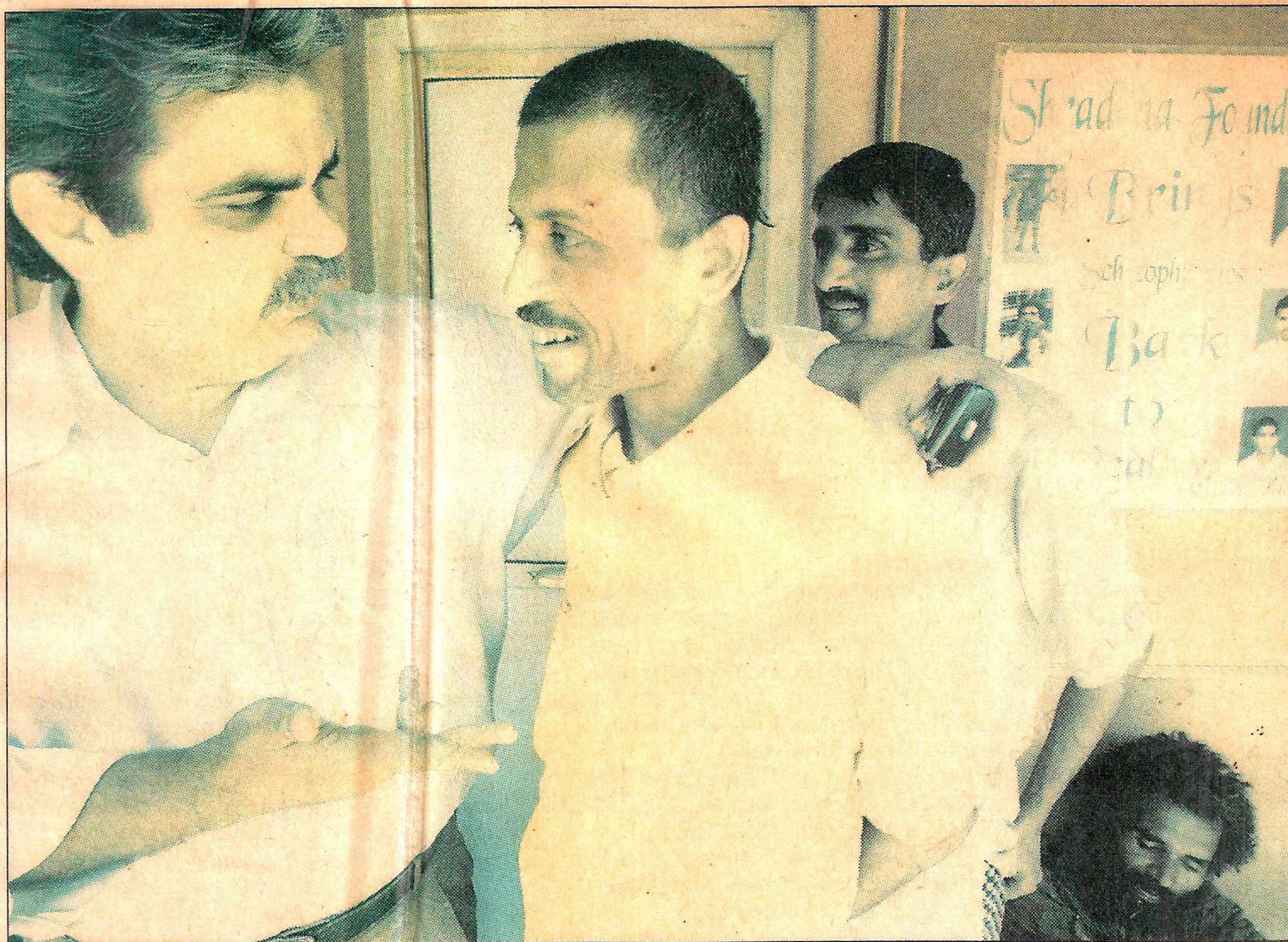


Hindustan Times

Putting them in touch with the real world

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



HT PHOTOS: VIKAS KHOT

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

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.

