced about the strength of the capital’s contingent.

Cholamandal sends Bhagwan Chavan, C Douglas (who did so well at the Helpage auction) and the sculptor Nandagopal. The Calcuttans include Ganesh Pyne and Paritosh Sen, among others equally well-known. Even Santiniketan sends K G Subramanyan and four colleagues. Laxma Goud leads a sizable team from Hyderabad, while Bangalore promotes G S Shenoy, S G Vasudev and six other noted artists.

Borivali naturally has a strong contingent, including Bhupen Khakkar, Gulam Shaikh and (a curiosity) Ranjitsingh Gaekwad. This princeling is known as a connoisseur and a vocalist but this is the first time he is featuring as an artist in Bombay’s gallery world. And there are painters and sculptors from Ahmedabad, Udaipur, Gwalior, Bhopal, Udipi, Vishakhapatnam and Pune.

“We have been round the whole country approaching these artists personally,” says Bharat Vatwani. “One of our immediate projects is to build an extension to the Foundation’s present facilities in Dahisar. The funds raised by this show will go towards making that a reality.”

It is a tribute to our artists that they can rise to the occasion, thinking of the needs of the mentally ill and destitute.



Heads by Altal

Munich, Toronto, New York and London,” says Dr Ghanashyant Bhimani, founder-psychiatrist of the organisation.

tion all the contributors to the fund-raising venture. Especially pleasant surprises include the internationally famous gra-

Indian Express

INDIA'S ONLY NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

FROM AHMEDABAD BANGALORE BARODA BOMBAY CHANDIGARH COIMBATORE DELHI HYDERABAD KOCHI KODHAKODE MADRAS

MADURAI NAGPUR PUNE VJAYAWADA VIZIANAGARAM

BOMBAY SUNDAY OCTOBER 17 1993

Art to the rescue

‘SHRADDHA Samarpan’ is an offering by the artist community for the cause of the mentally afflicted, manifested through the medium they know best. A week-long exhibition of their paintings and sculptures will open at the Jehangir Art Gallery on October 18. The exhibition has been organised by the Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation, an organisation which works for the mentally-ill destitutes.

This foundation has rescued countless mentally disturbed people from the streets and has looked after them, treated them and tried to rehabilitate them.

“The exhibition will culminate in an auction and sale of some of the works on October 21, the proceeds of which will go to Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation,” say the organisers.

Nearly 150 pieces of art have been received from prominent artists like Vivian Sundaram, T Vaikuntham, Prabhakar Barwe, Yusuf Arakkal, C Jagdish, J Swaminathan, Nagji Patel and Rini Dhimal to name a few.

On show will also be paintings of Narayanan Akkitham, Krishna Reddy and Prafulla Mohanti flown in from Paris, New York and London respectively. Mohanty has named one of his his water-colour for the exhibition as ‘Shraddha—source of light’.

The genesis of the exhibition is interesting. Hemant Thakre, a lecturer of JJ School of Arts, was picked up by Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation from the streets where he was roaming aimlessly after losing his mental balance. Bharat and Smita Vatwani, psychiatrists, took him under their wings. Once cured, he got back his job at the Art School.

It was Hemant’s idea to organise an art auction to collect funds for the expansion work of the Shraddha Foundation. The artist community responded—as they always do and over 130 Indian painters and sculptors from India and abroad pledged their works for the cause.

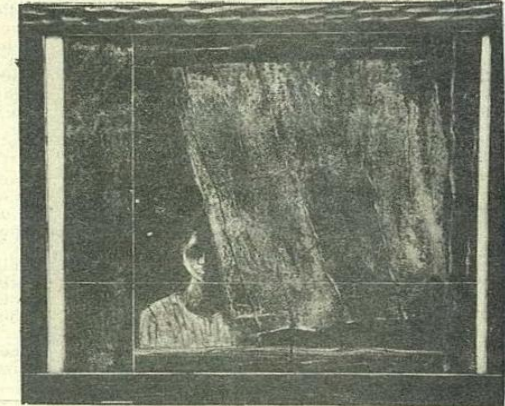
Of special mention at the exhibition are ‘Open window’ by Yusuf Arakkal, ‘Telangana Woman’ by Vaikuntham, ‘Aging couple’, a ceramic sculpture ‘Devi’ by Himmat Shah and another ceramic and copper piece by Nandgopal.

The exhibition will be inaugurated by Sunil Dutt. Prominent industrialists and business houses, bureaucrats and a number of film industry personalities are expected to visit the exhibition and bid at the auction.



■ Ceramic and copper by Nandgopal

■ ‘Open Window’ by Yusuf Arakkal



The Foundation proposes to open a bigger rehabilitation centre with occupation facilities at Dahisar so that more mentally afflicted destitutes can be given free medicare, counselling, shelter and a sense of purpose in life.

Mini Pant-Zachariah

Shraddha Samarpan

Jehangir Art Exhibition

18th to 24th October 1993

NATIONAL NEWS

Coverage - V / VI

By BANIJONA BANERJI
HELLO MAMA, hello papa. I'm very much fine here and happy... No, my name is Robinson. Burjor Rantomi Ahi is my artificial name... My wife and family live in Scotland Yard...
Robinson was picked up by Smitha and Bharat Vawani, the husband-wife team of psychiatrists from Shradddha Rehabilitation Foundation, outside Jehangir Art Gallery last week.

He is just one of the many mentally ill destitutes that the two, along with fellow doctor Ghanbhay Bhimani, have picked up from the streets of Bombay. And often cured. In the short time that Robinson has been with them, his paranoia has lessened — he doesn't think that spies are after him, but there's still a little irrelevant chatter.

When they started out, the Vawanis used to look after one destitute at a time. But as their private practise — and means of supporting destitutes — grew, the number increased. Today, they have about eight destitutes to 12 private patients in their nursing home at a time.

But while the private patients stay about a week — since they come at earlier stages in their illness — destitutes must stay at least two months. So, to look after them better, and separate the two types of patients, Shradddha has embarked on a grand scheme.

"We have located about 3000 sq feet in Dahisar where we would like to open a nursing home only for destitutes," says Bharat. This would be cheaper in the long run as they would get kitchen facilities which they don't have here, and would also be able to set up rehabilitation workshops.

To pay for the nursing home, Shradddha is organising a mammoth exhibition of the works of 130 Indian artists. "Right now, for every Rs 100 we spend, we get Rs 30 back," says Bharat, most of these through small donations.

The Vawanis are overwhelmed by the response they have got from the art world: "We have got full support from the artists, we are filled with gratitude. Once they realised what the cause was, they gave from the hearts."
One sector which closed its

doors is the corporate world. "I've been knocking on doors for months," says Bharat, "and I still haven't got past the PA stage."
And yet a simple letter to Sakti Barmar in Paris resulted in an acquisition of three paintings, instead of just the required one. Raza, also based in Paris, has sent in a work.

These are big names in Indian art, and the Vawanis had no prior acquaintance with them. But they felt for the cause. For the corporate sector's silence, though, the psychiatrists in Bharat comes out. "I'm sure that they are good people at heart, it's just that they haven't got the time."
People in the business add a

few factors to that. "Says one industrialist ruefully, "I get about 25 to 30 appeals on my desk everyday. I can't reply to all of them, so I pick those who have addressed me personally."
The ones which miss out are charities which just send a standardised sanitised letter all round.

Dilip De of Ranadip Shipping says that often, one person in a company is involved with a particular charity. As a result, all efforts are directed towards it, making it difficult for a new concern to break through.
But there is some hope for Shradddha. The chairman of East West Airlines has given his blessing, so has Sheriff T T Khorahiwala, owner of the Akbarally stores.

Geat's Harsh Goenka says, "Because this is art, and a good cause, I've written to Shradddha to say that I'd like to be involved."
Of course, Shradddha did have one foot in the art world's door through one of their first roadside patients. Hemant Thakare was a lecturer and gold medalist from the J J School of Arts. He was knocked off the rolls after a mental breakdown.

His students, who watched him wander the streets only to collapse in front of his alma mater, took him to Shradddha. Today, Thakare is well and back on the art school's faculty. He now helps Shradddha with their scheme, visiting artists, collecting their works, writing to them.

Like Thakare, many mentally ill people who wander the city's streets are intelligent and artistic. Often, they come from good homes. It is their disease which usually prompts them to leave.

Yet it is relatives who fail to realise the dangers of mental disease early enough. "In our culture, mental illness is not taken seriously," says Smitha. "And factors like Hindi films, where madness is seen as a laughing matter, hardly help,



Smita and Bharat... at the institute

PASSIONS OF THE KIND

Bombay's mentally ill destitutes have a new home. And a psychiatric couple is playing host

adds her husband, "People will wait and wait and wait for some lunar eclipse to cure him, and when that doesn't work, bring him in one Sunday morning." It is also common in India for the mentally ill to be married off, and then exhorted to have children, in some bizarre belief that these are cures.

In fact, most of the mentally ill people that Shradddha pick up are schizophrenics. Hounded by delusions, by voices that speak to them, they become incapable of the jump the gap between reality and make-believe.

Robinson, who had to be "put ka type ki surat banare building ke bahar khadi bar." So we picked her up," says Bharat. Then there's a lady from the Lions Club of Borivli who just walked in with a donation. Or another local lady who sent a cheque for Rs 1500. "A lot of people like to donate in kind, but we have to refuse them," says Bharat.

Smitha explains, "You see, if you give sugar, or rice, or bedchests, you might feel that

FROM DELHI, Baroda, Calcutta, Santiniketan, Madras, Chola, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune, Visakhapatnam, Bhopal, the US, Paris, they have sent their works. Moved by Shradddha's cause of mentally ill destitutes, these artists have not stinted on their generosity. "We would like the artists to keep 30 per cent of the sale amount. But many have waived even that," says Bharat.

The names on the list include S H Raza, Manjit Bawa, Anjolie Manoj, Kishan Khanna, Bikash Bhattacharya, Paritosh Sen, K C Subramanyam, Laxma Gouda, Yusuf Arzoo, Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh, Akbar Padamsee, Badrinarayan... and many more. Many refused initially, but later changed their minds. As Smitha points out, "It is the artistic and intelligent, after all, who are more likely to get schizophrenic."

One factor, however, which many insisted on, was that their works must not be auctioned. This is hardly surprising, given the fact that most auctions in this country have hardly been unqualified successes. In any case, if at all, only 20 or so works will be auctioned, perhaps only to fund the Shradddha Samarpan exhibition shows at the Jehangir Art Gallery and Artists Centre from October 18 to 24.

sedated to be brought to Shradddha, falls well into that category. "Yet, he tried to pay us for the sleeping tablets we used," say the doctors, "because he could not accept charity. He gave us a box of cheese."
"We also get psychotics and manic depressives," adds Bharat. Of the 200 roadside patients treated so far, Shradddha has about a 70 per cent success rate. Of the rest, many relapse because they stop their medication too early. Since schizophrenia is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain, medication is vital.

Shradddha has got a fair amount of support from the police and locals. "The other day the watchman from the building across the road came and said,

your donation is being used on private as well as charity patients. We don't want to risk that sort of dissatisfaction."
Former patients are also an excellent source — many return the service. "We get most of our old clothes from ex-patients," says Bharat. Of course, if the exhibition is a success, Shradddha will be offering a lot more to the wandering schizophrenic than old clothes.

And perhaps inspire others too. "When we went to the charity commissioner to register Shradddha, he laughed that this was the first charity he had heard of that looked after street-side destitutes," says Bharat.

May be Shradddha can change that.

Shradddha Rehabilitation Foundation, an organisation which seeks that the destitute ill dwellers on the streets of India, has organised an exhibition of the Jehangir Art Gallery, to raise funds for this cause.

Explains Dr. Bharat Vawani, the main trustee of the foundation, "We pick up the mentally disturbed people from the streets and look them. The majority of them are totally left to the mercy of the streets as they are treated upon as mad dogs and sent to the psychiatric hospitals in the city who are not equipped to give the right attention, medication and the chance of rehabilitation. At Shradddha, we have where these and get them a chance

to pick up the threads of their lives once again." The foundation has organised this exhibition, titled "Shradddha Samarpan" starting from Monday, September 18, across the country, including prominent artists like S.H. Raza from Pune, Bhupen Khakhar from Mumbai, Manjit Bawa from London and others have contributed their works, which will be sold through the exhibition and the proceeds will go towards the same. The exhibition will open till October 24.

