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# DIALOGUE

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## THUS SPAKE :



Dr. Bharat & Dr. Smitha Vatwani

### SHRADDHA - The Faith in Humanity

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

*Legality figality chhodo -yaar.*

*We immediately took him to our hospital and treated him. He was the first one.'*

Dr. Bharat Vatwani was telling us his early memories of treating homeless schizophrenics and rehabilitating them. Most importantly, taking them back to their homes- wherever that might be - Mumbai, Orissa or Shrinagar ,without charging a penny to these unfortunate individuals. His team at **Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation** [SRF] has been doing it since 1988.

'So, how many have you united with their families ?' we asked him. We thought 100 would be a good number. He said, 'No - more than that, must be around 900.' We could not believe it. ('This is great, very great indeed' is what everybody, we narrate the story, has to say. *Matlab aaise bhi log hai duniya mein jo itna bada kaam kar rahe hai* - is one of the common exclamations we have been hearing.)

The First young man caused a chain reaction of good events which keeps on growing and attracting more goodness. This man was from Andhra and had done his BSc DMLT.

Both, Dr. Bharat and his wife Smitha are psychiatrists. Dr Bharat is also a poet we have his permission to publish one of his poems - in Dialogue.

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

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

As word of mouth spread, a rare stroke of destiny which changed the entire face of the Foundation happened. Few students of J. J. School of Arts approached the doctors and requested them to assist and help out their lecturer who had been rendered destitute by mental illness, and had lost his job and was wandering around in the area of Jehangir Art Gallery. The doctors decided to help out and took him under their wings. Over a period of 3 to 4 months he improved and the bond between him and the doctors became almost like family. Shraddha Foundation decided to attempt to rehabilitate him in totality and try and reinstate him in his job. They approached Smt. Kumud Bansal, the then Secretary of Education and made an emotional plea on his behalf. After a few months of bureaucratic hurdles the lecturer was back at his job at J. J. School of Arts. Since the case became well known amongst the Art fraternity, colleagues, friends and senior artists

came out with the idea of a fund raising art exhibition of Jehangir Art Gallery, to support the cause of the Foundation. **150 artists from all over India and abroad chipped in** including famous names such as **Bikash Bhattacharjee** of Calcutta, **Anjolie Ela Menon** from Delhi, **S. H. Raza** from Paris and **Adimoolam** from Chennai. The exhibition held in October 1993 was a runaway success and generated funds, from which the Foundation purchased a small exclusive plot in Dahisar for its rehabilitation activities. Well meaning organization and well wishers chipped in and thus was born a separate psychiatric institution which could house, treat and rehabilitate 30 mentally ill roadside destitutes at any point in time. This institute was inaugurated in March 1997.

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

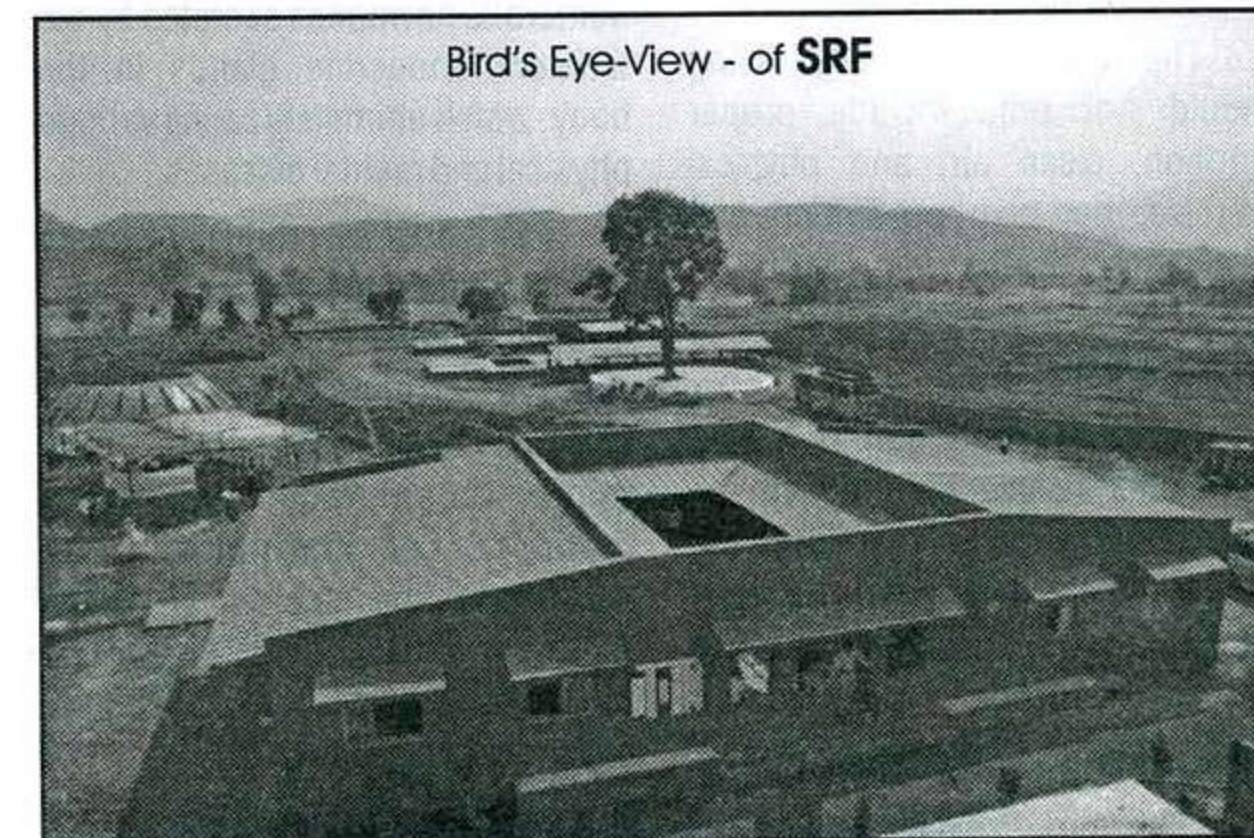
In an attempt to grow further, the Foundation decided to raise funds and expand from the existing 2 storeyed 30 bedded structure to a 4 storeyed 50 bedded building with appropriate infrastructure and facilities.

