

SPINE NEWS

THE SPINE FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

A thousand hopes

*She is the 1000th patient to be operated on for free at VN Desai Hospital.
Here is the person behind that number.*

SAVITA SHASHIKANT REMJE is a small woman with an easy smile. Only when you see her strong, calloused hands do you realise the strength within her diminutive frame. She lives in a small village of about 100 houses called Ainekher near Chiplun. Mother to two sons, Sushant and Prashant, her husband passed away when her elder son Sushant was just five. He drowned while gathering lotus flowers from a pond that he would sell to keep the kitchen fire burning. This illiterate woman had to do manual jobs like cleaning yards, gathering fallen cashew nuts and removing weeds. She sent her elder son to Mumbai, where he found a housekeeping job at Wadia hospital. After some time, when Sushant got a job at VN Desai Hospital, he jumped at the better prospect.

Even as her son made his way up to Mumbai, Savita started noticing a pain in her left leg. She ignored the pain and continued her work as she needed every Rupee to keep her body and soul together. As her pain worsened, she took the support of a stick. Eventually, after two years, Savita had no choice but to take to the bed, unable to move without pain.

As fate would have it, her elder son Shashikant had just found a new job at VN Desai with the Spine Foundation. He spoke to the doctors at the foundation about his mother's condition. They asked Shashikant to get his mother to VN Desai.

The Spine Foundation opened its spine unit at the VN Desai Municipal General Hospital to bring quality spine care to the people who cannot afford it. And thanks to the Pentagon



Savita with her two sons Prashant and Sushant, after surgery.

Charitable Foundation, they could put up a well-equipped operation theatre at this hospital. In the first year, 20 surgeries were carried out here, all free.

The doctors discovered a strange coincidence when Savita Remje was scheduled for surgery. She would be the 1000th patient to be operated on for free by the Spine Foundation at the VN Desai Hospital. Remember, VN Desai Hospital is just one of the many hospitals where the foundation offers free spine surgery.



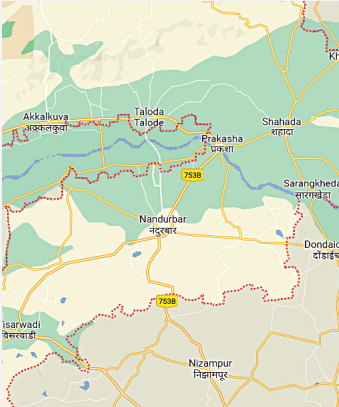
Another important thing to note is that while the Spine Foundation operated on 1000 patients at VN Desai hospital between September 2009 and September 2022, it treated 35556 patients for various other spine diseases.

Savita Remje has since fully recovered and is staying with

her son in Wadala, a suburb of Mumbai. Her younger son, too, has shifted to the city to look after his mother and is looking for a job in Mumbai. Her sons do not want their mother to work any more and continue living with them in Mumbai. Will Savita stay with her sons in the city or return to her village? We do not know, however, one thing is undeniable. The Spine Foundation has given a thousand people a choice on how they want their future to be. And hope for a better life.

Ground reports from TSF camps

The past few months have been busy for The Spine Foundation. So what have they been doing?

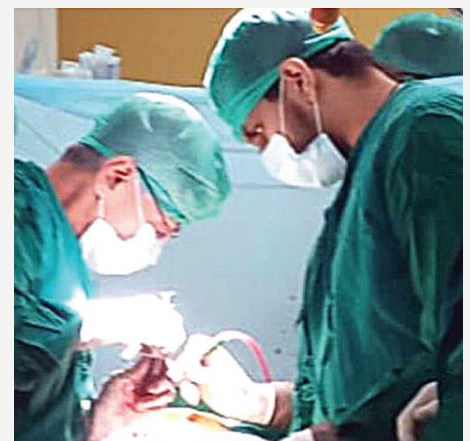
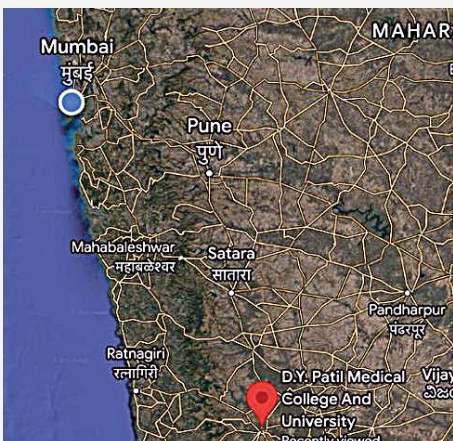


