

BHOPAL MEDICAL APPEAL

Charity registered in England & Wales, No 1117526



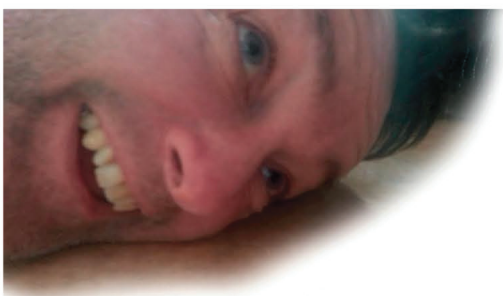
Dear

My name is Farah and I was born in Bhopal. It's the festive season so I don't want to take up much of your time but I'd like to share a few experiences that I hope you'll enjoy hearing about.

I've been a volunteer with the Bhopal Medical Appeal for fifteen years and have lived in Britain almost all of that time. I met my husband, Tim, who runs the BMA office, in 1999 when he cycled from Brighton to Bhopal to raise money for the Sambhavna Clinic. I thought he was so handsome that I really wanted to meet him, so I did what every Indian girl does in these circumstances and completely ignored him. Later, this nonsense out the way, he used to visit me at my parents' house. My mother didn't approve of him so he'd hide under my bed when she was around. More than once he had to lie there with her heels swinging inches from his nose listening to her telling me what an unsuitable fellow he was.

I was twenty-six when I first left India to be with Tim in Britain. It sometimes feels odd that I've lived two such different extremes but it's given me an unusual take on things. I feel I can see the best and worst of both cultures with a fresh eye.

I was ten when the gas tragedy happened. Before December 3rd, 1984 I was an ordinary ten-year-old girl thoroughly enjoying my childhood, scoffing candyfloss and Indian sweets whenever I could get the chance, playing with dolls, cycling and making friends with anyone I met.



Collecting giant dragonflies in jars was one of my favourite ways to spend time, and hunting for red velvet bugs (bheer bahuti) which I found under rocks up on the side of the hill above the lake where I lived. It was down this same hill that Union Carbide chairman Warren Anderson stumbled to make his escape in a waiting boat after his sudden release from custody a month before my eleventh birthday.



You might know by now that Warren Anderson died on September 29th, 2014, finally completing his escape from the law. His death appears to have changed everything, but it's really changed nothing.



On the day of the gas, in just a few hours, everything changed for me and so many others. I saw dead bodies for the first time and felt terror. I witnessed people suffering extreme pain. My innocence was gone, as I realised just how dangerous the world could be, and just like in the movies, learned that with a click of a finger life could be turned upside down. My city was poisoned. People lost their lives through no fault of their own. I have not slept soundly since that night: I wake at the slightest noise. Deep down I'm still scared because I know now that at any moment, some bad thing could happen, and hurt my family and children without warning.

I've suffered from psoriasis for several years. It has given me a lot of pain and discomfort: there are days when I can't stop scratching and the eruptions of excess skin crack and break open in sore wounds that don't heal quickly.



In Britain I had had effective treatment to control my psoriasis, but as every psoriasis sufferer knows it comes at a heavy cost. Drugs like methotrexate are strong immunosuppressants which leave your body less able to deal with other kinds of illness. Sambhavna use herbal medicines based on Ayurveda coupled with a range of massage treatments known as *panchakarma*. To guarantee quality, Sambhavna grow the herbs needed in their own garden and make the medicines themselves. While producing near-miraculous and well-documented results for hundreds of gas-affected psoriasis sufferers in Bhopal, Sambhavna's treatment has no negative side-effects at all.