Narain Prasad — Calcutta

Shradddha Foundation to hold fund-raiser



Narain Prasad — Calcutta



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Shradddha Samarpan
Jehangir Art
Exhibition
18th to 24th October
1993
BOMBAY
Coverage - VII / VIII

Shraddha Samarpan

Jehangir Art
Exhibition

18th to 24th October
1993

BOMBAY

Coverage - IX

OCTOBER 1993

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HEALTH & NUTRITION

HEALTH HURRAHS

Applause for persons or institutions
improve the standard

that have taken innovative steps to
of community health

*...for seven score
of India's leading
artists*

Why would a gold medallist and a popular lecturer at Bombay's J.J.School of Arts find himself kicked out of his job one morning? Because he had lost touch with reality, quite literally. Hemant Thakare, young, lean and bearded, ended up on Bombay's faceless streets, drifting in a schizophrenic haze of hallucinations.

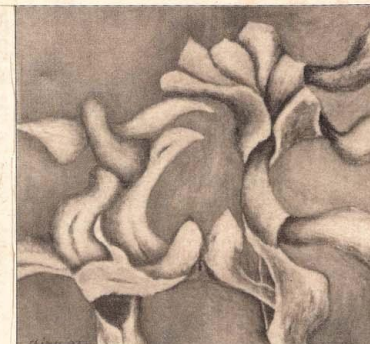
One day, a year later, he collapsed outside the Jehangir Art Gallery. It was at

MAKING A BIG SPLASH FOR A GREAT CAUSE

this point that one of his former students decided to take a hand. He had heard of the Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation, a city organisation spearheaded by the husband-wife team of Smitha and Bharat Vatwani, both practising psychiatrists. The Vatwanis have been drawing recent raves for the hands-on work they have been doing with streetside schizophrenics in Bombay. (See 'Health Hurrahs', Health & Nutrition, January, 1993). To put it pithily, they pick up mentally-ill destitutes off the city's roads, treat them with drugs and counselling, and then attempt to reunite them with their families (the majority are from outside Bombay) or to rehabilitate them in jobs in the city (often in the same jobs that they have lost due



Sneak preview! Some of the exhibits: Left: 'Birth of Water' by



Bhupen Khakkar; Right: 'Ring of Fire' by Chiru Chakravarty

to the mental illness).

And that's what Shraddha did for Hemant Thakare, too. When they found him he was engaged in a solo imaginary conversation with M.F.Husain. After his successful recovery (following about four months of treatment), the Vatwanis approached the State Secretary of Education, Kumud Bansal, and managed to get Thakare back his job in the J.J.School of Arts. This was four years ago, and Thakare is, in fact, due for a promotion shortly: the Dean reports that he is among the most punctual and professional members of the teaching staff.

And there the story could have ended: another success notched up to the credit of the Vatwanis who, to date have been able to maintain a 75 per cent recovery rate with the 200 mentally ill destitutes

they have rescued in the last five years.

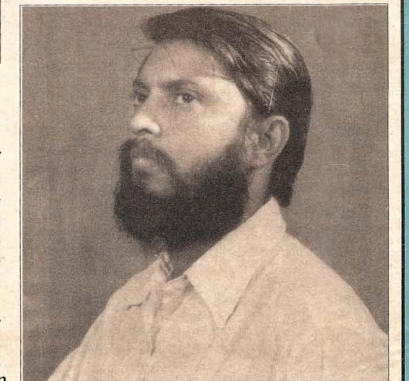
But Thakare, to his everlasting credit, did not just pick up the broken threads of his life and forge on. He decided to give something back to Shraddha. His brainchild: to get India's community of artists — the best and the biggest names in the land to come together in a unique venture, donating their works of art to raise funds for Shraddha.

Thakare personally called upon well-known artists, ranging from Bikash Bhattacharjee to Anjolie Ela Menon. And Bharat Vatwani informs Health & Nutrition that, all the way from London, has come a special contribution from Prafulla Mohanty, titled, 'Shraddha'. Other leading lights whose works will twinkle in the October 18-24 exhibition this year at the Jehangir Art Gallery and the Artists'

Centre at Bombay: Bhupen Khakkar, Prabhakar Barve, Prafulla Dahanukar, Suruchi Chand, Badrinarayan, Manjit Bawa, Jatin Das. And about 130 others.

Overwhelmed by the response from the artists, the Vatwanis are now confident that the citizenry will also surpass itself and rise to the occasion. The money raised will go into an upcoming Shraddha project: a new building to house mentally-ill destitutes, accomodating at least five times the number that can be taken in at the existing premises.

And how can it fail to touch a chord



Thakare: Giving back something

when we remember that the ones to whom Shraddha reaches out a hand are the loneliest of the lonely: those who are strangers even to themselves?

NIRMALA FERRAO

SUNDAY MAIL

INDIA'S PREMIER NEWS WEEKLY

Pages 16+4+4 Volume IV: Issue 49 Bombay, October 31-November 6, 1993

SRF cares for mental destitutes

by CHANDRASHEKHAR
SALVI

Bombay

Saroj, 24, was found roaming aimlessly in Borivli. She would refuse food and alms and become violent with passer-bys. She was picked up by workers of the Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation (SRF). Treatment saw her gradually change, both physically and mentally, and one day she was escorted back to her native place.

Hemant Thakre, an ex-lecturer of the J.J. School of Arts, Bombay, was dismissed from service due to mental breakdown. After wandering around he collapsed outside the Jehangir Art Gallery. SRF pulled him back from the edge of madness, approached the secretary of education and helped Thakre get his job back.

These are just two cases of mentally-ill destitutes picked up and treated by the husband-wife psychiatrists team, Dr Bharat and Smitha Vatwani and a fellow-doctor, Ghanshyam Bhimani, of the SRF, Borivli. They have been providing free medicare to mentally unstable people found on the roads for the past seven years.

Dr. Bharat said: "Since destitutes come at earlier stages in their illness they have to be housed for at least two months. To look after them better we intend setting up a 4,000 sq ft nursing home in Dahisar which will be exclu-

sively dedicated to roadside destitutes. The nursing home will house around 100 patients at any given time. It will also have rehabilitation facilities such as gardening, stitching, sewing, kitchen space and recreational facilities."

To raise funds for the nursing home, a major art exhibition-cum-auction organised by SRF is being held at the Jehangir Art Gallery. About 140 senior artists from India and abroad have donated their works for the cause of mentally afflicted destitutes. Vatwani said: "We have got a good response and full support from the art world."

Artists will receive 30 per cent of the sale amount while the foundation keeps the remaining 70 per cent. Many artists have even relinquished their share. Participating artists include Bhupen Khokhar, Yusuf Arakkal, Ajnolie Ela Menon, S.H. Raza, Manjit Bawa, Rameshwar Broota, Manu Parekh, Uma Adirekar, Prabhakar Barve, Bikash Bhattacharjee and Sheela Gowda.

The SRF has treated around 200 patients so far. It avoids drug addicts, alcoholics and the aged, preferring to treat mentally unstable people as according to Dr Bharat, "Mental illness is the most neglected of all ailments -- even when the sufferer is living within the secure confines of the family. Our aim is to help those whose tragedies are not of their own making."

Shradha Samarpan

Jehangir Art
Exhibition

18th to 24th October
1993

BOMBAY

Coverage - X

ISLAND

BOMBAY AT ITS BEST

HUMAN INTEREST

Mending Minds

HE WOULD HAVE SPENT HIS LIFE ON THE ROADS, HUNGRY AND OUT TO TOUCH WITH REALITY, IF A GROUP OF PSYCHIATRISTS HADN'T TAKEN IT UPON THEMSELVES TO REHABILITATE HIM

HE was a reporter for the *Washington Post* and the pavement was his beat. He pounded the pavements, tirelessly, searching, straining to find something. Possibly a story. Where it mattered, deep in the recesses of his restless mind, he really believed he was a reporter for the famous American newspaper. Sometimes he imagined he was George Bush but for the greater part he was a hotshot scribe with a story to file. People looked at him pityingly. Unkempt, straggly hair, dishevelled clothes, a crazed look in his eyes. They thought he was mad. He didn't care.

But some one obviously did. Dr Bharat Vatwani, psychiatrist with an unusual mission, discovered Sudhir Phadke roaming the streets and instead of raising a professional eyebrow before turning his back on the unfortunate man, Dr Vatwani gently coaxed Phadke to come away with him.

The Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation is where the doctor took Phadke. Established by Dr Vatwani himself, in

association with his wife Smitha and Dr Ghanshyam Bhimani, also psychiatrists, the institution was dedicated to mentally ill destitutes wandering on the streets of India. Like Sudhir Phadke. It was their mission to rehabilitate such unfortunates and bring them back to reality. "People afflicted with mental illness are down with a tragedy not of their making. It is not like alcoholism or drug addiction where the person himself is contributing to it. This is a chemical disturbance in the brain and can happen to anybody," explains Dr Vatwani.

Sudhir Phadke's case is just one of over 300 that the Foundation has helped to rehabilitate but the success of this particular case has been particularly heartwarming to his mentors, the results have been so tangible. Phadke, a sub-engineer with the Bombay Municipal Corporation, was an ordinary educated worker, devoted to his family and job. He discovered a flair for writing and tried his hand at freelancing for publications like *Dinank*, *Kridangan*, *Lok Prabha* and *Satkar*.

He aired his views on education and pollution and the state of sports in the country. Sports was a field he enjoyed, he even represented the BMC in cricket matches. He might even have taken to writing full-time but realised that his job at the BMC was more stable, it would at least bring him a regular income.

Somewhere along the way, Phadke began to get delusive. His family history caught up with him. His first wife had been discovered to be schizophrenic and the marriage was declared null and void. His second wife developed a thyroid problem that plagued her for eight long years before it was cured. If that was not enough, his mother was assailed with cancer, he watched her undergo four operations in ten years before finally succumbing to the disease. Earlier his father had lost the battle against abdominal cancer — he died on the day Phadke graduated from VJTI.

"We were under severe mental and financial pressure," remembers Phadke,



FROM HELPLESSNESS TO HELP TO HEALING: SUDHIR PHADKE



and he exhibits not a trace of his previous illness. It's as if his bout with mental illness never took place. "I asked my wife to look after my mother but she didn't bother. When my mother finally died, my wife decided she couldn't get along with me, so she left, taking with her our daughter. That's when my problem began."

Phadke chucked his job with the BMC. Some colleagues realised he was showing signs of mental illness and tried to get him admitted to the KEM Hospital. The hospital authorities refused to admit him because he didn't have any relatives with him. "I went to meet Nikhil Wagle of *Mabanagar* and he asked me to join *Mabanagar* but that didn't work out. Meanwhile some so-called friends suggested I rent out my flat at Borivli on leave and license terms. The tenant paid Rs 25,000 as deposit which was intercepted by the agent and I was out on the roads," recalls Phadke.

He was on the streets for nine months, he went without food for days, boys would throw stones at him, people called him mad. That's when Dr Vatwani found him. "He was lying on the road in Borivli, his head was full

of pus and lice. He was talking to himself, imagining himself to be someone big. We took him in and within three months he began to show improvement," says Dr Vatwani.

Phadke recalls his days on the road with distaste. "I vividly remember those days. I used to sleep on the roads and when the police came looking for criminals at night, they would pick me up. I went to a senior police inspector at the Borivli police station and told him I had nowhere to sleep. He gave me permission to sleep where I wanted and asked me to use his name if anyone asked. The police never harassed me after that. I had no food and I contracted malaria which got worse everyday. But I kept on writing."

When Dr Vatwani found him, he made arrangements to pay the tenant his deposit and acquired Phadke's flat for him again. "Once he was rehabilitated, we tried to get his job back for him," informs Dr Vatwani. "We went to meet the then deputy municipal commissioner and director of technical services, P.N. Kale. He was very impressed by Phadke. He took an on-the-spot interview on civil engineering and was very happy with Phadke's replies. After a long bureaucratic procedure which took almost six months, Phadke was reinstated."

Today Phadke is back at work, drawing a comfortable salary again. His faith in humanity, so buffeted at one time, is almost restored again. He wasn't completely out of touch with reality even at his worst, he still re-

"I HAD NO FOOD AND I CONTRACTED MALARIA WHICH GOT WORSE EVERYDAY. BUT I KEPT ON WRITING."

members the traumatic times. But he's willing to look ahead. "I live in the present. I try not to think about the future. I want to forget the past. Six months ago my wife filed for divorce. The divorce is almost through. I try to avoid meeting my daughter, I don't want any emotional tangles."

The doctor is proud of his role in the rehabilitation. The fact that the rehabilitation is complete, that Phadke has come full circle, back to a job he was doing, is very heartening. Phadke of course is grateful. In his eyes, Dr Vatwani is the only person in the world who has the right to light his funeral pyre. He's the one who gave him another chance at life after all.