NANDURBAR

10TH SEPTEMBER 2022. The Spine Foundation travelled to Nandurbar in northwest Maharashtra to continue the campaign of providing free spine treatment

and surgeries to the poor. The team conducted nine surgeries and treated one block at the camp held at the Civil Hospital, Nandurbar. Thanks to Rotarians Els Reynaers Kini, Monique Von Goubourgen, Sheetal Idnani and Puspraj

Nadar for visiting the spine surgery camp at Nandurbar and supporting this initiative. The Lions Club of Nandurbar hosted a special lunch of local homemade delicacies of the Khandesh region for the entire team and hospital staff.



KOLHAPUR

THE SPINE FOUNDATION has a unique relationship with DY Patil hospital, Kolhapur. On 24th September 2022, TSF found itself back in the city to conduct its seventh free surgery camp, where 29 patients had already been successfully operated upon. In this camp, six

more patients underwent successful surgeries. Two pain blocks were also done. The Spine Foundation also signed an MOU with Dr DY Patil Hospital & Research Centre. The function began with a traditional inaugural ceremony for the new surgical instruments and equipment. After that, TSF trustees Dr Shekhar

Bhojraj and Dr Premik Nagad signed on behalf of the foundation. Dr Sanjay Patil, Chancellor & President of DY Patil, along with Dean Dr Rakesh Sharma, represented the hospital. This partnership will bring relief to thousands of poor patients living in and around Kolhapur by giving them access to free quality spine care.

GADCHIROLI

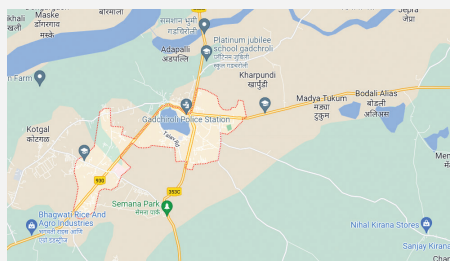
THE SPINE FOUNDATION returned to the SEARCH campus at Gadchiroli on 11th November 2022 to operate on 23 patients who needed urgent surgery. The 20-strong TSF team comprised senior spine surgeons, spine and research fellows, anaesthetists, senior physiotherapists, OT assistants and more.

On reaching Gadchiroli on Friday, Dr Shekhar Bhojraj addressed over 100 medical health officers and shared with them the workings of the foundation. Dr Bhojraj, Spine Fellow Dr Harshit Dave and TSF Project Manager Mahesh Palan were also felicitated at this function. Dr Gaurish Kenkre, who heads TSF's physiotherapy team, Dr Bhojraj and Dr Anand Bang took the opportunity to sit down with other senior members of TSF and SEARCH to discuss future

plans. Team TSF's Dr Harikrishnan, Dr Shiva Kumar and Dr Dimpal Singh joined doctors from SEARCH and travelled about 30 km to Karwafa District hospital to hold a free spine OPD. Hereafter screening 156 patients, they identified 126 people as spine cases.

12th November, Saturday, was an even busier day. TSF's Dr Dimpal Singh joined SEARCH's mobile medical Unit team of Dr Harsha to travel to the tribal village of Bodin and Bodintola. Again, they found that most cases were connected to the spine needing further investigations. 12 cases out of 16 in Bodin and 20 out of 36 in Bodintola were spine patients.

