

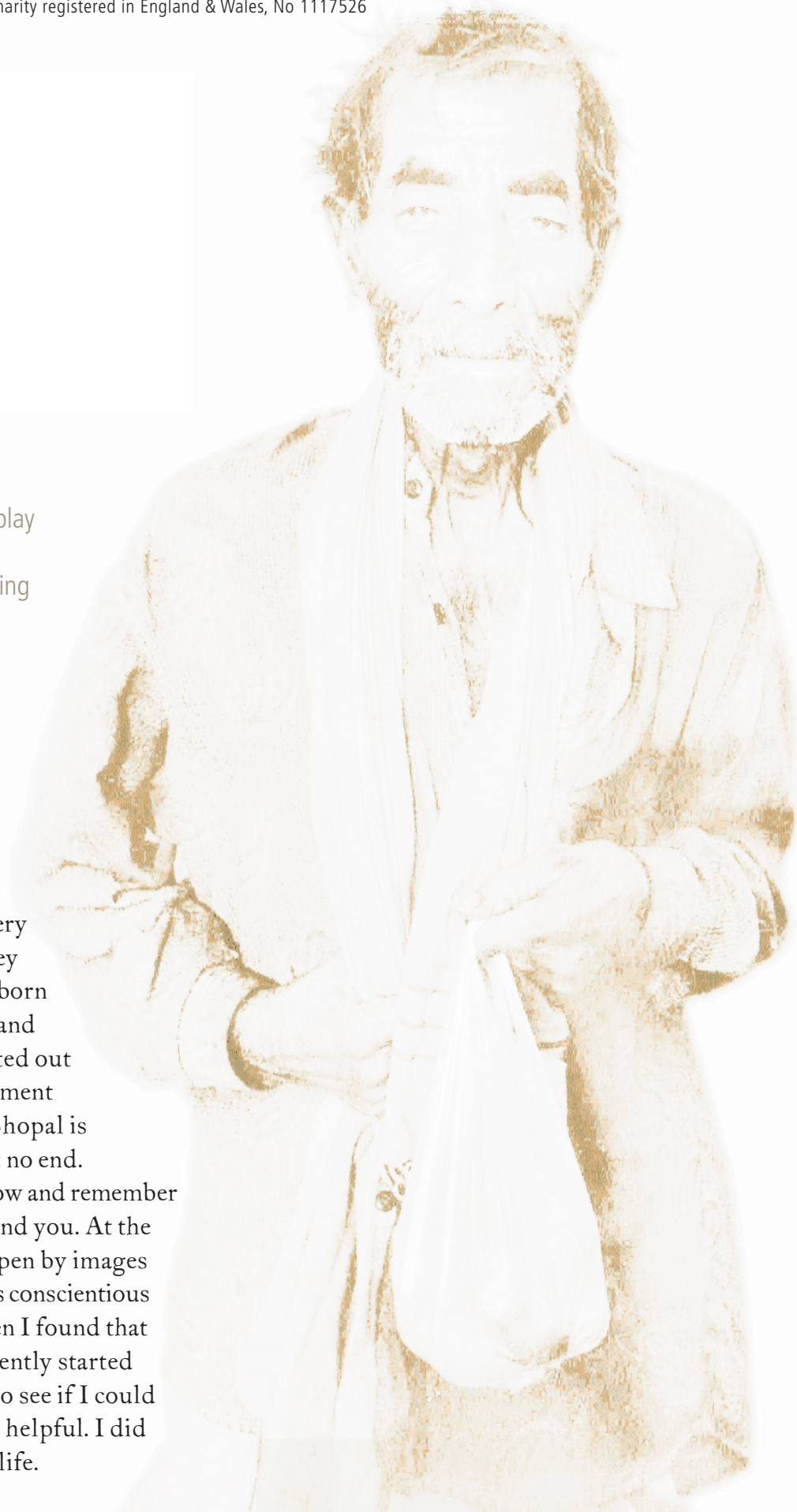
THE BHOPAL MEDICAL APPEAL

Charity registered in England & Wales, No 1117526

I remember that afternoon
the shadows of trees lay
slantwise on the hill, the boys at play
I remember how it was
before everything fell and everything
fell through our fingers,
I was poor before,
after, I was a beggar

In December it will be 30 years
since the gas came. In that one
fearful night, pain and illness
became loyal companions of every
person the gas encountered. They
made acquaintance with the unborn
too, via parents' blood, organs and
genes. Around 4,000 gas-affected out
patients seek help from government
hospitals each and every day. Bhopal is
a disaster with a beginning, but no end.