In a city where time is not a luxury for most, there are still some people who take the time to stop and notice the less fortunate; and when they've seen them, they take the time to stop and help. The Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation has recently been able to expand their activities to include facilities to house, shelter and rehabilitate about 30 mentally ill destitutes at any given point of time. Sudhir Phadke is certainly not the last of the beneficiaries of the institution. There is hope for many more like him. ●

NATIONAL
News

Bombay

JULY 1994

**However, not all was easy going
& the local residents
resisted & took
Shraddha to court for picking up**

**“roadside, psychiatrically disturbing
elements”**

**that they perceived
threatened their families
with a bad influence**

DAHISAR CENTER
COVERAGE - 1

NATIONAL
News

Mumbai

MARCH 1997

People will not readily bear pain unless there is hope
— Michael Edwards (South African businessman)



The leader guards the reader

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Mumbai: Saturday, March 1, 1997

Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd.

30 pages with Saturday Times

Centre for mentally ill at Dahisar upsets local residents

By Sophie Menezes

MUMBAI: The Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation's recently established rehabilitation centre for mentally-ill patients at Dahisar has given rise to a controversy and become a cause for concern and anxiety among local residents, particularly women and children.

Says clinical psychologist Meeta Shah, who lives in the neighbourhood, "It is unfair to expose such patients to normal people as it makes them suffer from a complex. Besides, they have a tendency to be careless

regarding their clothing. Considering that our high-rise buildings overlook their rooms, such acts could have an adverse effect on youngsters and children. Moreover, the environment provided for these patients should be spacious, open and environmentally friendly."

The centre's two-storeyed building, which is still under construction, presently houses nine inmates — two females, six males and a child — in one room. "The incomplete structure lacks proper water supply, electricity, medical facilities and food arrangements, which are prerequisites for any rehabilitation centre, nursing home or hospital," complain members of New Link Road Residents' Association, Dahisar.

"The absence of proper security measures (like a high compound wall with barbed wire fencing) could make residents victims of untoward incidents, for which the mentally ill

cannot be held responsible," they add.

The residents said they appreciated the aim of the project but were against its location. They would welcome the conversion of the same structure into a nursing home for the aged, alcoholics or drug addicts. Alternately, they insist that the foundation should sell the property and buy more land at cheaper rates at either Mira Road or Naigaon for their mentally-ill patients.

However, psychiatrists Bharat and Smitha Vatwani, who founded the centre, say that such suggestions will remain mere suggestions unless the residents themselves contribute funds for the new centre.

Incidentally, the need for better services and support for mentally-ill destitutes prompted the Vatwanis to launch the project. In the last seven years, they have picked up nearly 600 patients off the streets and brought

them to their nursing home at Borivli for treatment.

But they felt that the existing facilities at the Borivli centre could not satisfactorily meet the needs of the mentally ill. They then decided to buy a 1,400-sq foot plot from the proceeds of an art exhibition titled, 'Shraddha Samarpan', in 1993. The construction work, which commenced in January 1996, is expected to finish this month.

The nursing home plan was approved by the Brihanmumbai municipal corporation, according to the Vatwanis. The rehab centre will provide for 40 beds — 20 for females on the first floor and 20 for males on the second. The Vatwanis feel the 24-hour water supply from underground and overhead tanks should be adequate.

In addition to the grill work and locks on doors at the centre, doctors are willing to chain patients who are likely to cause a problem for the neighbourhood.

EXPRESS Newsline

EXPRESS Newsline

MUMBAI ■ SATURDAY ■ FEBRUARY 22, 1997

Residents wage war against mental hospital in Dahisar

KAAJAL WALIA
FEBRUARY 21

IRATE residents of New Link Road colony in Dahisar (West) are threatening to force the closure of a newly opened mental hospital in their locality. Displeased with the hospital's location, the residents are agitating to shut down the institution.

The hospital run by a trust 'Shraddha rehabilitation Centre' has been in operation since February 10, 1997 from a bungalow here.

Starting with a single patient, the hospital now has nine mental inmates including four women.

Dr Bharat Vatwani, director of the rehabilitation centre, alleges that over 60 residents of the township tried to enter their hospital on February 12 night when his wife, Dr Smita Vatwani, was inspecting the patients.

"They tried to force their way

into the hospital but somehow, were kept in check. On February 16, the residents' association threatened to stage a dharna, after which, we sought protection from the police," he says.

Two police constables from the nearby Dahisar police station are kept on guard at the entrance of the hospital.

However, the New Link Road Residents' Association, which has 800-odd members, denies resorting to violence. "We are all middle-class working people. When would we get time for all this," they ask.

They further alleged being cheated by Dr Vatwani who had earlier promised to shift the hospital premises to a suitable location. "In one of our meetings with Dr Vatwani, it was mutually decided that the hospital premises would be shifted to another location.

He even agreed to look into our suggested alternative sites," a

member of the association informs.

"The construction work of the hospital abruptly stopped after the meeting, which naturally gave the impression that Dr Vatwani had lost interest in the project. However, a flurry of activity was witnessed towards the end of January. A fortnight later, the hospital started functioning after an inaugural ceremony was secretly performed at midnight," he disclosed.

The association, is quick to point out that they are neither against the trustees nor the mental hospital. "Dr Vatwani is doing a wonderful job. We simply want the hospital premises to be shifted to a secluded place, away from our residential area since we are worried about the safety of our members," informs N J Save, general secretary of the association.

Dr Vatwani says, mental destitutes without a violent streak are admitted to their rehabilitation in-

stitute, which should calm the residents' fears. He further denied having ever agreed to shift the hospital premises to another location.

"We have been running a similar rehabilitation centre at Borivli for the last six years and none of our neighbours there have faced any problems. In fact, I have extended an open invitation to the association to visit my Borivli premises and speak to the residents anytime to clear their doubts," when contacted, Dr Vatwani told *Express Newsline*.

Shankar Pawar, senior police inspector at Dahisar Police station talking about the issue said, "We have received complaints from the residents as well as the hospital's trustees.

We have provided police protection to the hospital after the residents' threat to stage a demonstration. However, now everything is under control."

**In a landmark judgement,
the much-abused section of
society
found its lawful
place under the Sun...**

**“The mentally-ill roadside
destitutes”...**

emphasized the Mumbai High Court,

**“are as much entitled
to medical help as any physically
indisposed person”**

NATIONAL
News

Mumbai

JUNE 1997

EXPRESS Newsline



The Indian EXPRESS

MUMBAI ■ MONDAY, JUNE 30, 1997

HC gives rehab centre the nod

MANOJ KUMAR SHARMA

JUNE 29

BRUSHING aside residents' fears, the Bombay High Court has upheld Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation's (SRF) right to run a rehabilitation centre for mentally ill at Kandarpada in Dahisar (W). The centre provides shelter to mentally-ill destitutes for free. It also provides for their treatment and rehabilitation.

The centre was facing stiff opposition from the Kandarpada residents who perceived a threat to their children and womenfolk from its inmates. They wanted the centre shifted to a "safer place" and had filed a petition at the Bombay High Court against the centre and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

Upholding SRF's right to run the centre, the bench comprising Justice A C Agrawal and S D Gundewar observed that since the foundation was engaged in providing psychiatric care, food, shelter and rehabilitation facilities to destitutes free of charge, it becomes every citizen's duty to support it in whatever way possible.

The foundation had sought a licence to run the centre on March 14 from the BMC. But its application was not processed as the residents' petition was pending in the court. The bench directed the state government to appoint an inspection committee as per the prescribed norms of the Mental Health Act, 1987 within three weeks. The inspection committee will inspect the SRF centre and submit its report to the government within period of three months.

Dr Bharat Vatwani, a trustee of the SRF said, "None of the psychiatric hospitals in the state have a licence. I am running my psychiatric institute at Borivli as a nursing home."

Dr Vatwani said, "This judgment is moral victory for the mentally ill destitutes who have been rejected by the society."

About the residents' fears he said, "We have been running a similar rehabilitation centre at Borivli for the past 10 years and none of our neighbours there have faced any problems." The residents, however are far from convinced. "We appreciate the project but its location is not acceptable to us."

"There is no security in this centre and local residents would be victims of mentally ill patients who cannot be held responsible by the law," lamented another residents.

**NATIONAL
News**

AUGUST 1997

THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE
Rs 10 August 13, 1997
OUTLOOK

■ **SOCIETY**

The Road to Tranquility

IN what may be considered a landmark judgement, a much-abused section of society found its lawful place under the sun. The mentally-ill, roadside destitutes..., emphasised a Mumbai High Court statement, are as much entitled to medical help as any physically indisposed person. This ruling was in response to the case filed by the residents of Dahisar, a far-flung, western suburb of Mumbai, against the Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation, started by Dr Bharat Vatwani, a psychiatrist by profession.

Founded a decade ago, Shraddha is the only institution of its kind; it picks up roadside destitutes and helps rehabilitate them. "Mental illness has a taboo attached to it," feels Vatwani. Add to that patients "picked from the roads" and the neighbours found enough to complain about. They believed that such 'anti-social elements' would be a threat to their families, besides being a bad influence.

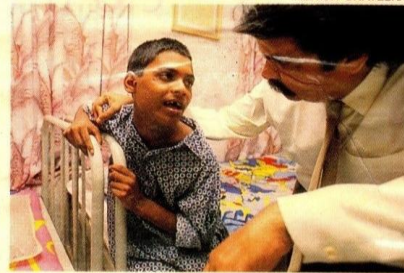
The court, however, was concerned about the laxity in the implementation of the Mental Health Act 1987, where institutions like Shraddha do without mental health clinic licences. It directed the government to appoint an inspection committee to take stock of Shraddha and issue the required licence.

The judgement has come as good news for Vatwani who, along with his psychiatrist-wife and staffers, have been engaged in this unromantic enterprise. While

some patients respond within a few days, the average treatment period ranges from a month to two. Over 500 patients have been rehabilitated in the last ten years. Patients from areas as far off as Nagaland have been found and treated.

Shraddha has, in the process, gathered sufficient goodwill from others in the medical fraternity. Doctors from all disciplines ranging from gynaecology to skin-specialists offer their services voluntarily. Today, at any given time, there are about 20 inmates living and working together. That's when the doctor bought the premi-

ABHIJIT BHATLEKAR



ses in the hub of the case. Help from organisations like the Lions Club—which is paying for the construction of the double-storey structure—has been forthcoming, but none from the government yet.

The problem is widespread, which is why Vatwani has had to set a criterion for choosing patients. Shraddha takes young people who have been ill for short periods and have a greater chance of recovery. This choice may seem a poor commentary on our society's current values: Older patients are rarely accepted back by their family members whereas the older willingly accept their young ones. ■

Charubala Annuncio

Bombay Times

Shradha Foundation brings schizophrenics back to reality

Alex Fernandes

MANIBEN would have been just another homemaker had it not been for her mental illness. As a schizophrenic who was also the victim of wife-

beating, she came to Mumbai a decade ago with her two children, abandoning her spouse in Mehsana in Gujarat. Lost in the labyrinth of this callous city, with no one to turn to for help, Maniber, slumped it out, sometimes surviving on contaminated water and eating leftovers. She lost one of her children before psychiatrists Smita and Bharat Vatwani of the Shradha Foundation at Dahisar admitted her in their institute for treatment.

The Shradha Foundation is dedicated to the care of persons afflicted with schizophrenia. Dr Smita Vatwani expands on the illness. "Schizophrenia is a major mental illness in which a person's thinking is impaired due to chemical changes in the brain. The schizophrenic loses touch with reality, smiles, laughs and talks incoherently to himself. Schizophrenics live in a world of make-believe in which they are completely delinked from reality." Dr. Bharat Vatwani adds, "For instance, the patient imagines himself to be a VIP or a close associate of a well-known personality." Clinically, schizophrenia is an abnormally-elevated level of dopamine, a chemical in the brain.

Prakash Gokhale, 50, a management graduate from IIM was working in a senior capacity with a pest control firm when he was afflicted with schizophrenia about 15 years ago. Prakash was picked up from the roadside in Dadar by volunteers of the Shradha Foundation. Today, Prakash has no recollection of how the course of his life turned from the cozy comforts of his office and home to the streets. Shunned by his wife and children, he does not even know their whereabouts today. "They have moved away from the house where I once lived," he says with a blank expression on his face.

For Prakash, his earlier life is a forgotten dream. Now he is rewriting his life with the help and care of the Shradha Foundation.

Indeed, care and love is what a schizophrenic needs most. "But people often beat up and ridicule patients, treating them as though they were the scum of society," says Dr Smita. "They are often tagged as 'insane' and 'mad' and the hackneyed attitude is to shun them," adds Dr Bharat. "The social ostracism stems from a lack of awareness and a misconception which needs to be dispelled," he feels. Dr Bharat Vatwani rues that while other underprivileged sections of society are often given a fair chance to live life, we have

SYMPTOMS:

- Gibberish talk.
- Patient sits in one position for hours or even days without any sleep.
- Walks without clothes and exhibits other forms of uninhibited behaviour.
- Smiles, laughs, talks to himself without any reason.
- Prefers remaining unhygienic and unrepresentable in appearance.
- Suffers aural and visual hallucination.
- Is suspicious about friends, neighbours.

chosen to blindfold ourselves to the mentally challenged.

