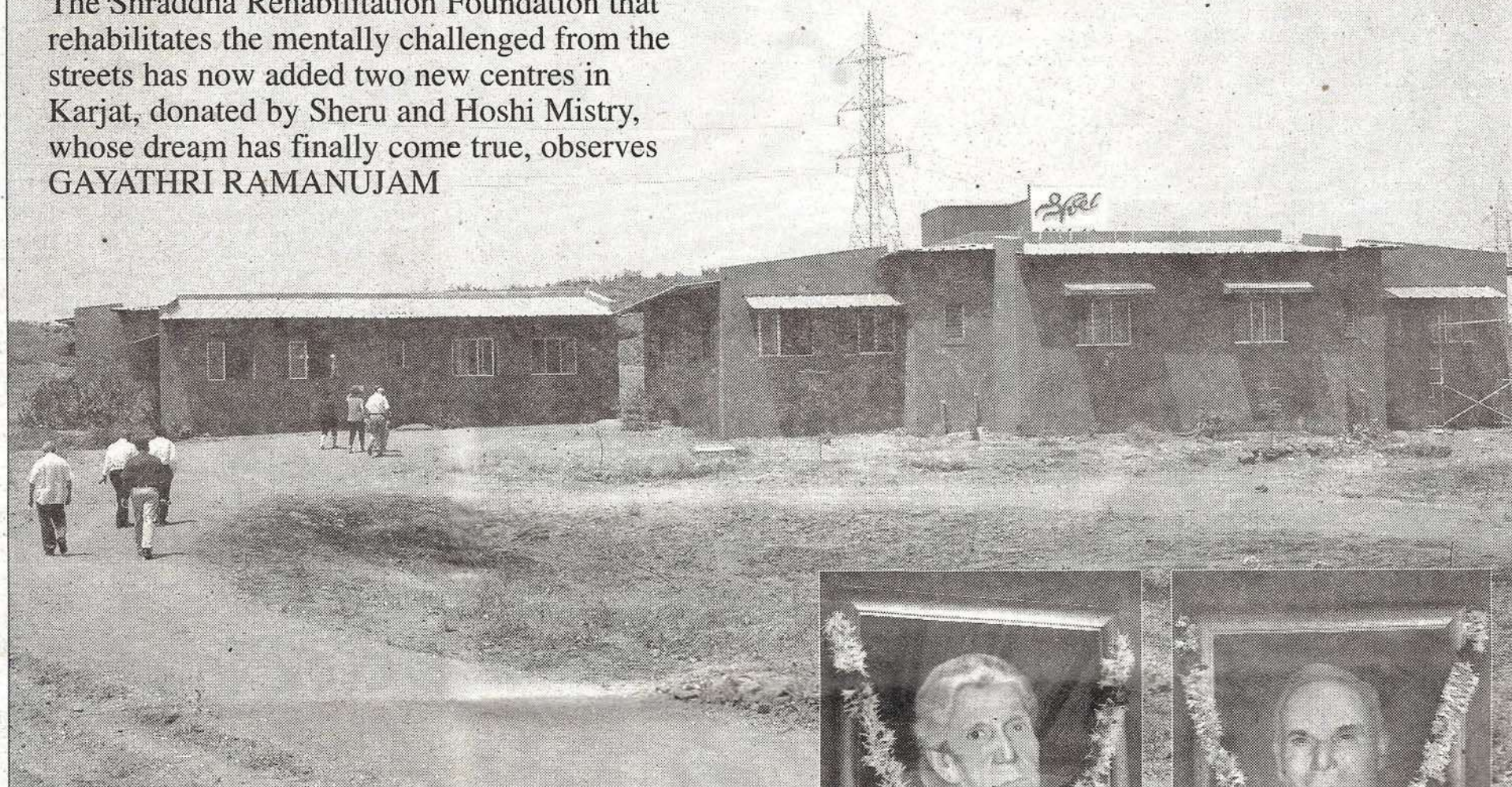




Shraddha for

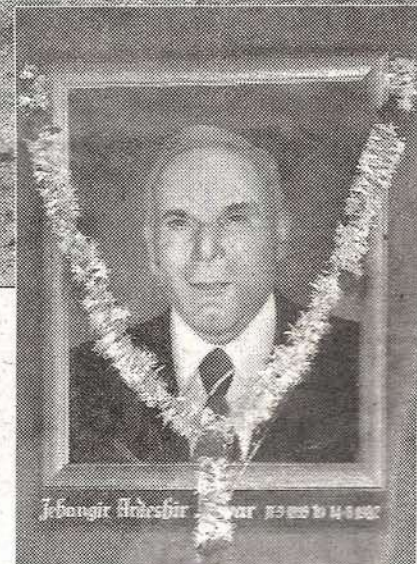
PICS BY VISHWANATH SALIAN

The Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation that rehabilitates the mentally challenged from the streets has now added two new centres in Karjat, donated by Sheru and Hoshi Mistry, whose dream has finally come true, observes
GAYATHRI RAMANUJAM



The Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation (SRF) that has been extending their hands to help the mentally challenged from the streets received two more centres on Sunday. These two centres, donated by Sheru and Hoshi Mistry, have been built near the already established two centres of SRF at Karjat.

These centres are the fulfilment of Sheru's late parents' dream to help the poorest of the poor. So the centres are named after her parents The Perin Jehangir Davar Memorial Centre for the male patients and The Jehangir Ardeshir Davar Memorial Centre for the female destitute.



Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation

Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation was founded in 1988, to deal with the mentally-ill roadside destitute, living off the streets who are left lonely, haggard and stripped of all human dignity, but humans nevertheless.

In 1997, Shraddha expanded its services with a 30-bed hospital in Dahisar.

Since its inception, Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation has picked up, treated and successfully reunited with their families over 1000 mentally ill roadside destitute - all for free. Destitute families have been traced to places as far flung as Srinagar, Bangalore, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Delhi, Kerala and Orissa. After scouting for innumerable plots, the Foundation finally came across this 6.5 acres plot at Karjat in 2004. The centre was formally inaugurated in March 2006.

This institution in Karjat is already operational. It currently houses and treats 50 mentally ill roadside destitute. SRF hopes to house 110 patients in this new set-up.