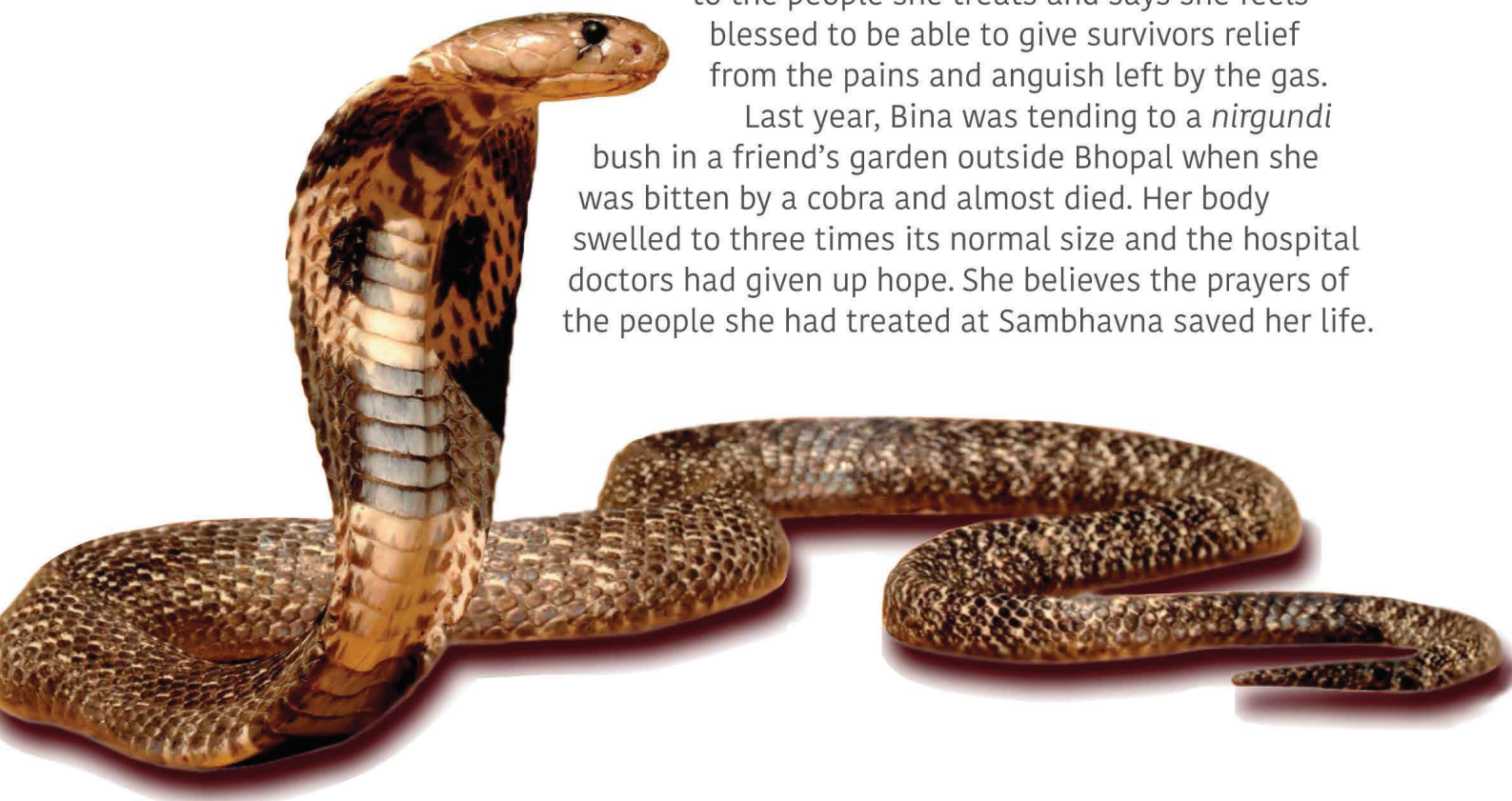
Recently I was in Bhopal for a family wedding and visited Sambhavna. I knew of the success it had had treating immune disorders that modern medicine considers 'incurable' – psoriasis is a good example – and was hoping it might help me too. It was a fairly tentative hope. I had read the reports, seen the statistics and read the testimonies of people wild with relief that they had been 'cured', but the sceptic in me didn't believe it could really be true. At least not for me.

When I arrived at Sambhavna the security guard politely and correctly told me that 'only people registered as gas-affected by 1986 can come here for treatment'. I explained I was a volunteer and that Sathyu, who runs the clinic, had invited me to take the treatment.

At the clinic I met a group of women who were also taking the *panchakarma* treatment. I was struck by their strength, resilience and sharp sense of humour. We sat together outside the treatment room on wooden benches. Nearby were lots of large trees through which fresh air blew, keeping us cool. The garden looked golden in the golden early morning sun we watched the petite figure of Bina, our therapist, as she gathered fresh herbs which she would heat in an enormous pressure cooker to prepare the ointments for our ayurvedic treatment.