Contrary to this discouraging response, Shradha Foundation is a saviour for schizophrenics, thriving

purely on donations and contributions from well-wishers while a major part of the funds are chipped in by the Vatwanis from their personal income. The treatment which often lasts for a considerable period of time comprises hospitalisation and anti-psychotic medication which assuages the level of dopamine in the brain. "Occupational rehabilitation goes a long way in treating the patient, as much as love and care from the family," reveals Dr Smita.

Despite the fact that the trust operates on a shoe-string budget, Shradha Foundation also provides financial aid to patients and helps them reunite with their families once memory floods back. "It is a satisfying experience to see them in communion with their family after years of wandering away from home," says Supriya, a social worker attached to the foundation.

"Our first patient was a young graduate of microbiology who was picked up from near a garbage can. After three weeks of treatment, he spoke in perfect English and was able to tell us his address," recounts Dr Bharat. "He had come to Mumbai from Andhra Pradesh and is today married and has a child," beams Dr Smita. "At the end of the day, we feel satisfied that we've contributed our mite to society, though it's not adequate enough given the number of schizophrenics in the city," she concludes.

MUMBAI
News

AUGUST 1998

Haven for the homeless

Nivedita Gowda visits Shradha Rehabilitation Centre, where mentally ill patients with no place to go find shelter

A dishevelled Sudhir Phadke was found wandering aimlessly at Yogi Nagar in Borivli, muttering to himself. His clothes were in tatters and his hair badly matted. Sudhir believed he was a journalist with The Washington Post. After a traumatic 15 years at the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, Sudhir, who found himself a misfit there, fell prey to schizophrenia.

His wife left him, and his friends fleeced his money and inhabited his house. Now, Sudhir roams the streets of Borivli, at the mercy of strangers.

Hemant Thakre, a gold medalist, and professor at JJ School of Arts used to behave and talk like Maqbool Fida Hussain. He would even refuse to wear slippers. Diagnosed a schizophrenic, he lost his job at JJ. He would often sit on the steps at Jehangir Art Gallery, muttering to himself.

Raja Kalid, son of a police inspector from Kashmir, was wandering naked on the streets of Borivli. He was very violent when taken in by social workers. He had to be drugged for many days before they started psychiatric treatment on him.

Apart from the fact that Sudhir, Hemant and Khalid were mentally ill with schizophrenia, they have another thing in common. They were all rescued by the Vatwanis, the doctor couple that founded Shradha Rehabilitation Centre for mentally ill roadside destitutes.

But for the timely intervention from the Vatwanis, Sudhir, Hemant, Khalid and the 20-odd patients at Shradha would have had no hope, left to die on



WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A PLAY: A mentally retarded child who was brought in by the Vatwanis became a master at the art of playing the tabla during his stay there.
Picture by Vinayaka Prabhu

the streets of Mumbai.

At Shradha, Smitha and Bharat Vatwani pick up such people and rein-

state them back life. They even keep the odd patient who finds it hard to be accepted by society at their private

nursing home in Borivli.

Sudhir, who was reinstated at the BMC after he was cured of his illness,

opted for social service. He now engages his time gardening and managing the Shradha office.

because most of the patients are uneducated with little or no knowledge or memory about the place they come

from. "Sometimes," says Smitha, "they even wonder how they landed up in Mumbai. They have absolutely no recollection."

"These patients are mentally ill. They sit in any train and land up anywhere the train takes them. So it becomes very difficult trace their village," she says.

Shradha Foundation presently has three permanent patients. One of them is a woman who was found at Dahisar railway station.

His parents in Andhra Pradesh were contacted and the patient finally left for his home town.

There are scores of such inspiring examples at Shradha. Due to a financial slump, the Vatwanis are finding it extremely difficult to manage even daily expenses. But that is hardly a deterrent to the spirits of this couple.

Recently, they had organised an art exhibition and auction of paintings from some of the most renowned painters in India.

The tremendous response to the exhibition enabled the foundation to buy its own land at Dahisar and build a day-and-night care centre for the mentally ill.

A set of 10 greeting cards with picture of famous paintings are sold for Rs 8 each to further raise funds for Shradha.

But most of the funds for the foundation come from Bharat and Smitha Vatwani's private practice.

The doctors personally escort their patients to their native land and homes. Sometimes finding the correct address is the most Herculean task. This is

"The satisfaction of seeing people reunited with their families is satisfaction enough"

- Smitha Vatwani

She was violent and throwing stones at passerby. Her husband and family refused to take her home, even after she was cured. She now helps the nursing staff at Shradha.

Smitha Vatwani divides her time between the nursing home at Borivli and Shradha at Dahisar.

If that is not enough, she even has three adopted kids at her home in Borivli. Life is busy business for this unusually concerned couple.

"I used to find it difficult when I came in the mornings to attend to my patients. Now I come only in the evenings. That way I am free during the day to do whatever I please. And most of the time, I work," says Smitha Vatwani.

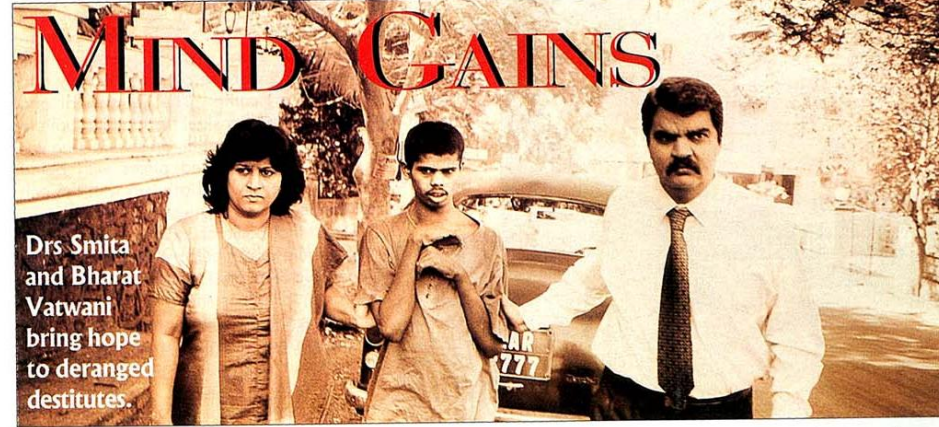
**NATIONAL
News**

DECEMBER 1998

NATIONAL
News

SAVVY

MARCH 2000



Drs Smita and Bharat Vatwani bring hope to deranged destitutes.

It was triggered off by a dirty, mad man in rags who lived next to a garbage bin near a gutter — his sources of food and water. Psychiatrists Drs Smita and Bharat Vatwani saw him and immediately realised that he was a schizophrenic. They took him to their clinic and treated him. The recovery of the patient, Vijayan, was dramatic and he was immediately escorted back to his village in Andhra Pradesh. Vijayan was a diploma holder in pathology.

This was the turning point in the lives of Drs Smita and Bharat too. "The seed of interest in helping others was always there in us. Even as students in psychiatry, when we used to see the mentally ill on the road, we used to wonder why nobody was helping them out. With treatment, people like Vijayan can be useful members of society. However initially, we had neither the infrastructure nor the resources to support them. After we set up our own private practice and our treatment on Vijayan yielded very quick and positive results, we decided to devote our energy to helping others like him."

Their 'Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation' in Borivali, a western suburb in Mumbai, was registered in 1992, though the couple started their good work much earlier. Currently, they house and treat at least 20 mentally ill destitutes totally free of cost, at any given point of time. Most of their patients are schizophrenics and manic depressives.

The destitutes at 'Shraddha' are referred by concerned individuals and organisations. The staff too bring in such persons from the roads and railway stations. They are given medication and injectable treatment which gives quick results — crucial for those who are violent or suicidal. Treatment can last for about two to three months, depending on the seriousness of the illness.

"After the person is back in touch with reality, we ask him/her for the home address and escort the person back," says Dr Smita. This is often a very satisfying experience as, "the entire village turns up to receive the person. Their emotional bonds are very strong," says Supriya Sinha who has been working with them for more than seven years. 'Shraddha's' services are free. The

staffers follow up on cases through letters and send medicines if they are not locally available. Most of the rehabilitated patients settle in well but there are a few who fail to take the medicines and have a relapse. Drs Bharat and Smita finance all the activities of the 'Shraddha Foundation' by their earnings from private practice and private donations.

That mental illness is a grave spectre haunting society, is undeniable. Says Dr Bharat, "There is a 50 per cent chance in every person's life of undergoing some form of mental illness. One per cent of the population suffers from schizophrenia. In spite of these facts, mental illness is not on anybody's priority list."

Paucity of funds and volunteers hampers the activities of 'Shraddha' a good deal. Says Dr Bharat, "Mad people don't evoke sympathy. There is still a great deal of stigma attached to psychiatric patients."

Adds Dr Smita, "After a patient becomes well, no volunteer comes forward to take the patient back home. We have to divert our own trained staff to take him back to his village." To solve this problem, the couple are planning to form a corpus of funds to employ more qualified staff.

Drs Smita and Bharat are equally passionate about their cause. They divide their time between their home, private practice and the work of 'Shraddha'. Of course, it is an uphill battle and Dr Bharat often finds himself frustrated. "The magnitude of the problem is gigantic and our coverage is too little in comparison." Dr Bharat poured out his despair in a book of poetry entitled, 'Alone. Isolated. And Lonely'. He penned,

"There has to be an end,
vision at the end of the tunnel,
redemption..."

Over 800 patients have recovered with the help of Shraddha Foundation. They are probably a part of the redemption.

('Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation' can be contacted at 022-8954333/8918321)

KHUSHMAND
PHOTOGRAPH MUKESH PANCHAL

Mid Day

Saturday • December 1, 2001



THE SMILE SAYS IT ALL: Mridula with other patients of Shradha Nursing Home, which specialises in helping destitutes who need mental help

Samaritans to aid of destitute principal

Scholar beggar now in Dahisar nursing home. Several others come forward to help

Shailesh Bhatia

"MY world is about to change," says Mridula Bose, former principal of Ramkrishna Mission High School, near Kolkata, who has been singing songs for money on Juhu Beach for the past four months. The beggar was discovered when she walked into Santa Cruz Police Station to complain about the other beggars on the beach harassing her.

Now, after a story in Mid Day about the beggar woman who could quote Kalidas and Shakespeare, Sanskrit shlokas and Wordsworth, several people have come forward to give Mridula the assistance she needs.

"I have received more than 15 calls from people and institutions who want to help Mridula. Some came personally to the police station to meet her," said Senior Inspector Vilas Tupe, of the Santa Cruz police.

For now, help has come from the Shradha Nursing Home, Dahisar, which is run by Dr Bharat Vatwani. Mridula is being treated for mental problems at the centre. Shradha, which offers its services for free, specialises in the psychiatric treatment and rehabilitation of mentally afflicted destitutes.

Vatwani sent Dr Sheetal Bhandari, an occupational therapist, and Neha Mehta, a social worker, to the Santa Cruz police on Wednesday evening.

Tupe arranged for Bhandari and Mehta to go to the beach and find Mridula. Mehta said, "She was just lying on the beach, clutching her small bundle of belongings and a copy of Mid Day in which her story had appeared. She readily agreed to come with us to the nursing home."

Vatwani, who has examined Mridula, said, "There are some



COMFORT AMONG FRIENDS: Sheetal Bhandari (left), an occupational therapist, and Neha Mehta, a social worker, who were sent by Dr Bharat Vatwani (below) of Shradha Nursing Home to find Mridula at Juhu Beach on Wednesday

signs of psychological imbalance. Such bio-chemical disturbances can be treated with medicine. There are very, very good chances of her recovering in four to eight weeks."

He added, "Normally, in such cases, when the patient starts responding to medication, she may want to rise back to her earlier social status. Whether she wants to go and stay with someone, or return to her family in Kolkata, will depend on her at the time of her discharge."

Yesterday afternoon, Mridula seemed at ease at the nursing home. "This place reminds me of Mother Teresa's Ashram back in Kolkata," she said. "Everyone is kind to me. All the fussing over me is giving me an inferiority complex. I like it here, but I feel like a bird in a golden cage. I will truly be happy when I am free to lead a normal life."

Vatwani said, "This is a common case of people not diagnosing a mental problem and treating it on time. People run to a doctor for a common cold, but tend to ignore mental health."

If Mridula decides to not return to Kolkata, she would have several options. Those wanting to help include Amrita Aluwallia, an Air India airhostess, who was in the news a decade ago for rescuing Ameena, a minor from Hyderabad. Ameena was about to be put on a

plane at Delhi airport and sent to Saudi Arabia to be sold as a child bride.

"I want to take Mridula with me to Hyderabad. She can live in my flat for the rest of her life. After all, my mother used to be a teacher too. I will not let her spend another night on the beach," Aluwallia says.

