

# ISLAND

BOMBAY AT ITS BEST

**T**hat faraway look in the eyes and a perpetual smile on the lips don't always mean that the person is a poet or in love. Most of the time it means that the person is mentally ill. One sees many such people on the roads and pavements of the metropolis. But looking at them as a means for 'time pass' till the bus comes or the train arrives is what most of us do. However, the Vatwanis of Borivli behave differently. They pick up these 'mad' people from the streets and bring them to their Shradha Nursing Home in Borivli. Drs. Bharat and Smitha vatwani have both done their MD in psychiatry and have been doing this social work for the last four years.

"We pick up the mentally ill, young people from the roadside and bring them to our nursing home, treat them, ask them for their address and then reach them home with an escort or call their people to collect them," says Dr. Bharat Vatwani. "We pick up only the mentally ill and not the mentally retarded as the mentally ill ones have a normal IQ and can be cured with medical treatment unlike the mentally retarded ones," adds Bharat. His wife Dr. Smitha Vatwani too accompanies him in his social work. "We have no particu-

from their homes for a long time." Nowadays, however, they prefer to pick up people only from Borivli as they are faced with space and finance constraints. "We have booked a place for a bigger nursing home near Dahisar. At present at Shradha we don't have enough beds and neither space for

**A couple of psychiatrists from Borivli have initiated a programme to pick up mentally disturbed destitutes from the street and restore them back to their families.**

## REARRANGED DESTITUTES



The Vatwani's with the inmates of Shradha Nursing Home.

lar reason for doing this. We do it for our own satisfaction," says she. Theirs is a love marriage and Bharat had met Dr. Smitha Ganla when she was a lecturer in the Cooper Hospital.

The cause of deranged behaviour is often curable. Bharat says, "Certain bio-chemicals in the brain stop producing and these people start to behave differently. Like they get depressed, talk to themselves, lose touch with the reality, start imagining things, etc." According to Smitha, "There is no particular reason for these chemicals to stop producing. It just happens. We have come across people from all walks of life. They roam the streets and are normally found missing

kitchen. We get food from outside. Also, here our private patients sometimes complain when they are put together with those picked up from the streets," adds Bharat.

They find it very easy to pick a problem destitute from a regular beggar. "These people basically are always on the lookout for food unlike a beggar who approaches you and asks for money. Then there are certain symptoms such as laughing or crying or talking to oneself, etc. When we approach them we take a few packets of biscuits with us and we also have a knack of talking to such people," says Bharat. Even legally they say that they don't have any problem. To admit a person in a nursing home all they require is a certificate from two psychiatrists saying that the person is mentally ill. "Once we start the treatment, we try to find out the address of the person. Even with few

clues we do our best to locate the man's family," says Smitha.

Last year they had picked a girl from near the Ajanta Talkies in Borivli. It seems she had been roaming the streets for seven years! Her name was Padma and when they picked her up, like everybody else she was very unkempt and haggard and she could not even say where she was from and on questioning repeatedly kept on saying just Mulugu. "Ultimately I sat down with a map and located the place in Andhra Pradesh," says Bharat. There are many such incidences, for example Kutkuti. He was suffering from schizophrenia and was from Orissa but did not know the details. After some investigation, they were able to locate his home

town.

Vatwani introduces you Sudhir Phadke. He looks neat with closely cut hair and is wearing bright yellow Shradha Nursing Home T-shirt. But when he starts talking, you know why he's there. "Bob Woodward (of Watergate) is my close friend as he used to stay in the next building where I live. I

have written everywhere and am unhappy about the Indian Express group as they have still not paid me..." says Sudhir. The doctors inform us that Sudhir had actually written articles for Mahanagar. "I am a very good writer on sports and I would like to write an article for your magazine about the advantages of a rubber ball in spin bowling over the regular season ball..." adds Sudhir. According to Bharat, Sudhir was an assistant engineer in the BMC sewerage department and has a flat in Yogi Nagar, Borivli. "He has given his flat on leave licence. His wife and children have left him after he became ill. However, I have found out that his post in the BMC is still vacant and I want to get the job back for him once he becomes alright. I have fixed an appointment with the municipal commissioner and an editor has promised to come with me to meet the commissioner in order to get Sudhir his job back," says Bharat. Sudhir turns to me, "I used to work in the Sankhli Street office. After my wife left



Drs Bharat and Smitha Vatwani, the samaritans of Bombay.

me I gave the flat on hire and started living on the streets. They pay me regularly every month, but have you met Dwarkanath Sanzgiri, he writes on sports and he is my friend." The doctors feel he is responding well to the treatment and should be normal in a month or two.

Yet another case was that of Hemant Thakare. He was a lecturer in the JJ Institute of Arts and a gold medallist too. "He started having some problems and he put up posters and banners against the officials on the walls of the Institute. When we picked him up he was on the roads. However, he responded very well to our treatment and has now even got back his job. He now works as a social worker for us and helps us in escorting the patients back to their homes. His name is now included in the letter head of the Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation. Once we get back Sudhir's flat we want Hemant to stay with Sudhir for the first few days..." says Bharat.

On an average the Vatwanis spend

about Rs. 40-50 on a patient everyday. "We never ask for the money even after the person goes back to his people, some of them pay on their own accord. A person has to undergo the treatment (follow-up) for at least two years after he is cured. Some who have gone back send us a money order and we send them the medicines. Others who are too poor, and if they ask, we continue to send them the medicines," says Bharat. Recently, after a few articles on them appeared in the newspapers, they have started getting phone calls from people pointing out the mad people in their area. "Recently somebody called us and told us about a boy who was ill and roaming in the streets. I asked the person what his interest was in the issue. He said nothing, he just wanted to help the boy. When I asked if they could give us some sort of aid, he readily agreed and immediately sent the money once we picked up the boy." At least, they are not alone in their mission.

ABHIJIT BHADRE