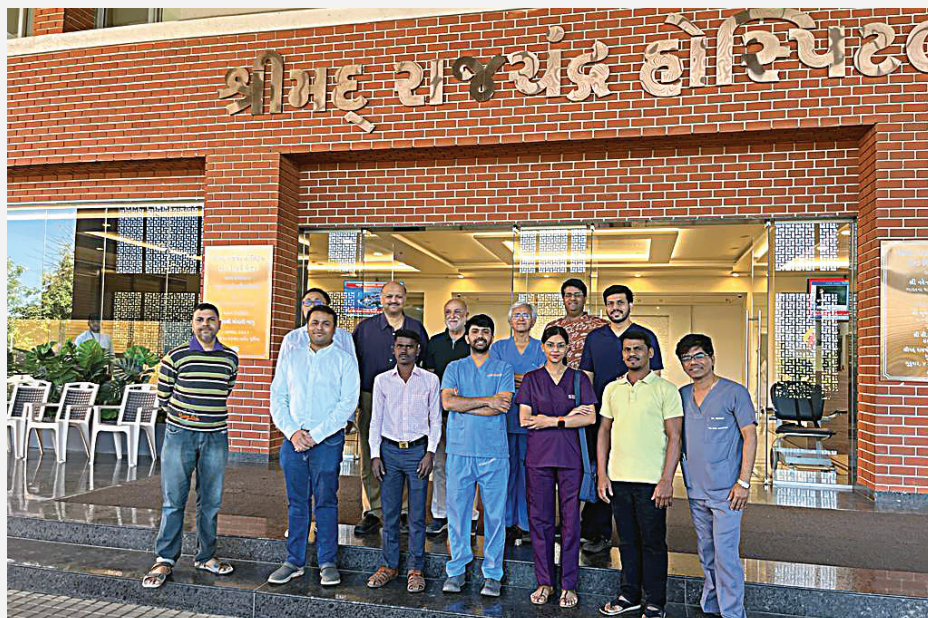
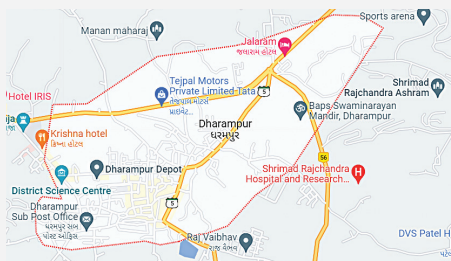
A spine awareness program was conducted at SEARCH on Saturday, 12th November, for arogyadhoots (local health workers) who were given physiotherapy training.



DHARAMPUR

THE SPINE FOUNDATION had a successful camp in Dharampur on Dec 3 and 4, thanks to the excellent efforts of Dr Tritesh Rana, Dr Sunil Dubey, Dr Manish, anaesthetists and the excellent staff of Shrimad Rajchandra Hospital & Research Centre.

The surgical team of Dr Prateek Israni, Dr Hridayacharya and Dr Apurba Gorain, headed by Dr Gaitam Zaveri, operated on 10 cases, including five instrumented fusion procedures. There were no intra-op or post-op complications, and all patients are doing well.



DEHRADUN

1ST OCTOBER 2022. The Spine Foundation travelled from the coastal city of Mumbai to Swami Vivekananda Charitable hospital at Dehradun, located at the foothill of the Himalayas, for another free spine surgery camp. Four spine surgeries and two blocks were successfully carried out during the camp in Dehradun. Another satisfying weekend for team TSF.



Who is this fellow?

This spine surgeon from Pune shares how The Spine Foundation shaped him as a doctor.

MEET DR TUSHAR DEORE. He is a successful Spine Surgeon who runs 'the Spine Clinic Pune' in Aundh, Pune. Dr Deore is also the head of the Spine Department at Jupiter hospital Pune. Besides his private practice, Dr Tushar Deore is integral to the Spine Foundation family. He has worked extensively in rural Maharashtra to provide free spine care to the poor. How did a highly successful surgeon end up going and doing free spine surgery in the remote parts of the state? It started in 2009 when Dr Tushar Deore joined Dr Shekhar Bhojraj as a Spine Fellow.

Tushar was always a bright student. He came from an academic family; his parents were English and Marathi, literature professors. After finishing his schooling, he was faced with a conundrum. Should he join Engineering College or BJ Medical College in Pune? Tushar decided to fulfil his parents' dream and follow in the footsteps of his elder sister Dr Vaishali in medicine. During his MBBS program, Tushar developed an interest in orthopaedics and decided to pursue the subject during his post-graduation at the prestigious Sancheti institute For orthopaedics and Rehabilitation, Pune. At SIOR, he met Dr Parasnish, who had been a Fellow with Dr Shekhar Bhojraj. Dr Parasnish encouraged Tushar to apply for a Spine Fellowship under Dr Bhojraj. It was this Fellowship that changed Dr Tushar Deore's life.