You are one of the few to know and remember
this and do not need me to remind you. At the
age of 15 my eyes were prised open by images
of the the disaster, but I wasn't as conscientious
as you and in time I forgot. Then I found that
a handful of volunteers had recently started
an appeal in Britain. I decided to see if I could
also volunteer to do something helpful. I did
not realise it would change my life.



I find myself now with the rather grand-sounding title of Executive Trustee of the Bhopal Medical Appeal. I'm writing to you not to remind you of Bhopal, but to enable you to know of the great changes that you've shared in making to thousands of people's lives.

TEN YEARS OF NEGLECT : Relief work in those first hideous weeks was a miracle of compassion and selfless endeavour.

But nobody was told what the gas did to living bodies, or what an effective type of treatment might be. Politics and skullduggery thwarted administration of the one drug that trials found did seem to help. Small clinics established by gas survivors and volunteers to help ease the immensity of suffering were shut down by the government, their organisers arrested. In time, India accepted a settlement offer from Union Carbide Corporation that awarded just a few hundred dollars each to the more-than-half million permanent gas victims. Even this pathetic sum would not reach the majority until 15 years or more had passed since 'that night'.

Ten years after the gas there was no help and no hope. The international press ran harrowing stories with headlines like *'Out of sight, out of mind'*, and *'City of the living dead'*. Sickness was everywhere: the sound of hacking coughs filled the slums around Carbide's abandoned factory, whence other lethal poisons were now seeping. Mental illness was at epidemic levels. With tens of thousands of people too ill to work, deep poverty was rife. Yet lawyers, judges and doctors demanded outlandish bribes to facilitate meagre compensation claims.

Even as the government abandoned all medical studies, endless queues bedevilled the 5,000-and-more gas-affected people seeking help each day. Once finally seen, government doctors – brusquely dismissive of the 'Gassies' needing their care – would claim medicines were out of stock and refer patients instead to expensive private dispensaries.

As no treatment protocols existed, antibiotics and steroids were common prescriptions, giving at best fleeting relief. At worst, regular overuse of strong pharmaceuticals pummelled the bodies of those whose compromised immune systems had been likened to a form of 'chemical AIDS'. In the absence of cures, quacks and charlatans thrived.

In these ways numerous survivors, already punishingly poor, spent the compensation they were due many times over, before even receiving it. Moneylenders feasted on the plenty of desperation. Bhopal was like a level of Dante's Inferno, one newspaper reported, 'in which nobody gets better and few, if any, people receive treatment that might even begin to justify the suffering and humiliation they have been forced to endure.'

During that tenth year, 1994, a UK journalist described meeting a survivor from JP Nagar, the first community to be swamped by the gas and where every family had suffered losses. 'Safia Bi sits listlessly all day on the threadbare blanket of her old iron bed, and waits.

"We're just waiting for the end", she wheezes from her ruined lungs. She can hardly speak, and barely walk at all.' Another survivor from JP Nagar, Nahne Khan, said to the same reporter "Something has died inside us, so now we only think about when we'll die too. We don't know how much life is left in us."

Our first appeal, twenty years ago this December, was a cry of fury and despair. Publication was risked on the wavering hope that this was not a world without care. Nothing really prepared us for what happened in the following days. People from all over Britain responded in such numbers that our volunteers were entirely overwhelmed. Weeks passed but supporters just kept coming forward, one after another, with staggering, humbling open-heartedness.

Perhaps you were also a part of that first wave of love, a wave that rolled six thousand miles

at great speed and set in motion a fundamental change to a situation of profound despair.

You should understand that nothing has quite been the same since.

In our forthcoming newsletter in the autumn of this important year, we'd like to explain what

TWENTY YEARS OF LOVE:

twenty years of love has achieved for tens of thousands of people whose names you may not know, but who count you among their dearest friends.

Back in 1994 there was no ongoing medical research, no medical monitoring, no database of computerised medical registration or records, no treatment plans, few relevant experts, little enough care and plenty of racketeering. Studies found that survivors were regularly prescribed unnecessary and hazardous drugs.

Noting abnormalities of the immune system, one study discovered TB in three out of every four survivors examined, but ineffective and irrational use of bronchodilators predominated. Its authors strongly recommended non-drug strategies and physiotherapies to help rehabilitate the high numbers of people disabled by incurable lung damage. No one with a duty of care was listening.

