

Parsiāna

AUGUST 21, 2007

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 Vengaon 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

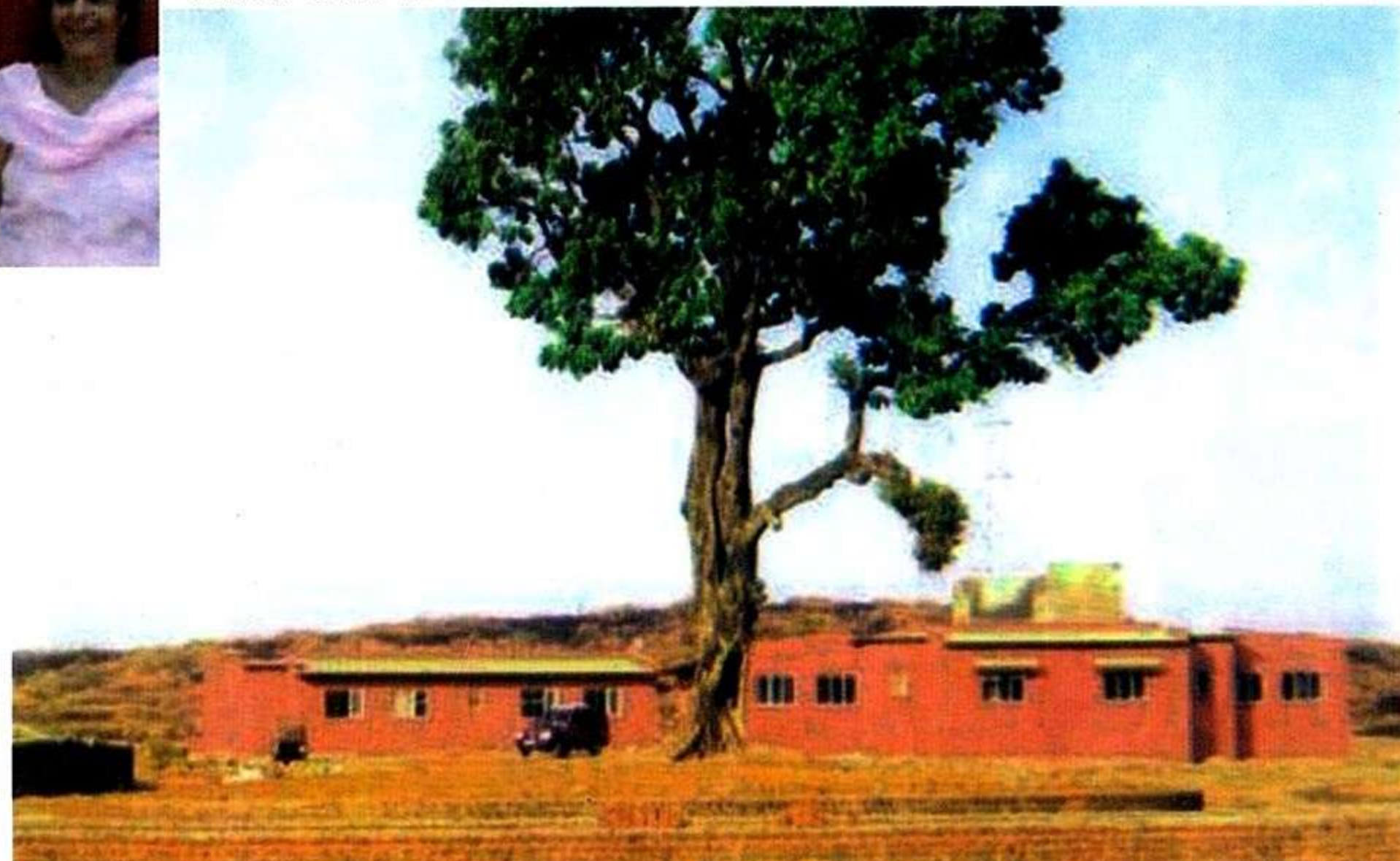
Hosi and Sheru Mistry flank a poem on her mother, etched in marble; a young priest blesses the unit at its inauguration; the Perin and Jehangir Davar units at the Shradhha Centre

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.

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 through a judicious combination of medicines, love, care

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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.

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."



A mentally ill patient before and after treatment

Sadly, in India, the issue of mental illness is not only grossly misunderstood but also neglected. 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. Donating to this worthy cause would in essence be an act of worship. Shradhha Rehabilitation Foundation is registered as a public charitable trust and donations are deductible (50 percent) under section 80G and 100 percent under section 35AC of the Income Tax Act 1961.

For further information readers may contact the Foundation at: Shradhha Manasarovar, Behind Shanti Ashram, Opposite Eskay Club, Off New Link Road, Borivali (W), Bombay 400103. Tel: (022) 28955020/65852628, e-mail: svatwani@hotmail.com, website: www.Shradharehabilitationfoundation.org