Under Dr Bhojraj, Tushar learnt more than just the finer points of spine surgery. He learnt work-life balance. He learnt about being a good human being, not through lectures and books but by the live example set by Dr Bhojraj. Most of all, he was exposed to the work being done by the Spine Foundation. He accompanied the foundation doctors when they travelled to the interiors of Maharashtra to conduct free surgery camps. He saw the foundation bringing spine care to people who could barely afford two meals a day and lived in the remote parts of the country where there were no medical facilities. He saw the happiness on the faces of the crippled and in pain when they took their first pain-free steps. Dr Tushar Deore had found meaning in his life.

After finishing his fellowship, Dr Deore



joined a medical college as an Assistant Professor. His private practice, too, bloomed. He was in demand not just in Pune but also outside the city. Dr Tushar Deore continued his association with the Spine Foundation despite his many private commitments. In 2015-2016, the foundation signed an MOU with the Government of Maharashtra to start Spine centres in various Government Medical Colleges across the state. One such centre was Shri Bhausaheb Hire medical College at Dhule. Dhule is a small city in northwest Maharashtra located on the banks of the Panzara River. Dhule is also Tushar's native place. Therefore Dr Tushar Deore raised his hand to take on the responsibilities of the centre coordinator. This involved organising quarterly spine screening

camps, developing the surgical work at Dhule Medical College and propagating the ideas of the Spine Foundation.

Next in line was the tribal area of Nandurbar, which was lacking in medical facilities. The Spine Foundation set up a spine care centre at the Nandurbar Civil Hospital with the support of Dr Sanjay Gavit orthopaedic surgeon & Lions Club Nandurbar under Dr Mahajan and his team. In 2021, a generous donor enabled the foundation to establish an excellent infrastructure in Nandurbar Civil hospital on par with any

big private hospital. On average, eight to ten spine surgeries are performed here every day.

Even as Nandurbar went online, Dr Bhojraj initiated activities at DY Patil Medical College in Kolhapur. Dr Deore jumped at the opportunity to connect to the city and immediately volunteered as the coordinator. DY Patil had an established Department of Orthopaedics under Dr Salim Lad and his team and had a good infrastructure for spine surgery. The Spine Foundation started conducting spine surgery camps for the urban poor and the poor in the rural areas around the city. Dr Tushar Deore was involved in many difficult surgeries, including Scoliosis Deformity Correction surgery under spinal cord monitoring. Perhaps most importantly, it gave him to be in the company of his mentor, philosopher and guru, "SYB Sir".

Since 2007, his wife, Dr Sandhya, has been accompanying Dr Tushar Deore on his professional and social journey. a software engineer with an MBA followed by a PhD from Pune University. She took

a sabbatical to raise their twins, Aryan and Anaya, who were born in 2008. Apart from sharing an aptitude for academic excellence, the twins have very different interests. Aryan is a guitarist and plays football for Barca academy. Anaya is a Bharatnatyam dancer who has distinguished herself nationally and internationally. Following her father's footsteps in social service, Anaya is a recipient of the Leela Poonawalla Foundation's internship for teaching maths to underprivileged girls.

In 2009, Dr Tushar Deore's journey began with a Spine Foundation Fellowship. Infected since then with the germ of social service, this successful surgeon has been responsible for thousands of poor patients getting a second lease on life. His journey continues.

The legacy of The Spine Foundation.

Dr Sheetal Mohite, one of the earliest Spine Fellows, is now a Trustee of The Spine Foundation. He shares how they create the next generation of doctors who will continue providing quality spine care for all.



"If you would not be forgotten, as soon as you are dead and rotten, either write things worth reading or do things worth writing." –

Benjamin Franklin.



WE AT SPINE foundation believe that the best gift we can pass on to the next generation is the gift of knowledge. It would be at its purest if it is backed with empathy, ethics, hard work, honesty, critical self-analysis and willingness

to change for betterment. This thought is a source of pride and motivation and inspires us to strive for greater heights.

The Spine Foundation fellowship programme is very sought-after by candidates all over India. So far, more than 35 Spine Surgeons have been trained by Spine Foundation since its inception.

The fellowship programme gets applications from all over India. It is a well-structured programme for two years. The candidate is put through a six-monthly rotation schedule, placing them in different hospitals of

different infrastructures (top-class private corporate hospitals and municipal hospitals) to expose them to different environments and environments to aid their learning curve. We take pride in having been trained by one of India's top surgeons known for his conservatism in spine surgery (yet has a mind-boggling number of surgeries), and is the final word when surgical intervention is contemplated.