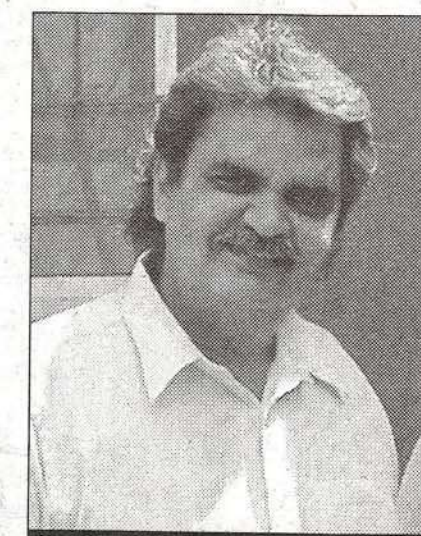
the mentally-ill

The founder-psychiatrist and the helping hands

With this expansion of the centres the founders of SRF Dr. Bharat and his wife Dr. Smitha Vatwani, who are serving as psychiatrists, are not at all afraid of added responsibilities. They rather are grateful to Sheru and Hoshi Mistry.

"I remember the day the Mistrys approached me with their idea. Sheru said, 'Shraddha is our baby'. These touchy words will stay in the heart forever. Despite several difficulties during the project the couple saw through their commitment. They will always be remembered for this landmark and so will the late parents of Sheru, who are the foundation of their project. I should not forget to appreciate the social workers who stay with the patients far away from their families and out of city limits," says Dr. Bharat at the inauguration of the new centres in Karjat on Sunday.

"The patients suffer from chemical imbalance which is curable through medicines and few psychiatric exercises. They are split-form reality. We cure them in a month or two months. Then we trace their address and reunite



Dr. Bharat Vatwani.

them with their families," Dr. Bharat explains.

There are over 20 social workers who help Dr. Bharat and Dr. Smitha at the Karjat centre. One of the psychiatric

social workers, Jinto Abraham says, "Initially we must mention that it is the calm and quiet surrounding that is favourable for the patient's quick recovery."

When asked whether they are scared of the patient's behaviour, Jinto says, "There are no such chronic patients here. I personally feel it is again the calm environment that helps them to keep their mind cool and undisturbed."

Those who are not accepted by the families or whose families are not found become permanent inmates and help the others to heal.

"We come across very emotional and touchy scenes while we reunite the patients and their family members. The worst situations are created when family members refuse to take them back or none from their family is found at the traced address," adds Jinto.