The women told me how grateful they felt to Bina, who works with some of them every day, soothing their aches with her hands. She has a strong connection to the people she treats and says she feels blessed to be able to give survivors relief from the pains and anguish left by the gas.

Last year, Bina was tending to a *nirgundi* bush in a friend's garden outside Bhopal when she was bitten by a cobra and almost died. Her body swelled to three times its normal size and the hospital doctors had given up hope. She believes the prayers of the people she had treated at Sambhavna saved her life.





Bina came back and explained to me which plant was for which ailment. Above are a few of the ingredients that go into just one medicine used to treat psoriasis. A big leaf she showed to me was for treating pain. I knew I was in the right hands as the queue of women steadily increased. Despite the numbers, every person waiting was given more than one hour's attention to fulfil the whole treatment!

When I started the treatment I had to bring my own sheet so I could lie on the treatment table. I had to take all my clothes off and Bina smeared me all over with a herbal balm, then I climbed into a wooden cabinet which Bina closed up leaving my head sticking out of a hole at the top. It was really a sort of sauna and soon I was immersed in aromatic steam that would make me sweat all the toxins out. It was very hot but I knew it was good for me so I bore it. By the next day my itchy and scaly skin felt noticeably better and the redness had subsided.

This picture at the foot of this page is (it's not me!) of a lovely old man called Akbar having the same treatment as me. Akbar was forty when the gas leaked, sound asleep along with his wife and children. Today's he's seventy with serious respiratory and cardiac trouble, severe muscle cramps and joint pains.

I met an old lady in a beautiful yellow saree. I didn't ask her name but called her Amma, or Mother, as we Indians call the elderly. Amma can barely walk but she makes her way to Sambhavna on foot - she can't afford transport - because the treatment is good and free. Chronic muscle pain means that Amma has to use small shuffling steps, stopping frequently by the side of the road when walking the mile and a half to the clinic. It takes her several hours, but she believes in the treatment and values the relief it gives, so she makes this epic journey often. Amma kindly offered her tea and breakfast to me but I told her I had already eaten.

Another woman I met was in a lot of agony: she'd taken seven days off from her job to come here so she could feel better. She spoke about how she supported her family on her own, earning the money for them to eat. She offered me peanuts and this time I accepted, they were rather tasty.

The sense of community and sharing at Sambhavna is like nothing I've ever



known. It's an oasis, a centre of healing energy, scrupulously clean. The staff are always polite and make you feel at home right away. There's a deep feeling of comfort. Everybody shows a lot of respect to everyone else. The touching moments I shared with some of the other visitors there will stay with me for a long time.

I had just three treatments at Sambhavna but already I'm feeling much better: the psoriasis has cleared from my face and lessened all over my body. Dr. Jay insists that I will need at least nine sessions to clear the problem but I had to return to my family in England. I hope to visit again very soon and rid myself entirely of this horrid discomfort.

As you sit in Sambhavna and wait for your name to be called, you see a large plaque positioned right above the entrance. It reads : 'Heartfelt thanks to more than ten thousand British people who help run the Sambhavna Trust Clinic with their donations.'

The thanks come from Sambhavna's staff and visitors, more than 30,000 of them, whom have now benefited from the work your support makes possible. I can attest that each thank-you is truly heartfelt and I'd like to add my own. The work you make possible is truly wonderful.

If you are able to continue helping, please consider making a regular donation as this gives us a secure basis for planning what we can and can't do in the next few years. We've attached a direct debit form in case you'd like to do this. Or you can make a one-off donation by using the other side of the same form.

Whether or not you can help this time, please stay involved one way or another because I do have the strongest feeling and so do the women I talked to in Bhopal, that whereas money is necessary to make the work happen, an even more precious gift is that of love. That's what we feel you give, and as Amma said, 'God bless those good people, if I could I would give each and every one of them a huge hug'.

A very happy festive season to you, with our love,



Farah Edwards-Khan

PS. We planned to tell you about Sambhavna's unique successes in more detail this Autumn but kept finding more to tell. Our newsletter will now be sent in the spring: our apologies for those who were looking forward to reading it earlier.