The candidate is taught the principles of treatment and core ideas by his mentors during the clinics, operation theatre and ward rounds. They are blessed with long follow-ups of many cases in the clinics to help them understand the success or failure rates of conserved/operated patients. They are exposed to the best treatment facilities in operation theatres of corporate hospitals.

During their training, the candidates are involved in various free Spine Surgery camps, which The Spine Foundation conducts as a social outreach programme. The camps are conducted at NGO-run hospitals, Government run hospitals, and Civil hospitals. They aim to sensitise our fellows to the demands of the rural poor and imbibe the values of giving back to society.

At the end of their tenure, they are posted at

a municipal hospital where they get a chance to apply whatever they have learned, as now they are the main caretakers of the patient. This would be the best scenario for them before entering private practice as they are calling the shots but are always watched by their mentors to guide them if needed. The principles of treatment remain the same irrespective of the economic capacity of the needy.

On completion of their tenure of the fellowship programme, if the candidates decide to start their private practice, the Spine Foundation tries to get them placed in hospitals of good repute. The candidate may replicate the Spine Foundation model of serving the economically backward masses. The Spine Foundation is more than willing to hold camps and perform surgeries free of charge at government-run hospitals. This would help the candidates expand their practice base and help The Spine Foundation spread its services.

We at Spine Foundation take great pride in enrolling candidates of different backgrounds from all over the country. This legacy is possible because of complete belief in the values and principles of the foundation and the dedicated hard work of all its members over the years.

LEARNINGS FROM THE GROUND

Dr Madhav Sathe shares his thoughts and experiences of nearly four decades in the social sector



THE PROBLEM WITH Non-Governmental Organisations or NGOs is that they forever need government grants or support from outside for their survival. On the other hand, Non-Profit Organisations or NPOs can earn profits that can be reinvested in the organisation. Therefore I consciously developed the Bombay Mothers & Children Welfare Society as a 'not-for-loss' organisation. Philanthropy should create sustainable social enterprises. These are my learnings from my service in the social sector for over three decades.

The Bombay Mothers & Children Welfare Society is a public charitable trust established in 1919. After its founder died in 1967, its activities steadily came to a standstill. Financial

mismanagement, bad labour practices and court cases had brought it to a grinding halt. There was a group of like-minded people who decided to revive the trust. I was the youngest member of the group and was given the responsibility of the Secretary. The year was 1985. I was a doctor with zero knowledge of administration, labour practices or finance.

The situation on the ground was extremely difficult. our earnings were too low to meet the running costs of the organisation. a demotivated labour force added to our difficulties. adding to it all were the court cases. there was darkness all around. it was a dying organisation. I did not like the idea of seeking outside support unless we had plans ready to turn around and be sustainable. The change had to come from within. It required a change in our thought process and a defined strategic policy to turn the tide and move forward.

At that time, we ran two hospitals in Mumbai, Dr Mhaskar Hospital at NM Joshi Marg and Tilak Hospital in Worli. I decided to close Dr Mhaskar Hospital to reduce expenses and consolidate our resources. A part of Tilak Hospital was converted into a supportive care centre for cancer patients who flocked to the Tata Memorial Cancer hospital from all across India. These patients and their families found staying in Mumbai while undergoing treatment very expensive.

The idea was to help them with a low-cost, affordable stay facility.

Cancer is a devastating disease affecting the patient and the entire family.

The patient, weakened by chemotherapy and radiation, needs constant care. So we made space for two relatives to stay with each patient during treatment. This 114-bed facility was an instant hit with the patients. Over the years, it has helped thousands of people fight this dreaded disease.

The main portion of tilak hospital too was renovated. The upwardly moving lower middle class of Worli was reluctant to go to public hospitals. While treatment at public hospitals was good, delays and unhygienic conditions turned people away. We transformed the hospital completely. Today it is a spotlessly clean, beautiful ultra-modern hospital offering compassionate treatment from experienced doctors. We also reduced the charges by 70%, thereby attracting more patients. Our Perceptive Policy Development had become the organisation's core philosophy by now.