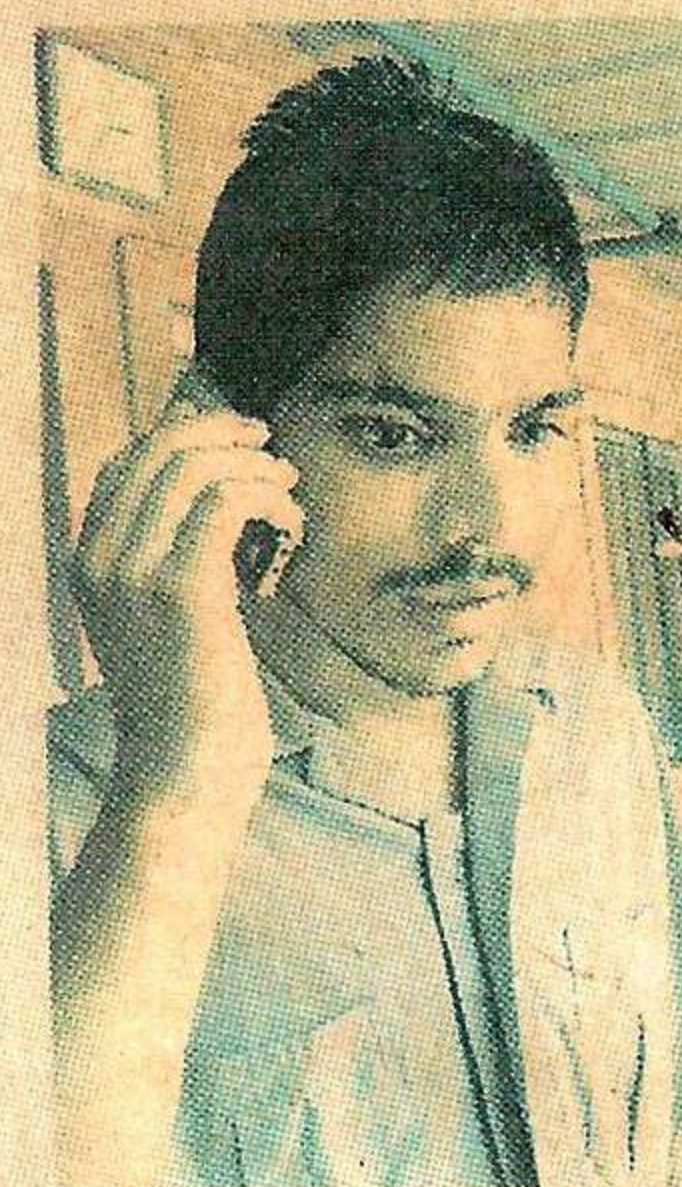
"It is a feeling of contentment when we see these patients reunited with their families," said Bijoy Philip, a volunteer at Shradha. "When I went to Orissa to reunite a boy who had been missing since 16 years, the family treated me like God. It was a magnificent feeling to make somebody happy."

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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.

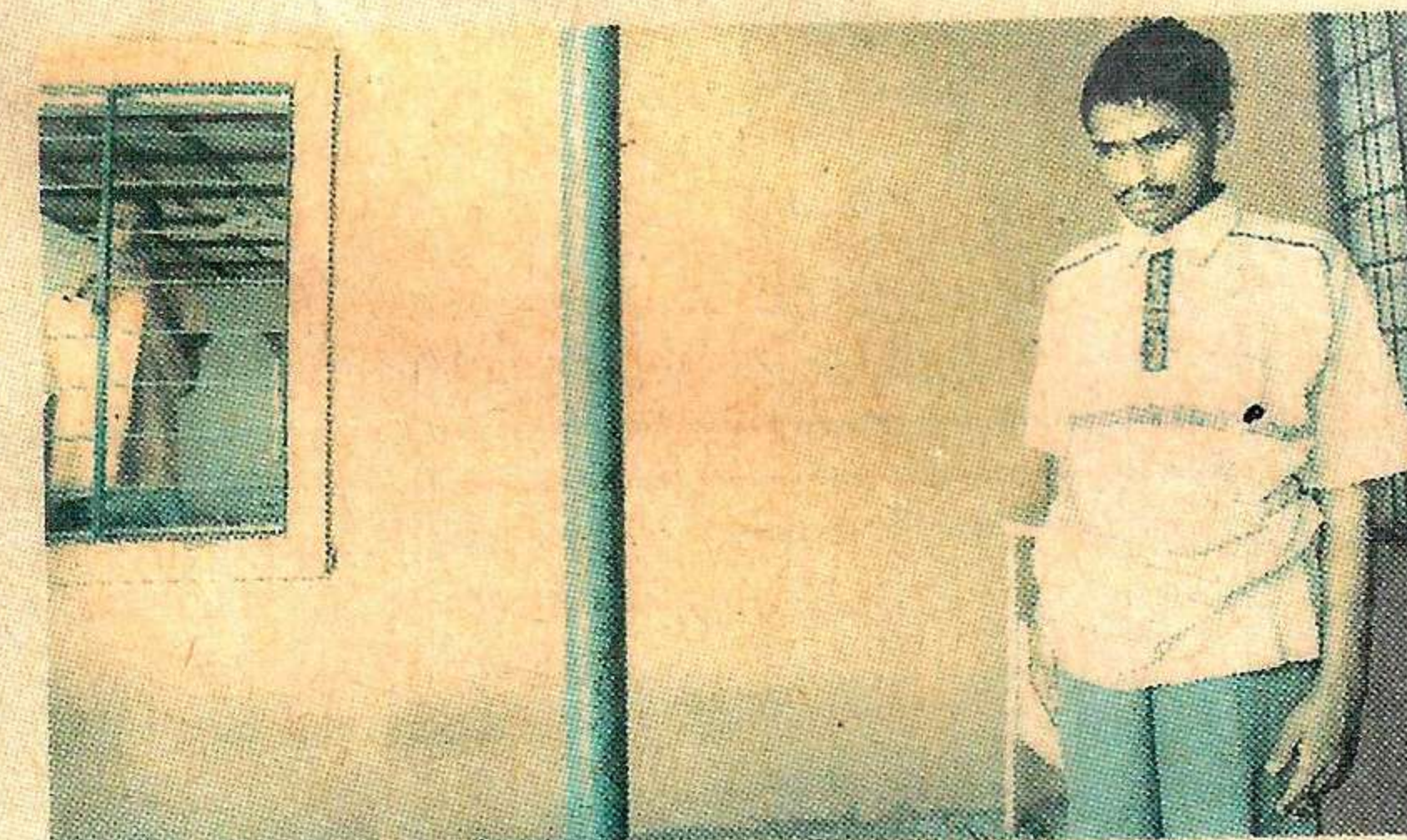
BHARAT WATVANI, psychiatrist who runs the Shradha rehabilitation centre

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.