According to psychiatric social workers at the centre, most of the patients are from the poor class and remote villages of India. Due to several circumstances they end up becoming insane.



Sheru and Hoshi Mistry

Sheru and Hoshi Mistry, the good Samaritans

Sheru Mistry collected money for the project through out her life as a banker. Without financial backup from her family, she went through many obstacles.

"It took lots of hard work, but I achieved my goal to fulfil the promise made to my mother," says a relieved Sheru.

"I still remember the day she last spoke to me before she died. She said, 'Sheru my life was a waste. I couldn't reach my goal in life'. I promised her I would fulfil her dream of helping the poorest of the poor and here I am," Sheru says, her eyes moist with tears.

Speaking about the project she says, "I was in search of the right project where I wanted to donate my lifelong savings and found Shraddha the best place to do so. When we see the handicapped beggars on the roads we easily tend to help them with money or whatever possible. But we cannot make out the mental illness, so we tend to neglect them. Shraddha has a unique way of helping society by picking these mentally-ill people."

She says, "Shraddha's mission, in spirit, resembles that of Mother Teresa's. Those rare ones refused by their families after cure become permanent inmates of Shraddha. Despite agonising and time-consuming efforts, those rare ones become family-orphaned for life. To such inmates Shraddha becomes a 'caring home' for life. They will live here frugally, but cared for in Shraddha's sheltering walls."

She explains, "At times, Shraddha feels the last rupee will soon be over, but its vision and commitment never wavers. And God always comes to the rescue with last minute donations. The mission goes on and on. This rarity of concept and the sincerity with which it is practiced by founders Dr. Smitha and Dr. Bharat completely won me over. For fifteen years I searched for a rare, one-of-its-kind project. I found it at last, in Shraddha. I visited Karjat many times, interacted with patients, admired the dedication of its staff and the rarity of its founders. Shraddha would fulfill the lifelong dream of my mother - a project worthy of the waiting and matching her pure and noble vision."

"I financed two entire units for Shraddha. One unit is in fulfilment of my mother's dream of serving the poorest of the poor. The other is my tribute to my father who was low key and immense."

Sheru says: "My earnest request to all individuals is to donate whatever amount to this rare and worthy project. After all, it will be utilised completely for these children of a lesser God."

Going home

Going back home is not very easy for these patients and sometimes they are kept behind at the centre if their families or relatives do not welcome them.

Few patients have the ability to speak. They stare at strangers initially before slowly responding to instructions given by the social workers and other inmates. Gradually they start interacting with others before they finally discover themselves. The social workers at the centre later trace their addresses and reunite them with their families.

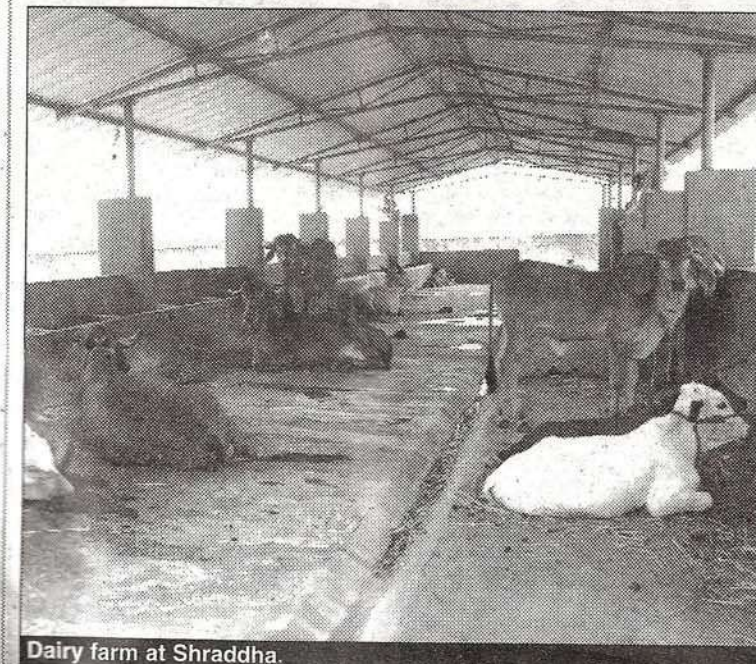
One of the patients, 16-year-old Babulal, once insane while roaming the streets of Mumbai for five long years, was all set to leave the centre to meet his parents. "I will be meeting my parents and brother," says Babulal, his radiant smile lighting up his face. "I don't know what I should say to them? One man from my village brought me to Mumbai promising me a job and I was lost after working for a few months." Babulal, who was picked up three months, is from a remote village in Orissa.