This is when my good friend and spine surgeon extraordinaire, Dr Shekhar Bhojraj, visited our humble hospital. He was a man with a burning drive to serve the poor, a thought process that matched ours. He offered us his services as a surgeon for free, allowing us to

offer spine treatment at a nominal cost to the poor. Dr Bhojraj founded the Spine Foundation and set up the excellent operating facility at VN Desai, a public hospital in Mumbai's Santa Cruz East. This, I think, is the one and only such public-person collaborative facility in Mumbai. The Spine Foundation has now reached deep, remote and deprived areas in India to treat spine diseases. We are extremely proud to be associated with the journey of the Spine Foundation.

These projects proved the efficacy of the path of Perceptive Policy Development. Our next project aimed to alleviate some of the problems faced by young mothers. An increasing number of women from middle-class families were coming out to work. They needed creches that cared for their children while they went to work. They wanted a creche that cared for their child's physical well-being and had facilities that helped their child's development. We decided to develop an 8000-square-foot creche at a parcel of land that the trust owned in Goregaon. We got help from a local builder who agreed to invest the money we returned to him over ten years without any interest. The walls were decorated with fables from the Panchatantra. Dance, drama, music and sanskar classes were organised for the children. This unsubsidised facility now earns a small profit that can be ploughed back into our projects. The Bombay Mothers & Children Welfare Society activities in Mumbai stabilised, and I decided it was time for my pet project of rural development. The organisation used to run a primary health care centre in Rajgurunagar near Pune. It was shut down in 1974, and this 4-acre property had fallen into ruin. We decided to revive this centre and make Rajgurunagar the hub of our rural development activities. The Bombay Mothers

& Children Welfare Society was also invited to join the Reproductive & Child Health program of the Central Government. Two years in the program gave us an insight into the problems faced in villages and the solutions that were needed. We decided to follow our philosophy of Perceptive Policy Development to address the problems faced at the grassroots. So we began with a bottom-up approach. Take, for example, education. While the dismal quality of education is popularly put as a lack of infrastructure and bad teachers, the reality at the grassroots is more complex. An unimaginative and tedious city-centric curriculum with no relevance to their lives. This and a lack of teaching aids left the students bored and uninterested in their studies, leading to heavy absenteeism and demotivated teachers. This was accentuated by uneducated parents who saw no benefit in education. The pathetic state of education in rural India is summed up in an ASER report by Pratham that says that a fifth-standard student cannot read second-standard books!

To make education interesting, we decided to take the help of technology. We designed an animated and digitised curriculum loaded on computers and projected on a screen. This movie hall-like experience in education immediately raised attendance to 100%. The program started with 73 schools in 2013. It was so successful that it expanded to 600 schools and anganwadis. Over 30,000 students are now learning on this platform. While this e-learning program was a huge success, one problem was power. The unreliable electricity supply and frequent power cuts nearly forced us to terminate the program. That's when we decided to convert all schools to solar power. Today these children enjoy interesting, uninterrupted

and impactful education. All these schools are run on the PPP model, a participatory program where villagers contribute 15% of the project cost and take responsibility for sustaining it.

Another big problem in tribal schools is malnutrition. A study revealed low BMI and haemoglobin levels amongst children bought about by a poor and insufficient diet. We arranged regular nutritious meals for these children. In the space of six years, we were able to improve their BMI and haemoglobin counts by leaps and bounds.

Now, here is a paradox that baffles the mind. India is an agrarian country that doesn't teach agriculture, even in rural schools. Unless they are taught about modern agricultural techniques, their incomes will not improve, and they will remain backward. We have distributed hydrophobic equipment in the schools to inculcate a modern agricultural mindset in children. The food that the children grow here is used in the meals that are prepared for them.

This is just a part of our story in rural education. The Bombay Mothers & Children Welfare Society also runs many rural health and hygiene programs. Over the years, my work in the social sector has taught me that many people in India want to give back to society but do not know how to do it or where to start. I advise them to get involved with any organisation or NGO that matches their thought process and then move forward from there.

The Spine Foundation, established by my good friend Dr Shekhar Bhojraj is a good example of how nothing is impossible if you have the right thought. Who could have imagined that advanced spine treatment and surgery could be done in remote areas? And done for free. Most importantly done in a replicable way.





DR PRIYANK PATEL

He is a busy spine surgeon and a trustee of the Spine Foundation. Painting for him is a stress-buster that helps him relax. These paintings are done in acrylic using the impasto technique favoured by masters like Van Gogh and Rembrandt.