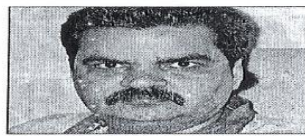
Due to her flight schedule, Aluwallia was unable to meet Mridula, but she said, "I have psychiatric friends in Hyderabad who will be able to give her the best of help she needs."

Mridula was happy to know that Aluwallia had offered to take her to Hyderabad. "I would like to be in the company of decent people who stimulate me intellectually."

Offers to help have also come from Mahua Chanda, who works in a financial firm and has compiled a list of institutions that could treat Mridula. Chanda also personally volunteered to be of assistance.

Nalini Shetye, of the Shradhanand Mahila Sangh, Marunji, is also willing to treat and rehabilitate Mridula at the institution. "Since she has a degree in music and a fabulous voice, she can teach music," she said.

Mridula, while on leave as principal, had received 30 per cent burns on her face and body in an accident. She never recovered



from the trauma, and was sent to Mumbai on a holiday by her brother to help her get her mind off her problems. But on her first day here, she was robbed of all her possessions on Juhu Beach. After that, she made the beach her home, returning there even after being sent back to Kolkata by the police, who had donated their own money to buy her a ticket on the Gitanjali Express.

“ I FEEL LIKE A BIRD IN A GOLDEN CAGE. I WILL TRULY BE HAPPY WHEN I AM FREE TO LEAD A NORMAL LIFE

— Mridula Bose

Tuesday • February 5, 2002

Mid Day

Bye-bye Mridula

A couple of months ago, Mridula Bose was found lying on Juhu Beach, uncared for and unloved. Thanks to the timely attention she received from samaritans, this former school principal is today on the Howrah Mail, travelling back to her family in Kolkata

We deliver Mumbai

City bids adieu to its most celebrated beggar

Mid Day impact

School principal turns beggar

Says she cannot return to Kolkata and let her family see her in this condition

Report in the Mid Day on November 28, 2001

Principal who sang for alms heads back to Kolkata

Shailesh Bhatia

AT 8 pm yesterday, a small group of people gathered at Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) to bid farewell to 44-year-old Mridula Bose, perhaps this city's most celebrated beggar.

A former high school principal, Bose ended up singing for alms at Juhu Beach after a couple of tragedies. But nearly two months after Mid Day first carried her story, a rehabilitated Bose, who has received psychiatric help in the city, bid adieu to well-wishers and began her journey back east.

Bose was once the principal of Ramkrishna Mission High School, in Satna, West Bengal. She was burned in a freak accident, which left her scarred, both physically and psychologically. Her brother sent her to Mumbai to help her forget her troubles. But on her first night in the city she was robbed of all her belongings on Juhu Beach. With no other alternative, she took up residence on the beach, singing for alms.

The other vagabonds soon realised she was no ordinary beggar, and harried her. She complained about this to the Santa Cruz police, who also realised she was no ordinary tramp. She quoted Kalidas and Shakespeare, and sang Rabindra Sangeet.

Once her story was reported, many concerned people and organisations volunteered to shelter and rehabilitate her. Dr Bharat Watwani, who runs the Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation, a voluntary organisation dedicated to mentally afflicted destitutes, took Bose



FAREWELL: Former high school principal Mridula Bose on the Howrah Mail yesterday

to his Dahisar hospital.

After two months of treatment, Bose is keen to rebuild her life. She says, "I will go back to my family and start a new life. Maybe I will start teaching again or maybe, I will join Mother Teresa's ashram and do social service." There are no traces of the earlier despondency that led her to describe herself as a "caged bird".

Dr Smita Watwani, who has been keenly involved in Bose's treatment, says Bose's homesickness shows the treatment has been successful. Since Bose was diagnosed as epileptic and psychotic, treatment will have to continue for up to five years, she adds.

Neha Mehta, a social worker at Shradha, is accompanying Bose to

Kolkata. "My job is to meet Mridula's family and explain the situation to them. They have to be told to continue the medication and keep in touch with Dr Smita and keep her informed about her progress," explains Neha.

Bose is confident of a warm welcome back home. "I am sure my brother and nephew will take care of me. I made the mistake of venturing out alone to Mumbai and found out that things don't always turn out as planned. I was lucky to get help in my hour of need," she says.

As the Howrah Mail chugs out of the station, Bose hurls out an invitation. "Come to Kolkata. I will cook lovely sweetwater fish in a mustard curry for you," she says.

CITY BOMBAY TIMES, THE TIMES OF INDIA

Family ties

Psychiatrists **Bharat and Smitha Vatwani** are proud parents of four children, three of whom are adopted

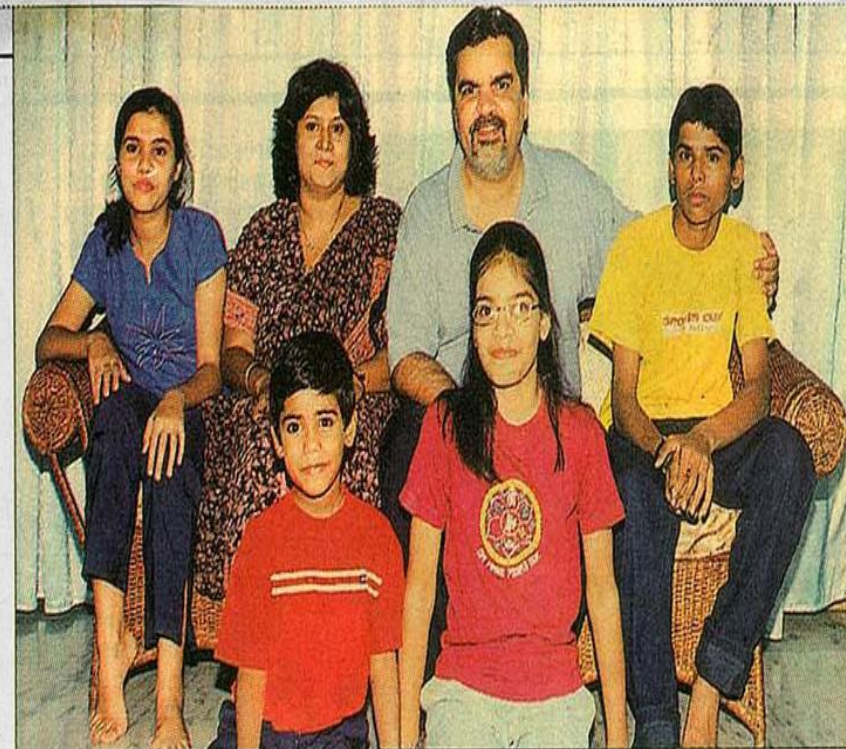
SHARMISTHA CHATTERJEE
Times News Network

For psychiatrist couple Bharat and Smitha Vatwani, adoption was something that came naturally. Having contemplated it for a long time, they resolved to go for it at the first opportunity. "We had decided before marriage that after our first child, we would go in for adoption," says Bharat. "We wanted do something good for children who are not our own."

From their four children, only Akshaa (14) is their biological child. Arjun (12), Kanika (11) and Karmanya (7) have been adopted. Caring little about social stigma and family resistance, the couple went ahead with their plan two years

after Akshaa was born. They adopted a boy and named him Arjun. Though the Hindu Adoption Act doesn't bestow parenthood on people who adopt after two children, it didn't stop them. The Vatwanis took Kanika and Karmanya under their wing and became their official guardians.

As psychiatrists, the Vatwanis had an edge over others. They let the children learn about their adoption quite early, enabling them to deal with the situation better. "My children are well adjusted," beams Bharat. "It is very important to let them know. For later in life, it could prove to be extremely upsetting and play havoc with their minds." Agrees his wife, "The earlier the



HAPPY HOME: (Sitting, top) Akshaa, Smitha, Bharat, Arjun, (sitting, below) Karmanya and Kanika at their residence

exposure the better."

Such mature handling of relationships is evident among the children, who accompanied their parents when they went for a third adoption. "Karmanya had been crying and that drew our attention," recalls Akshaa. "And the three of us told our parents that we wanted to take him home."

Such is the children's level

of orientation that snide remarks about their lineage has little or no impact on them. "I tell them you can say what you want, but they are my parents," says Kanika.

The parents' compassion has so rubbed on to the children that they insisted on taking in an abandoned puppy. The Vatwanis' efforts has indeed paid off, for their children want to follow in

their parents' footsteps. As Arjun says, "When I grow up and get married, I will adopt a child."

That's in the distant future. As of now, the doctor couple and their four children continue to raise many eyebrows. For the Vatwanis, it's a source of amusement. "It's funny," says Smitha. "But then it's all for a good cause."

**NATIONAL
News**

NOVEMBER 2002

Lost in the city for a year, runaway reunites with dad



Neeldhara and Deveshkumar with Arvind Shenoi (on right) and Girija Rajan (second from left). Neeldhara was reunited with her father on Sunday, after 13 months — Dillip Kagda

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

MAY 4

NEELDHARA Purohit's eyes were sparkling when she saw her father on Sunday. It was an emotional reunion, 13 months after she ran away from home.

"All for a job," says Neeldhara (35), defending herself to a tearful Deveshkumar Purohit. At the suburban rehabilitation centre, he couldn't stop thanking the good samaritans who looked after her. That his daughter is schizophrenic had only deepened the 78-year-old retired under secretary's anxiety.

"On January 24 last year, we had gone for a walk. I left her for a minute, to recheck the lock. When I returned, she was gone," says Deveshkumar, choking back tears. The Purohitis are residents of Ahmedabad.

Neeni, as he calls her affectionately, had it planned. She had withdrawn a grand sum of Rs 2,000 from her bank account. She remembers boarding the Gujarat Express, but not how she landed in Andheri.

Her money ran out quickly, she says. "Somebody in Andheri directed me to Colaba. My dream was to work for the Taj Mahal Hotel," she says. But before she knew it, she was trawling the streets in Colaba, sleeping on pavements and eating free temple meals. Her mental state continued to

worsen.

A Colaba resident, Girija Rajan, found her an odd candidate for destitution. "I saw her wandering aimlessly. She couldn't remember her name. She spoke to herself, but in impeccable English," says Rajan.

Rajan approached the police and civic hospitals; nobody would take her in. Finally, Rajan learnt about Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation, a non-governmental organisation run by a psychiatrist couple, the Vatwanis. In February 2003, Shraddha took Neeldhara in.

Meanwhile, Deveshkumar had approached the police, the Home Department and various NGOs, but nothing came of it.

"After months of treatment, Neeldhara began recollecting details," says Dr Smita Vatwani. She finally revealed her father's name and address. "Then it was a cakewalk," says Arvind Shenoy, an active member of Shraddha. Deveshkumar was contacted on Friday.

He's a proud father, reeling off details of her perfect academic record. She had cleared the Industrial Training Institute's stenography course and is proficient in MS Office.

Neeldhara says shyly, "It's god's grace that nothing bad happened."

She wants to go back and find a job. After all, it's been "all for the job."

NATIONAL
News

MAY 2003



SUNDAY TIMES



Bennett, Coleman & Co., Ltd.

Round the bend

Bella Jaisinghani meets the people who actually pick up wandering lunatics and send them home

HOMECOMING

Roshni's family was elated when they learnt that their daughter, who went missing years ago, was found in Mumbai. Driven by the dark compulsions of schizophrenia, she had boarded a train to the big city and on reaching it, made her home on its infamous streets. Till the day she was noticed by Shraddha, a voluntary organisation that lifts young schizophrenics off the streets, treats them and repatriates them to their villages and towns, anywhere in the country.

"How does one ascertain the background of a schizophrenic on the street, given that the patient's memory may be blurred even after months of treatment," asks Dr Bharat Vatwani who runs the place. The staff at Shraddha, thus, treasures a little book that has pin codes of every Indian town and village.

"If the patient names his home district and village, we ascertain its existence in the book," says Jossy Jose, a medical social worker at Shraddha's Karjat centre where the patients are housed.

But there are times when the pin code book is of little use, as a lunatic is very likely to give a false name. The girl who called herself Roshni actually turned out to be Sunita, as the Shraddha staff discovered when they took her home. "One patient, who told us he was Rajendra, gave us the badge number of his brother as his only reference. The brother, he said, worked as a coolie at New Delhi railway station," says Shraddha's Jinto Abraham.

"We took him to Delhi, and got the railways to make a public announcement for the worker who wore that badge. Once the man came over, we asked him if he had a brother named Rajendra. He declined. However, when we brought him face to face with our patient, he immediately confirmed that *was* his missing brother. Only, his name was Hoshkar Singh."

Co-passengers on the train help with directions, but sometimes the journey becomes the destination. "We were escorting a patient named Kallu Pathan who said he belonged to Pratapgarh. As luck would have it, his maternal aunt happened to be on the same train. She recognised him instantly, and reported that the family lived in Mumbai even though their hometown was Pratapgarh," says Abraham. Pathan went home with his aunt.

