Miracle in Poor Town

Sharing stories and keeping hope alive in Bhopal
Children of disasters untold, heirs to those still to unfold

“N”obody knows if the trauma will end with this generation, or the next.” Journalist Ritu Sarin could not at the time have guessed how tragically prophetic these words, written in July 1986, would turn out to be.

Published seven months after the disaster, The Babies of Bhopal laid bare the horrors endured by expectant mothers exposed to the gas, relating “shocking accounts given by the junior staff of hospitals, midwives and nurses who insist they have never seen any birth-and-death cycle of this kind before.” It was later established that nearly one out of every two children exposed in their mother’s womb perished. “Many are born deformed,” Sarin found.

The indications for those as yet unborn could hardly have been more ominous. A year after the tragedy, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) found chromosomal damage in 71 percent of the gas-exposed, over three times that of a control group.

Two years later, the chromosomes of a second group showed breaks and gaps. Yet another ICMR study found children of exposed mothers to be delayed in physical and mental development.

Then, without explanation, the ICMR’s research was shelved, its findings withheld.

The events fit an established pattern. Within weeks of the disaster, Ritu Sarin ran into a conspiracy of silence among senior doctors and health officials. “There is an attempt to cover-up disclosures of the nature of the deformities or abnormalities being recorded,” she reported.

On the 10th anniversary of Union Carbide’s disaster, when the Bhopal Medical Appeal was founded, our friends in the city were therefore unaware that a ‘Special Programme for at Risk Children’ (SPARC) had secretly identified mental and physical disorders in some 2,435 children below the age of six. Through this project, 37 infants underwent surgery for cyanotic heart defects.

“T”oxic gas affected the mother’s chromosomes and caused genetic mutation,” a leading cardiologist explained of the scheme. Funded by the Bhopal Gas Relief Dept., it lasted only four years. There was to be no other official effort to help Bhopal’s damaged children.

IT WAS only after the opening of Sambhavana (1996) — the clinic which owes its existence to your generosity — that we began to learn the true extent of the monstrous harms inflicted upon Bhopal. Our health workers met with hundreds of parents caring for brain-damaged or malformed children. Their findings led to the founding of Chingari (2006), to its care of Bhopali children.

This work becomes ever more urgent. Doctors recently found that the genetic damage wrought by MIC in 1984 is, over time, increasing. Apallingly, Bhopal’s 2nd catastrophe — in which thousands of families are exposed to water poisoned with chemicals known to maim foetuses and cause birth defects — now plagues an additional 20 communities.

And so, deep into the 4th decade since, we still cannot say for which generation “that night” might finally end. The only certainty is that both DowDuPont & India’s authorities aim to do nothing, nada, for those suffering.

We feature here two very special kids, Suraj and Ishita. Against all odds, they’re seizing life; their brighter futures, we owe to you.

Suraj Malam Singh reached adulthood without ever having caught a ball, sung a song or climbed a tree. At 18 years of age, Suraj had never run or jumped, had never stood up unaided, hadn’t once walked a single, self-sovereign step. By the time he could vote, Suraj had not uttered one word. Limbs twisted, trapped in a speechless void, unable to reach out, Suraj was best known for one thing: his enormous, brilliant smile. The person behind this delighted grin was an enigma, until, just months ago, something impossible began to happen.

THE LURE of regular work drew Suraj’s parents Ramiya Bai and Malam Singh away from Vidisha, a city ancient enough to be in the Mahabharata. Here, a prismatic sandstone pillar looms over single-story houses made of straw, clay, dung and tiling. Commissioned by a Greek ambassador over two millennia ago, the column testifies to the international reach of a powerful lost kingdom, one whose trading centre was once governed by the future Ashoka the Great.

This wasn’t trade as we know it now, though. Words inscribed on the pillar’s base advise that conduct follow three “immortal footsteps”: self-restraint, charity, consciousness.

High literacy rates hint at Vidisha’s former pre-eminence but today it’s one of a number of poorer districts across Madhya Pradesh frequently abandoned for metropolitan Bhopal and the promise of a better life.

