

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 Shradha 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

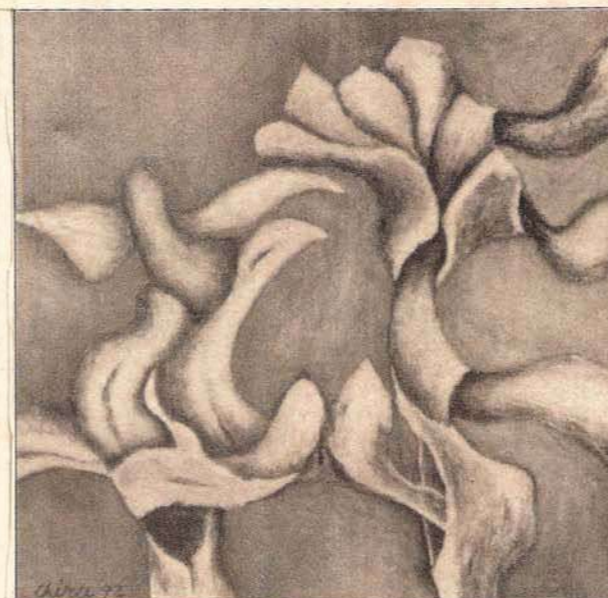


Sneak preview! Some of the exhibits: Left: "Birth of Water" by

to the mental illness).

And that's what Shradha 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



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

they have rescued in the last five years.

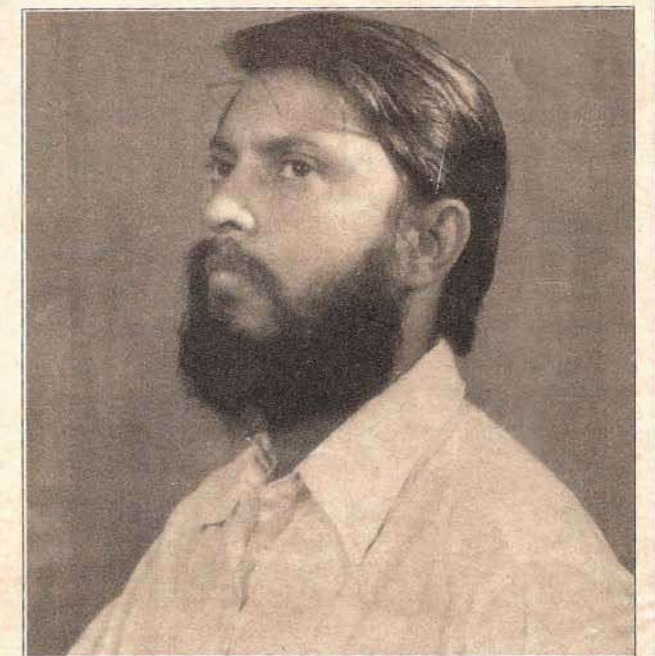
But Thakare, to his everlasting credit, did not just pick up the broken threads of his life and forge on. He decided to give something back to Shradha. His brainchild: to get India's community of artists — the best and the biggest names in the land to come together in a unique venture, donating their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

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, "Shradha". 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 Shradha 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 Shradha reaches out a hand are the loneliest of the lonely those who are strangers even to themselves?

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