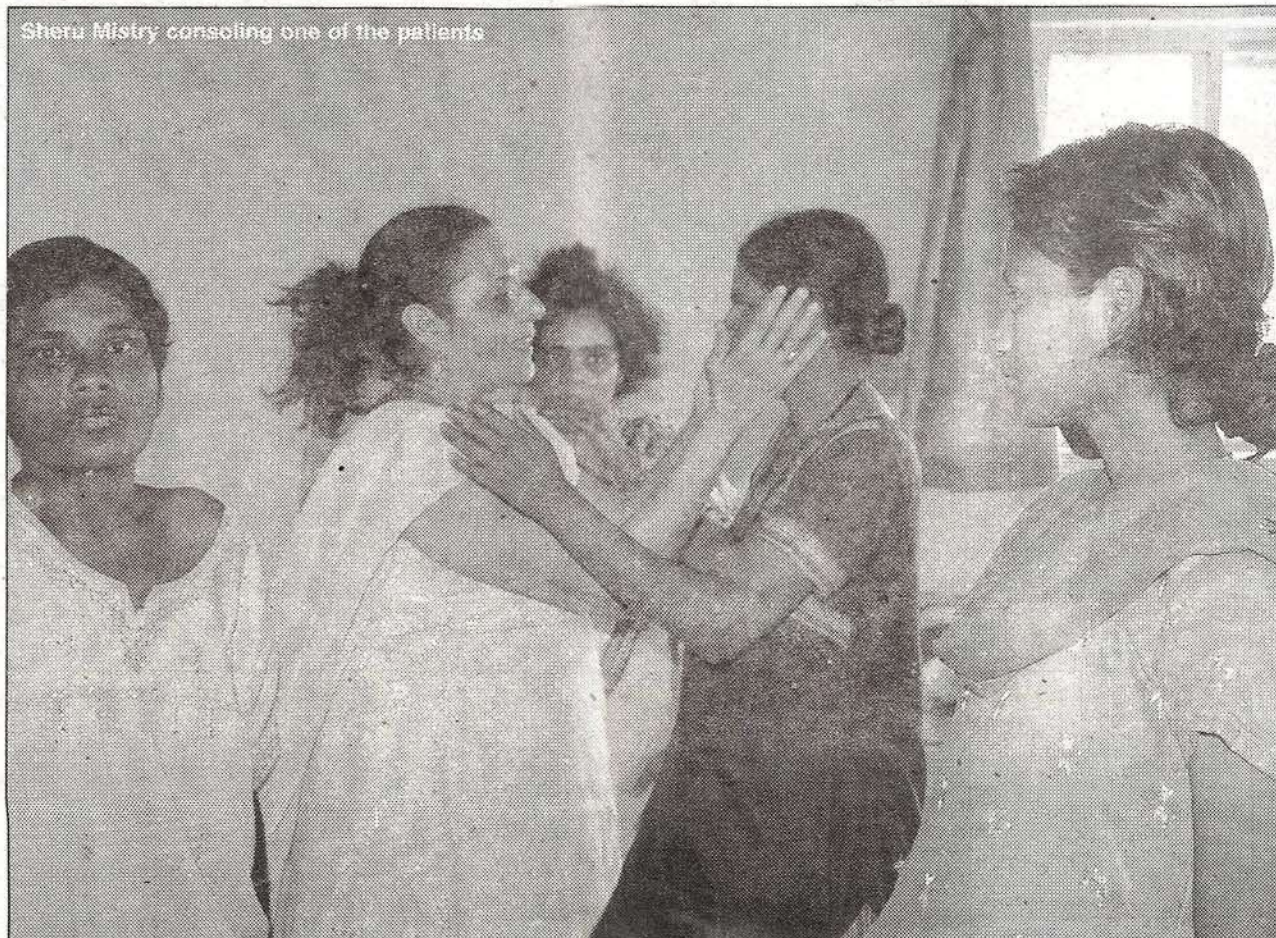
Babulal

Part of the cure at SRF

Believe it or not. The cure of 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.



Dairy farm at Shraddha.



Sheru Mistry consoling one of the patients