The situation for those reliant upon government hospitals has barely changed today. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is the primary symptom of gas exposure. This year a Supreme Court investigation found that at no time has Bhopal's only Pulmonary Medicine Hospital had a full-time pulmonary disease specialist.

The Sambhavna Trust was formed from the surge of compassion that followed our first appeal. Led by internationally renowned scientists, doctors, social scientists and social workers, the objective was to create a model primary health care centre that would be an exemplar of best practice, able to light a way for Bhopal's aimless health authorities.

Our Sambhavna Clinic opened its doors 18 years ago. A precious trust born of faith in the human spirit, Sambhavna carried an enormous responsibility. But it was, as Managing Trustee Sathyu Sarangi remarked shortly after its opening, 'a journey into uncharted territories'.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH:

Given the devastating toll upon survivors' bodies, Sambhavna strove for an approach that ought to have been the rationale of the entire medical response from day one: medicines prescribed with great caution, medicines that are both non-harmful and also properly effective.

To this end, we decided to employ herbal and yoga therapies alongside the most appropriate modern medicines. There were no reliable precedents for using ancient plant medicines and yogic asanas to fight modern, industrially caused diseases. Relevance and success would need to be discovered.

Our Autumn newsletter documents what, with your support, we've been able to find and achieve. How those suffering immune-disorder related illnesses have found long-term relief from otherwise endless discomfort. How relief has been gained without taking the extreme



health risks required by many pharmaceutical approaches. How the results Sambhavna is achieving are consistent and repeatable.

When considered within the context of the broader medical canon these results are, we think, so extraordinary as to be deserving of independent clinical investigations.

Success has been hard won. 18 months after Sambhavna opened we published a candid review of our achievements and failures. Though we'd already demonstrated the effectiveness of some non-drug therapies, a large number of visitors did not have enough patience or confidence in our methods. Some failed to return, whilst others reported little benefit.

Since those first tentative steps of 18 years ago, Sambhavna has established safe, simple, effective and inexpensive treatments for a variety of toxically caused illnesses. Among the illnesses we treat are joint pains, menstrual disorders, asthma, diabetes, hypertension and psoriasis. 80 of the medicines used by our physicians are manufactured on site from over 100 medicinal plants grown in our beautiful garden. We also carry out early detection of cervical cancer, tuberculosis and anaemia, control the spread of malaria and provide primary care of common ailments to 40,000 people with the help of close to 100 community volunteers.

Following our lead, other local hospitals have employed yoga and physiotherapy to help with breathing problems. Sambhavna's public health campaigns have helped obtain clean piped water to a majority of the families left drinking and bathing in Carbide's toxins (though much remains to be done). Each of Sambhavna's achievements are also your achievements. Almost 30,000 gas and water affected women, men and children have directly benefited from treatments made possible by your support. Without you, none of this - none at all - would have happened. I'll let Farukh Bhai, a new visitor to Sambhavna, explain what that means.

THIS IS YOUR ACHIEVEMENT : Farukh, an electrician with chronic heart and lung problems, spent thousands of rupees on medicines before finding Sambhavna. 'Nowhere in Bhopal do people treat you as well as at Sambhavna. The first time I came I felt completely hopeless. I was so weak I couldn't even pick up a bottle of water and needed support to reach the toilet. I told my children that there was no point in taking me there as I would die on the way. If I had gone to any other hospital I would have died. After being treated, even if I need to walk half a kilometre I am able to do so. There are 30 steps at my house and now I can climb up and down 15-20 times if needed.'

We meet people like Farukh often, people who previously had nowhere left to turn.

Farukh and those with similar problems can never be cured, but they still deserve care, love and relief from pain. But then you already know this, too. Bhopal may be a disaster without end, but the despair it brought has now ended. The work of both Sambhavna and Chingari Trust, whose Rehabilitation Centre brings light, meaning and practical help to 190 children with disabilities daily, continues only because of you. I can find no sufficient way to say thank you for this, but I hope you also feel pride in what we are all accomplishing together.

If you are able to continue helping our work, please consider making a regular donation, which will enable us to plan securely for the future. You'll find a direct debit form enclosed. Alternatively, you could consider making a one-off donation using the overleaf of the same form provided.

Love,



TIM EDWARDS, EXECUTIVE TRUSTEE