While this attempt to raise funds was going on, another chance episode changed the course and the direction of the activities of the Foundation. The trustees of SRF happened to visit **Baba Amte's "Anandvan"** at Varora near Nagpur. So moved were they by the enormity

and the quantum of the social work undertaken by Baba Amte and his son **Shri Prakash Amte** (whose work was located in a remote tribal area of Hemalkasa in Gadchiroli district) that they decided to go for a bigger project which would become a landmark institution in the treatment, care and rehabilitation of mentally ill roadside destitutes - just as Baba Amte's Anandvan had become for leprosy patients. After scouting for innumerable plots they finally came across this plot at Karjat in December, 2004.

the good wishes of his father Shri. Baba Amte, graciously consented to formally inaugurate, and which Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation dedicated humbly but with genuinity, sincerity and compassion to the thousands of mentally ill destitutes wandering aimlessly on the streets of India, on **30th March, 2006** being the auspicious occasion of *Gudhi Padva*.

This huge plot of land for the rehabilitation work admeasures 6.5 acres and is 2 km away from Karjat station. Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation hopes that this will be a



Bird's Eye-View - of SRF

So moved was Baba Amte by this concept that despite being in self proclaimed retirement he volunteered to come for the *Bhoomi Poojan* in January, 2005. Unfortunately because of ill health he could not make it and the *Bhoomi Poojan* ceremony never took place. However, the blessings of the Amte family continued to be with Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation and one and a half years of back breaking effort has resulted in this set up, albeit still incomplete, of the cherished project of "Shraddha" which **Shri Prakash Amte** alongwith

first of its kind pioneering effort in the field of rehabilitation work of mentally ill roadside destitutes involving as it will agriculture, dairy, poultry and fish farming.

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

We were humbled when we saw the work SRF is doing.

Had lunch there. The vegetables

we had - were grown in the farms of SRF. Our stomach and heart - both were full !

- ❖ Dr. Vatwani was interviewed by **Dr. Dushyant Bhadlikar** and **Dr. Shyamkant Ghotikar** on 16th July 2006 at the **SRF - Vengaon - Karjat**.
- ❖ Dr. Bharat Vatwani can be reached - on - **28955020**

### Alone & lonely :

Like the vulture sitting on the stark tree top,

Like the sliver of light creasing the clouded landscape,

Like the wisp of smoke trailing miles away,

**Alone & lonely -**

No place to go,

No space left,

The snow tricking leaving the terrain bare,

**Alone & lonely -**

Like the skyscraper stranded against the bleak horizon,

like a broken down vehicle in a traffic jam,

Like a mangled corpse in a bombed out wreck,

**Alone & lonely -**

No words to mouth,

No songs to sing,

the painting waiting for the painter's dream,

**Alone & lonely -**

Like the tears streaming down wrinkled cheeks,

Like a man in mourning in the human sea,

like the body buried under the weight of grief,

**Alone & lonely -**

**Alone & lonely.**

- Dr. Bharat Vatwani