The handing over of patients is not an ad hoc process. The overt emotional display of emotion between the patient and his people is a sure proof of their relationship. "Why would anyone else accept responsibility for a mentally ill person," asks Abraham, logically.

Despite the years that have slipped by, a patient's family recognises him at once. And the welcome *aarzi*, the vermilion mark and the floral garlands are not



TUHIN CHAKRABORTY

restricted to the patient. They are extended to the social workers who have brought him home too. "We are treated like holy men by the family and the villagers," says Dhruv Wadekar, Shraddha's newest medical social worker.

Jose and Abraham have met families who had presumed their relative dead and had even performed his last rites before he was brought home. "When they saw him at first, they mistook him for a ghost," says Jose, laughing. "Another time, we brought home a patient who had been missing for three years, and his sister's wedding happened to be scheduled the next day. It was such a joyous reunion."

Jose observes that it is the poorest families of rural India who are happy and grateful to have their loved ones back. "But Mumbaikars often decline to accept their mentally ill relatives or do so in a half-hearted way," she says.

Impoverished families may not be able to reimburse the cost of the patient's treatment or even his rail fare home. "But they show their love in many small ways. I was rewarded when a poor man from Chittrakoot offered to put me up if I wished to make a pilgrimage to the holy town. A recovering schizophrenic from West Bengal took a picture of my wife and me and circulated it to his village, saying I was his saviour," says Dr Vatwani.

Although the hits outnumber the misses, there are times when the repatriation trip turns into a wild goose chase. A young Gujarati was taken around three villages of the state but none of the inhabitants claimed him as their own. Shabbir is now back at the Karjat centre where he sits sullenly in a chair and stares down every passerby, repeating the name 'Wangra' to all those who care to listen. TNN

(With inputs by Priya Pathian)

NATIONAL
News

SEPTEMBER 2006

PARSEE MATTERS... PARSEE MATTERS... PARSEE MATTERS... PARSEE MATTERS...

Perin & Jehangir Davar Memorial Centres At Shradhha Rehabilitation Centre An Oasis At Karjat For The Mentally Ill Road-side Destitutes

Parsis are renowned for their charitable disposition. What's more, their philanthropy is seldom restricted to their own community. Take for example the Tatas, Godrejs, Jeejeebhoy's, Petits or Wadias - the secularity of their giving transcends all barriers of caste, creed or religion. This microscopic community has also proved time and again that one need not necessarily be rich in order to be philanthropic. After all, philanthropy is not just about 'giving money', it is about 'love for humanity'.

Take, for example, the recent act of philanthropy on the part of a simple and relatively unknown Parsi lady, Mrs. Sheru Hosi Mistry (nee Davar). She did not inherit a fortune nor is she privy to vast disposable wealth. And yet, from her own savings, accumulated by thrift, often bordering personal deprivation, she has helped establish two special units - one in memory of her mother (Perin) and the other in memory of her father (Jehangir) at Shradhha Rehabilitation Centre in Karjat. Shradhha is a non-

Centre for female destitutes - are the fulfilment of the dream of Sheru's late parents to help the poorest of the poor. This dream - full of pathos and the struggle to make it a reality - is best captured in Sheru Mistry's own words.

"My mother had a dream to become a doctor and serve humanity. She had a dream to go into the villages and give free service to the poorest of the poor. But her dream remained unfulfilled. In her times, girls were discouraged from pursuing higher studies out of fear that it would ruin their prospects of marriage. My mother often cried before me, Sheru, will I die unfulfilled? My heart's greatest desire unfulfilled. Though I knew not how I would do it, I promised her that I will do it for you. You would not have lived in vain. It took 19 years of intensive search before stumbling upon Shradhha Foundation. I like to think, now at last, my mother will be happy wherever she is. The Centre will stand as a living testimony that her life's mission has been fulfilled if not in her own lifetime then at least in her daughter's."



governmental organization (NGO) addressing the issue of the mentally ill roadside destitutes. In India, one can find thousands of mentally ill road-side destitutes. However, there are very few organizations which are dedicated to treating and rehabilitating them. One such organization is 'Shradhha Rehabilitation Foundation' established by the dynamic and dedicated Dr. Bharat Vatwani.

Inaugurations and opening ceremonies are often dull and ritualistic events which leave people cold and unmoved. However, the inauguration of 'The Perin Jehangir Davar' and 'The Jehangir Ardeshir Davar' Memorial Centres at Vengon village in Karjat, on Sunday, 15th April 2007 was something special and inspiring. This was the dream of Late Mrs. Perin Davar which her loving and devoted daughter Mrs. Sheru Hosi Mistry fulfilled.

These two special Centres - The Perin Jehangir Davar Memorial Centre for male patients and The Jehangir Ardeshir Davar Memorial

by Noshir H. Dadrawala



Late Jehangir Davar



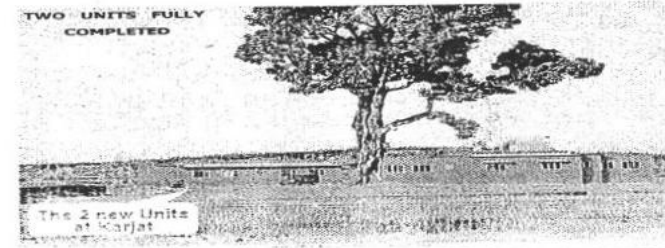
Late Perin Davar

reunited with their families over 1,000 mentally ill roadside destitutes - all for free. Destitute families have been traced to places as far-flung as Srinagar, Bangalore, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Delhi, Kerala and Orissa.

Shradhha Rehabilitation Centre has been operational in Karjat since March 2006. It currently houses and treats 50 mentally ill roadside destitutes. With the inauguration of the two new Centres it hopes to house 110 patients.

The Founder of Shradhha, Dr. Bharat Vatwani, is of the view that mental illness is like any other human illness which can either be cured or controlled through a judicious combination of medicines, love, care and understanding.

There are over 20 social workers who help Dr. Bharat and his wife Dr. Smitha Vatwani at the Karjat centre. Those patients who are not accepted by their families or whose families are not in the circumstances they end up becoming insane. Rehabilitating patients includes their involvement in activities like agriculture, dairy



Dr. Vatwani speaking at the inauguration

farming, poultry farming, vocational activities and others. There are several other pastimes like indoor games, television, music and others.

Sheru Mistry believes, "I was in search of the right project where I could donate my lifelong savings and found Shradhha the best place to do so. Shradhha's work, in spirit, resembles that of Mother Teresa's". Sadly, in India, the issue of mental illness is not only grossly misunderstood but also neglected.

worship. In the words of that great Lebanese philosopher and poet, Khalil Gibran - "Through the hands of such as these (i.e. those who give) God speaks, and from behind their eyes He smiles upon the world".

Shradhha Rehabilitation Foundation is registered as a Public Charitable Trust and donations are deductible (50%) under section 80G and 100% under section 35AC of the Income Tax Act 1961.

1001 Tales of Hope

Satjay Dhakane (Before/After)



The task taken in hand is huge. But the first step in the proverbial journey of a thousand miles has already been taken. The requirement now is for many others to join Sheru and Hosi Mistry as also Dr. Bharat and Smitha Vatwani in their journey. The cost per month for each unit is estimated to be around Rs.65,000/- per month. Donating to this worthy cause would, in essence, be an act of

For further information readers may please contact the Foundation at:

Shradhha Manasrovar, Behind Shanti Ashram, Opposite Eskay Club, Off New Link Road Borivali (W) Mumbai 400 103.

Tel: (022) 28955020 / 65252628
Email: svatwani@hotmail.com
Website: www.Shradharehabilitationfoundation.org



Mistry's mission

From her own savings, accumulated by thrift, a simple Parsi lady has established two units for the mentally ill at Karjat, in memory of her parents

Noshir Dadrawala

The microscopic Parsi community has proven time and again that one need not necessarily be rich in order to be philanthropic. After all, philanthropy is not just about 'giving money,' it is about 'love for humanity.'

Shining out recently is an act of philanthropy by a simple and relatively unknown Parsi lady, Sheru Hosi Mistry (née Davar). She did not inherit a fortune nor is she privy to vast disposable wealth. And yet, from her own savings, accumulated by thrift, often bordering personal deprivation, she helped establish two special units — one in memory of her mother (Perin) and the other in memory of her father (Jehangir) at Shradhha Rehabilitation Centre in Karjat.

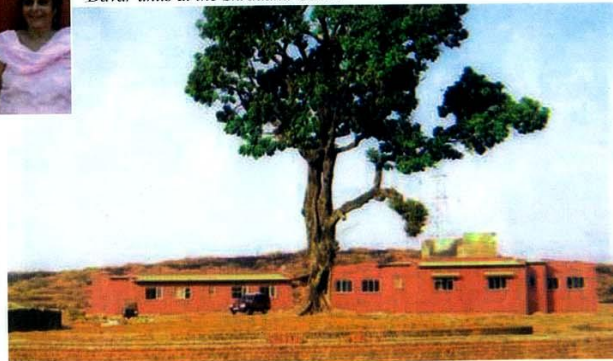
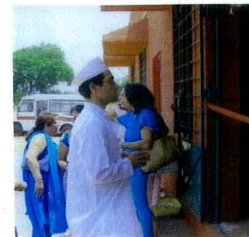
Shradhha is a non-governmental organization (NGO) addressing the needs

of the mentally ill roadside destitute. The inauguration of 'The Perin Jehangir Davar' and 'The Jehangir Ardeshir Davar' Memorial Centres at Vengao village in Karjat, on April 15, 2007 was something special and inspiring.

To help the poorest of the poor was the dream of Mistry's late parents which she helped fulfill with the setting up of the spacious units The Perin Jehangir Davar Memorial Centre for male patients and The Jehangir Ardeshir Davar Memorial Centre for female destitutes.

As conveys Mistry, "My mother had a dream to become a doctor and serve humanity. She had a dream to go into the villages and give free service to the poorest of the poor. But her dream remained unfulfilled. In her times, girls were discouraged from pursuing higher studies out of fear that it would ruin their prospects of marriage. My mother often cried before me, 'Sheru, will I die unfulfilled?' Though I knew

Hosi and Sheru Mistry flank a poem on her mother, etched in marble; a young priest blesses the unit at its inauguration; the Perin and Jehangir Davar units at the Shradhha Centre



not how I would do it, I promised her that I would do it. It took 19 years of intensive search before stumbling upon Shradhha Foundation. I like to think, now at last, my mother will be happy wherever she is. The Centre will stand as a living testimony that her life's mission has been fulfilled if not in her own lifetime then at least in her daughter's."

The Shradhha Rehabilitation Foundation was founded in 1988 to deal with the mentally ill roadside destitutes who living off the streets are left lonely, haggard and stripped of all human dignity. In 1997, Shradhha expanded its services with a 30-bed hospital in Dahisar. Since its inception, Shradhha has picked up, treated and successfully reunited with their families over 1,000 mentally ill roadside destitutes — all for free. Destitute families have been traced to places as far flung as Srinagar, Bangalore, Calcutta, Hyderabad, Delhi, Kerala and Orissa.

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continued on page 230



MISTRY'S...
contd from pg 223 and understanding.

There are over 20 social workers who help Dr Bharat and his wife Dr Smitha Vatwani at the Karjat center. Those patients who are not accepted by their families or whose families are not found become permanent inmates and help the others to heal. Most of the patients are from the poor class and remote villages of India. Due to various social or emotional circumstances they end up becoming insane. Rehabilitating patients includes their involvement in activities like agriculture, dairy farming, poultry farming, vocational activities and others. There are several other pastimes like indoor games, television, music and others.

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A mentally ill patient before and after treatment

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AUGUST 2007

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PHILANTHROPY
MAY 2007

PERIN & JEHANGIR DAVAR CENTRES AT SHRADDHA REHABILITATION CENTRE
An Oasis At Karjat For The Mentally Ill Roadside Destitute

By Noshir H. Dadrawala

Parsis are renowned for their charitable disposition. What's more, their philanthropy is seldom restricted to their own community. Take, for example, the Tatas, Godrejs, Jejeebhoy, Petits or Wadias – the secularity of their giving transcends all barriers of caste, creed or religion. This microscopic community has also proved, time and again, that one need not necessarily be rich in order to be philanthropic. After all, philanthropy is not just about 'giving money', it is about 'love for humanity'.

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Dr. Bharat Vatwani addressing the audience at the inauguration.

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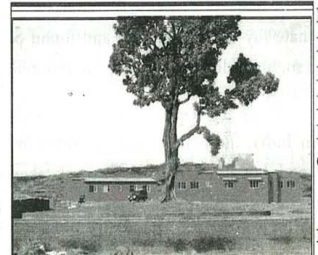
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Shru Mistry's own words:

"My mother had a dream to become a doctor and serve humanity. She had a dream to go into the villages and give free service to the poorest of the poor. But her dream remained unfulfilled. In her times, girls were discouraged from pursuing higher studies out of fear that it would ruin their prospects of marriage. My mother often cried before me, 'Sheru, will I die unfulfilled? My heart's greatest desire is unfulfilled.' Though I knew not how I would do it, I promised her that I will do it for her. She would not have lived in vain. It took 19 years of intensive search before stumbling upon Shradhha Foundation. I like to think now, at last, my mother will be happy wherever she is. The Centre will stand as a living testimony that her life's mission has been fulfilled, if not in her own lifetime, then at least, in her daughter's."

Shradhha Rehabilitation Foundation was founded in 1988, to deal with the mentally-ill roadside destitute who are living off the streets and are left lonely, haggard and stripped of all human dignity. In 1997, Shradhha expanded its services with a 30-bed hospital in Dahisar.

Since its inception, Shradhha Rehabilitation Foundation has picked up, treated and successfully reunited with their families over 1,000 mentally ill roadside destitute - **all for free**. Destitute families have been traced to places as far flung as Srinagar,



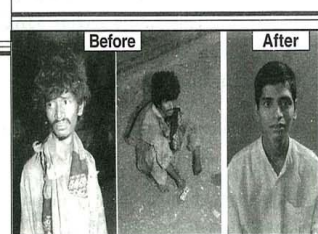
Two Units at Karjat fully completed.

Bangalore, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Delhi, Kerala and Orissa. Shradhha Rehabilitation Centre has been operational in Karjat since March 2006. It currently houses and treats 50 mentally ill roadside destitute. With the inauguration of the two new Centres, it hopes to house 110 patients.

The Founder of Shradhha, Dr. Bharat Vatwani, is of the view that mental illness is like any other human illness which can either be cured or controlled



Patients being rehabilitated through agriculture.



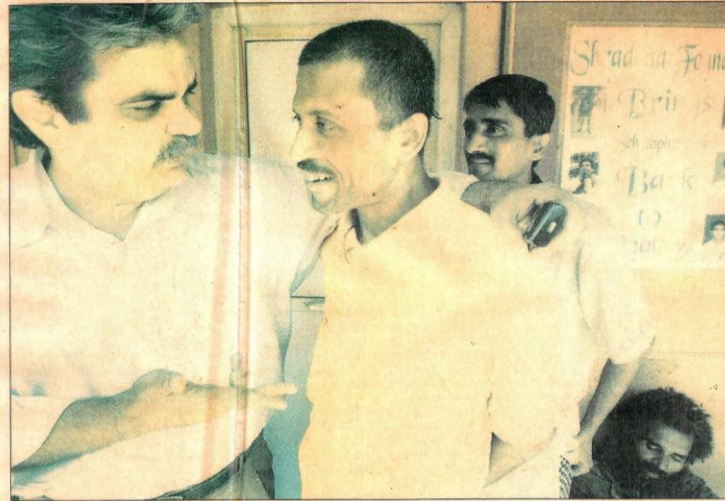
Sanjay Dhakane before and after rehabilitation.

There are over 20 social workers who help Dr. Bharat and his wife, Dr. Smitha Vatwani, at the Karjat Centre. Those patients who are not accepted by

Hindustan Times

Putting them in touch with the real world

Borivli psychiatrist runs rehabilitation centre for destitute schizophrenics; after treatment, reunites them with family



Psychiatrist Bharat Watvani (left) with one of his patients, Pramod, at his rehabilitation centre Shradha near Karjat. HT PHOTOS: VIKAS KHOT

Schizophrenics have hallucinations, hear voices and even laugh and talk to themselves. They are not mad, but sick. It would help to sympathise with them. People assume they are beggars and hand them money, which is of no use to them, as they don't know how to use it.

BHARAT WATVANI, psychiatrist who runs the Shradha rehabilitation centre

NATIONAL
News
MAY 2008

Megha Sood
Mumbai, May 30

A COLLEGE girl from Kolkata boarded a train for Mumbai three months ago to marry actor Shahid Kapur. No, she was not another starstruck Bollywood fan, but a 23-year-old suffering from schizophrenia, who believed she was in love with the actor.

After spending two weeks in Mumbai — lost, confused, without food, spare clothes or a place to go to — she was mistaken for a beggar. Fortunately for her, the railway police brought her to Dr Bharat Watvani, a psychiatrist.

Watvani, who pretended to be Shahid's father convinced the girl from Kolkata to stay at his Borivli clinic. After months of treatment, the girl was reunited with her family a week ago.

Nine kilometres from Karjat, on the outskirts of Mumbai, Watvani and his wife treat and look after 59 other destitute patients of schizophrenia found

in Mumbai and nearby areas, at their rehabilitation centre Shradha, established in 2006.

"Such patients get hallucinations, hear voices and even laugh and talk to themselves," said Watvani. "These people are not mad but sick. So, instead of dismissing them as merely 'mad', it would help to sympathise with them. People even assume they are beggars and hand them money, which is of no use to them, as they don't know how to use it."

Often, the railway police spot such destitute patients and bring them to us by offering them food.

Following treatment, when they are able to tell where they are from we try to trace their address and escort them to their family. The centre has treated over 1,000 patients so far and the reunion rate is 95 per cent, said Watvani.

When I went to Orissa to reunite a boy who had been missing for 16 years, the family treated me like a God. It was a magnificent feeling to make somebody happy.
BIJOY PHILIP,
volunteer at Shradha

Those not accepted by their families are rehabilitated in the ashram and are given the opportunity to undertake farming activities or other small jobs, said Watvani. The male inmates cultivate rice and vegetables in the farms while the women help in the kitchen.

Psychiatrists trained to handle such patients communicate with them and treat them. Their motivation, Watvani said, was in watching patients reunited with their family.

"It is a feeling of contentment when we see these patients reunited with their families," said Bijooy Philip, a volunteer at Shradha. "When I went to Orissa to reunite a boy who had been missing since 16 years, the family treated me like God. It was a magnificent feeling to make somebody happy."

megha.sood@hindustantimes.com

A HOME FOR THE TROUBLED

A man talking to himself in a corner, a woman walking lost, a man staring at the ceiling are common sights at the Shradha ashram, but there are a few like MAKHANLAL, who is packing his bags, ready to go home.

"When the family see their loved ones alive and fit, they realise that the illness can be treated," said Watvani.

The doctors of the ashram reunited 130 inmates last year and more than 63 this year.



HARIDAS (29) was a regular sight at Borivli station, seen in tattered clothes walking around aimlessly. The doctors of Shradha brought him to the ashram three months ago. He was hallucinating and hearing voices. He is now responding to medicines and has managed to tell them the name of his village in Tamil Nadu. The doctors hope to reunite him with his family soon.

MOHAMMED (32), the brickmaker from Madhya Pradesh, had been found by doctors of Shradha, wandering in tattered clothes outside Karjat station two years ago. He was hallucinating and muttering to himself. After a year of treatment, he gave his address where his sister also lived. The doctors took him to Madhya Pradesh, but his sister refused to accept him. They then brought him back to Shradha. "I had come to Mumbai to do some daily wage work but did not realise where and in what condition I was until the doctors picked me up and gave me food and work," he said.

In touch with reality again



Nine km from Karjat, Dr Bharat Watvani has constructed a rehabilitation centre for those suffering from schizophrenia. Over the last two years, he has been instrumental in treating and rehabilitating more than 1,000 patients, after they were found on the streets of Mumbai.

The Tribune

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Chandigarh . New Delhi . Jalandhar . Bathinda . Thursday, October 21, 2010

www.tribuneindia.com

**PUNJAB
News**

Chandigarh

OCTOBER 2010

Finally, mentally challenged finds a home

PARMOD MEHTA

DERA BASSI, OCTOBER 20

Mumbai-based Shradha Rehabilitation foundation, which is involved in helping the mentally challenged, finally met with success in locating the house of one such patient, Khusia Ram, at Khara village near Jagraon in Lud-

hiana district of Punjab.

Two members of Shradha Rehabilitation were trying to locate Khusia's house in Dera Bassi area for the last three days, but due to incorrect address were unable to do so. According to them, Khusia was found in a very bad condition two months ago in new Mumbai. After providing him with medical

treatment, the patient was enabled to tell his name as Mandeep of Khara village, near Jagraon.

When the foundation members finally succeeded in locating Khusia's home, his brother-in-law, Sucha Singh told over telephone that Khusia, who was living in the house of his sister after the death of his

mother, had been missing for the last nearly 6 years. They thanked the foundation members for their services.

The foundation is said to have helped one thousand mentally challenged belonging to different states, in locating their homes after providing them with medical treatment.

Shraddha Team shifting mentally ill destitutes from NGO in Tiruchirapalli (run by Psychiatrist) to Shraddha, Karjat for further reunion with their families across India

THE HINDU

TIRUCHIRAPALLI

10 mentally ill embark on journey of reunion

L. Renganathan

KARUR: MARCH 19, 2012 14:26 IST
UPDATED: MARCH 19, 2012 14:27 IST

Six women, four men handed over to Shraddha rehab centre for identifying kin



For the batch of six women and four men the long and arduous journey that could possibly take them back home after a turbulent period of wandering has just commenced with a small step from Trust Shanthivanam near Seethapatti in the district but proximate to Tiruchi.

After a tenure of rehabilitation coupled with solace and understanding, the inmates of Shanthivanam were on Sunday handed over to caretakers from Shraddha Rehabilitation Centre, Karjat, Maharashtra, en route to identifying their kith and kin at their native villages in northern India and reunite with them.

With untold hopes, eyes filled with tears and exuding gloomy surprise the batch of mentally ill wanderers, picked up and rehabilitated by the professionals at Shanthivanam, boarded the train.

While Kailash, Nepali and Girija are from Maharashtra, Kamlesh and Santoshi are from Madhya Pradesh. Nirola hails from Kamrup district of Assam, Sarojini is from Ranchi, Bihar.

Manjula Patil belongs to Bijapur district in Karnataka while Venkatarao has his family in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, and Najma Begum longs to see her family members residing in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh. All of them have one thing in common - they all are wandering mentally ill destitute, having either schizophrenia or other psychiatric disorders.

“There are 10 others from the northern States under our care at Shanthivanam but they have to wait for their turn as we have just initiated the experiment after signing a memorandum of understanding with Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation for Mentally Ill, Borivalli, Mumbai,” says K. Ramakrishnan, executive secretary, Trust Shanthivanam. Two staff from Shraddha came to take the batch of 10 persons to Mumbai and the group is being escorted by two staff belonging to Shanthivanam.

Mr. Ramakrishnan notes that Shraddha will refer standard Tamil speaking mentally ill wanderers rescued in Mumbai and other areas where the voluntary organisation works to Shanthivanam for early treatment and rehabilitation or a possible reunion with their relatives here.

The foundation has been picking up roadside mentally ill destitute, providing them treatment and reuniting them with their relatives for close to a quarter of a century now.

There are 85 inmates under rehabilitation while over 2,000 have been reunited with their families due to the efforts of the Shraddha Foundation and its founder trustee Bharat Vatwani.

TAMIL NADU
News

Tiruchirapalli

MARCH 2012

NATIONAL
News

MARCH 2013

Mind Balm on Streets

Psychiatrist couple treat people with mental disorders wandering on streets, reunite them with families

NEERAD PANDHARIPANDE

BHARAT Vatwani is no ordinary psychiatrist. He is one with a golden heart, a fact 3,000 families would vouch for. The Borivali-based psychiatrist Vatwani has been reuniting disoriented people with psychological disorders, wandering aimlessly on the streets, with their families.

He vividly remembers the first mentally ill person, a schizophrenic, he had picked up from the streets and treated.

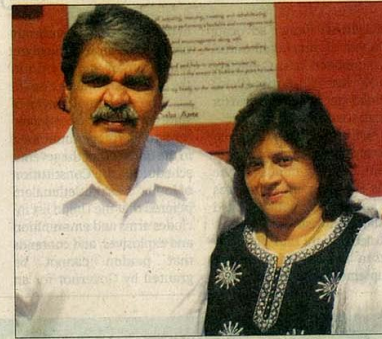
"When I saw him, he was on the roadside drinking water from a gutter using a coconut shell. He was a schizophrenia patient and had run away from home. Later, it turned out he was from Andhra Pradesh and was a science graduate. I started working for such people," Vatwani said.

For the past 25 years, Vatwani has been working for the mental health of people who are often described in dismissive terms like "vagrant" and "tramp".

So far, Vatwani says he has treated about 3,000 such people and reunited them with their families. He also has a private practice as a psychiatrist. His wife Smitha is also a psychiatrist and helps him treat such patients.

"The general perception about such people is that they act in strange ways deliberately and voluntarily. However, they may have genuine psychological problems, which can be treated," he says.

The work of helping mentally ill persons found on the streets is mostly funded through donations from people.



Bharat and Smitha Vatwani have reunited 3,000 people.

In several cases, Bharat and Smitha's NGO Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation has faced difficulties in reuniting mentally ill people with their families. "Especially in the case of people from remote tribal areas, some patients could not recollect the name of the village or even the state they come from. However, we have a team of social workers and counsellors from across the country. They help us get an idea of where the patient could be from and try to contact their relatives."

In one case, about two years ago, a man from Orissa was rescued and reunited with his family by the organisation after he spent 16 years on the streets. He was schizophrenic and had wandered away from his house.

Vatwani says families of patients are generally co-operative and understanding and accept them back.

Most people rescued are found to suffer either from schizophrenia or bipolar mood disorders. Bipolar

mood disorder is characterised cases where patient fluctuate from extreme depression to hyperactivity.

He says as far as awareness on such disorders and empathy of people towards them are concerned, it has improved.

"Awareness has definitely increased as compared to when we started our work. People come forward and tell us about cases where persons on street suffer from psychological disorders and need treatment. That is certainly a good thing," says Vatwani.

IRANIAN REUNION

APRIL 2013

MAHARASHTRA News

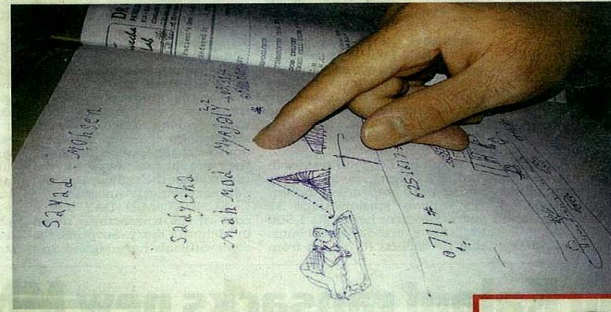
MID - DAY
Mumbai

APRIL 2013

SUNDAY **MID** DAY

Jagran APRIL 14, 2013, MUMBAI | 48 PAGES, INCLUDING PULLOUT | ₹6
A JAGRAN INITIATIVE

NOWHERE MAN REGAINS PARADISE



Sayed Mohsen Mirjalili came to India in January. He inexplicably lost his memory and used caricatures (right) to communicate with doctors and volunteers

Rescued by a good Samaritan and treated by doctors for three months, a footpath dweller from Chembur has turned out to be Mohsen Mirjalili, a rich 30-year-old from Iran! The man, who was suffering from loss of memory, has now regained his memory and given his family details to the police. The Iranian embassy has arranged for his return to Iran where his father is a famous religious teacher and his brother a professor.

SHAILESH BHATIA REPORTS ON PAGE 3



SHAILESH BHATIA
shaileshbhatia@mid-day.com

AS A teenager growing up in Yazd, a small city in Iran, I always dreamt of visiting India. I had never met them, but thanks to all the Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan movies I saw, they were all known to me," Mirjalili told this correspondent, as he waited for travel documents from the Iranian Embassy in India which will allow him to fly back to his homeland.

But how did he land up on a footpath in Chembur? Mirjalili says he had saved money from his ceramic business for years to make his dream come true. "I boarded a flight from Tehran to Mumbai and flew in via Dubai in January, 2013 (a fact corroborated by the Iranian Embassy). I then travelled to Goa and some other places. I was on my way back to Mumbai. The next I remember, I was in a rehab centre here," he says, looking around helplessly.

Upasana Daryanani, a volunteer at the Borivli-based Shraddha Rehab, says Mirjalili is on his way to full recovery. The Iranian national has even told her that he has a six-year-old daughter called Pariza. "Sayed's father is a well-known religious

'Mumbaiites saved my life'

Picked up from a footpath in Chembur where he was roaming around in an incoherent state three months ago, a mentally disturbed 30-year-old has turned out to be an affluent man from Iran. Treated and cured by volunteers and doctors for free, he is now set to rejoin his family. SMD catches up with a smiling Sayed Mohsen Mirjalili to listen to his amazing story



Sayed Mohsen Mirjalili with Upasana Daryanani, a volunteer at Shraddha Rehab, Borivli

teacher, while his younger brother is a university professor. Mirjalili keeps thanking us and Indian hospitality," Daryanani recalls. "Mumbai's people saved my life," agrees Mirjalili.

On his daily morning walk one day, Ajay Shah, a businessman from Chembur, observed a mentally unstable man, who in spite of his tattered clothes displayed a certain kind of uniqueness. "He would never beg and politely accept whatever was offered to him to eat. I called Dr Bharat Vatvani, a Borivli-based psychia-

trist, who had earlier helped treat and then unite an abandoned mentally challenged girl from Nagpur with her family," he told SMD.

Dr Vatvani, who runs Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation, a home for the mentally ill, recalls being called on the night of January 25. "The man was freezing and willingly got into my car," recalls Dr Vatvani. It was only after reaching his clinic that he realised the patient was a foreigner. "He could not remember his name and displayed symptoms of schizophrenia," Dr Vatvani says.

Dr Vatvani then approached DCP Ashwati Dorje of FFRO (Foreigners Regional Registration Office), who coordinated with the Iranian Consulate in Mumbai to expedite the process. The police were able to trace his family back to Iran.

Gulam Askari, an official from the Consulate General of the Islamic Republic of Iran said he was touched by the humanitarian effort. "We have issued a letter and a pass valid for 20 days that will enable him to enter Iran," he said.

Sayed's return journey is being sponsored by his delighted father, who is too old to come and escort his son home.

IRANIAN
REUNION

APRIL 2013

MAHARASHTRA
News

MID - DAY
Mumbai

APRIL 2013

MID
DAY

MY CITY...MY LIFE!

RESCUED IRANIAN NATIONAL BIDS ADIEU TO 'BEST COUNTRY INDIA'

Seyed Mohsen Mirjalili boarded his flight back home yesterday, after undergoing months of treatment for schizophrenia at a rehab centre; the man, who was holidaying in the country, had been found roaming the footpaths of Chembur in a disoriented condition

SHAILESH BHATIA
shaileshbhatia@mid-day.com

"BEST country India... best people India." These were the parting words of Seyed Mohsen Mirjalili, as he got off the ambulance to board his Iran Air flight from the Mumbai International Airport last afternoon. The flight will take the Iranian national back home to his country, family and friends.

"My only desire was to experience India and meet its people, who were unknown to me, but no strangers, thanks to the numerous Amitabh Bachchan, Salman Khan and Shahrukh Khan movies I have seen. My dream has been fulfilled and I am blessed," exclaimed Seyed, struggling to rein in his emotions.

It hasn't been an easy journey, though. Sunday MID DAY had reported earlier how Seyed, a man in his late 30s, was

picked up from a footpath in Chembur nearly three-and-a-half months ago. Found haggard, hungry and disoriented, he was sent to a rehabilitation centre for mentally ill destitutes run by Dr Bharat Vatwani ('Iranian national rescued from Mumbai streets recounts his tale', April 14). Diagnosed with schizophrenia, he was nursed back to health by Dr Vatwani and his team. The staff members of Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation, who have developed deep ties of friendship with Seyed over the past few months, accompanied him to the airport yesterday to bid him adieu.

After arriving in India in January, 2012, Seyed travelled to Goa and some other places, before things went awry. "It was during his convalescence that Seyed revealed how he had wanted to visit India from when

NOWHERE MAN REGAINS PARADISE



he was a child. Communicating with drawings initially, Seyed conveyed to us details like his nationality and phone number, and his family back in the Iranian city of Yazd. With the help of these details, the process of sending him back home could be initiated. The process was completed thanks



ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL: Staffers and volunteers of Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation, who nursed the Iranian back to health, accompanied him to the international airport for his departure yesterday. (Left) SUNDAY MID DAY report on April 14, 2013. PIC/KIRAN BHALERAO

to the efforts of the Foreigners Regional Registration Office and the Iranian Embassy," said Dr Vatwani.

Seyed's father Mirjalili is sponsoring his journey back home, as he is too old to come personally and escort his son. "We have informed the family and they shall be present at the airport, when Seyed's flight lands," said Vatwani.

Denit Matthew, a counsellor

with the rehab, said that Seyed was initially unwilling to return home to his family in a sickly condition. As his condition turned around, however, his desire to return and start life afresh grew. "On Monday, we took him shopping for new clothes and he was really thrilled. In the last four months that he spent with us, Seyed has charmed everyone with his impeccable manners and

grace," he said.

Upasana Daryanani, a volunteer at Shradha Rehab, said, "He would also praise Indian culture, which attracted him to come here as a tourist. In the last year and three months, Seyed said he has experienced all that he had fantasised about India, right from his childhood. He simply loves anything Indian, be it movies, food or sweets."



BOSHIKA GUPTA FOR THE CARAVAN

CAUSE CONCERNS

Positive Thinking

An NGO reunites mentally ill homeless people with their families

BOSHIKA GUPTA

ON A RAINY FRIDAY MORNING IN LATE JULY, Rajesh Castellino sat in a tiny room in Karjat, Maharashtra, a two-hour drive south-east of Mumbai. Files lay stacked in a corner, and an assortment of pictures and notes fluttered on the cracked walls; a sense of quiet and loneliness reigned. Castellino has big eyes, a lean frame and a dusky complexion. He stared into the distance, and in his mind seemed to be miles away, exploring a different time and space.

On my prompting, Castellino, who is 39 years old, told me how he'd gotten to where he was, to the Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation. On 30 January 2011, he was wandering through Mumbai's Sion area, dazed and with no idea of why he was there. He remembered suddenly hearing a question: "Where are you from?" A social worker approached, and took him to Karjat. Castellino, I later learned, suffers from schizophrenia, a psychiatric illness characterised by a severely altered perception of reality and an inability to distinguish between real and imaginary entities. I also discovered that he had already been at Shradha before, the first time after a similar episode in 2010, though Castellino himself did not remember it.

Shradha works to rescue destitute people with mental illnesses from the streets and reunite them with their families. This is a long, tedious process: patients are picked up, often by the group's ambulances on patrol; they are fed and housed to ensure good nutrition and hygiene; and then given a course of treatment. Once a patient starts to recuperate, social workers start asking questions: Where did you grow

LEFT: After several failed reunions with his family, Rajesh Castellino now lives at the Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation's centre.

up? Who did you have with you at home? Where's home? When a family is located, Shradha sends patients home. If the group cannot identify any kin, or when families refuse to take patients back, a lack of funds and space often forces Shradha to send them on to other NGOs or shelters after a few months of recuperation. By the records it has available, since March 2006 the organisation has arranged over 2,500 reunions, and often handled cases from as far away as Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. This year, by mid August, Shradha reunited 350 patients with their families. In all this work, Shradha battles Indian society's seemingly in-delible stigma against psychiatric illness.

Two days after I met Castellino, I joined Dr Bharat Vatwani, the psychiatrist who founded Shradha in 1989, on his drive back to Mumbai after his weekly visit to the rehabilitation centre. One day in May that year, he recalled, he noticed a young man with long, straggly hair drinking sewage on the streets of Mumbai. Realising the man was mentally ill, Vatwani and his wife Smitha, who is also a psychiatrist, decided to take him in at their private treatment centre. The young man, they discovered, was schizophrenic. They also learned he was well educated, and from a middle-class family that was looking for him. After a few months, he returned to this family. Inspired, Vatwani set out to help others in similar situations. The mentally ill don't "deserve to be on the road," he said with deep conviction.

But the work is often hard. Even after successful treatment, patients are often rejected by their families. Even when reunions are successful, patients are still seen as objects of shame. Dr Vatwani recalled one particular young man who turned out to be from a very influential family. As thanks, the family decided to donate to the organisation, but insisted anonymity so as not to be associated with mental illnesses. In other cases, Vatwani said, families have refused to acknowledge mentally ill relatives for fear of jeopardising the marriage prospects of their younger members. In 1997, when Shradha was based in Dahisar, a northern suburb of Mumbai, residents of the area began protesting against the presence of the mentally ill people. That was when "I was closest to shutting down," Vatwani remembered. The matter went to the Mumbai High Court, and fortunately the judge ruled in Shradha's favour.

Today things are somewhat better, though Vatwani told me support for the organization is still "minimal." There haven't been protests in Karjat, and local college students volunteer regularly. But for the patients themselves the outlook often remains bleak. Castellino, for instance, was first reunited with his family in February 2010, but disappeared again for reasons that he wouldn't specify. After he was picked up in January 2011, he was returned home again the following month. But he wandered again, and found his way back to Shradha on his own in July that year. He has lived at the centre since, though he does occasionally visit his family. Shradha is home for him now. ■

NATIONAL
News

THE CARAVAN
SEPTEMBER 2014