RamaSiiya AND Malam arrived a quarter-century ago in urgent need of cut-price land for a new home. They found none was cheaper than that in Gareeb Nagar (literally, “Poor Town”). “If we had had more money”, Ramiya says, “we might have bought a plot in a better area.” They didn’t, so they paid Rs. 1000 (£11.50) and began constructing a small, two-roomed hut.

We described their home in a 2007 newsletter (15 years later): Ramiya’s house is like many others, a bevel built of whatever materials came to hand. In it you may detect the debris of a sub-civilisation, walls include jute sacking, palm fronds, planks, beaten-flat cans, rubber tyres, frayed plastic sheets.

Two years earlier, visiting Sambhavana health staff carefully noted the milestones Suraj had missed by the age of seven. At one year he hadn’t sat up or recognised his mother. By three, no response to speech. Meeting Suraj at eight, managing trustee Sathiyu wrote, “He melts my heart, but does not, cannot, speak. His legs, arms too, are mostly useless, but he makes amazing use of them, dragging himself about, crawling, tumbling, using his limbs as though he’s trained each separately. There are sores on his knees, ankles, shins. Flies cluster on them. Suraj, unreadable, smiles on.”

“Suraj is so naughty,” Ramiya told Sathiyu. “He won’t sit still, he drags himself around, wanting to play with other children.” It was round-the-clock toil simply to keep Suraj from danger.

As in Vidisha, situated by a fork of the Betwa and Bes rivers, there was deep water nearby. But whereas the Betwa serves as a haven for endangered birds, the murky lagoon 150 feet from Suraj’s front yard — manmade, motionless and shaped like a swollen ‘m’ — harbours no waterfowl, rare or otherwise. A severe drought once left Vidishil’s astonished to find that the large stone outcrop used by generations of bathers wasn’t a ghat but a God, face-down in the mud, centuries-forgotten. Next to Gareeb Nagar, the dry season instead exposes tattered strips of black polyethylene, dark rainbow pools and the reek of something unholy.

Sammer Hassan, 17 in this photo, suffers cerebral palsy and profound intellectual disability. Sammer’s father, a daily wage worker, is severely gas-affected.

Suraj, age nine
“The water was often a dirty brown colour,” Ramsiya remembers. “It smelled and tasted really bad, like someone had added medicine. When you drank you’d feel burning in your throat. Sometimes people got stomach problems sometimes fevers.”

In 1990, independent lab tests on pond sediments and nearby soil and well water (organised by the Bhopal Group for Information and Action) found samples to be lavishly contaminated with phthalates, 1-naphthalene, benzene, and organochlorines like di- and tri-chlorobenzenes. As the news reached local press, Carbide director Bose sent a hectoring letter to State officials branding the reports “mischievous and designed to cause panic” and demanding that officials “remove unnecessary apprehension in [from] the minds of the public.”

It would be another six years before authorities painted Gareeb Nagar’s handpump red, declaring its water unfit for human consumption. Nonetheless, Ramsiya kept on using it. “There was nothing else for us to drink. What could we do? We had to keep drinking that poisoned water.”

Less than half a mile south-west of the main Gareeb Nagar handpump towered a modern relic of international trade — the rectangular tangle of rusting iron and steel that Carbide’s lethal MIC unit had by now become. A few years before Ramsiya made her home in Bhopal, Carbide undertook tests on contaminated soil and water taken from the decaying site. The samples caused “100% mortality” to fish.

When photographer Micha Patault visited the factory in 1990, he found nothing for his case. “The doctors can do nothing — they can’t speak, unable to play.” Suraj is mentally backward,” Micha wrote bluntly. “The doctors can do nothing for his case.”

Directly toward rapidly growing poor communities, where lived thousands of families like Suraj’s, Carbide kept their secrets business confidential”. Desperate to find answers, Ramsiya carried Suraj to numerous doctors. Finally, at Hamidia hospital, she received devastating news. “Doctor Sahib told me that Suraj’s brain has not developed properly, and that there was no treatment for his disease.”

Suraj was four by the time Carbide’s secret tests were dragged into the light via a New York court. He was belatedly weaned that year — the same year the NGO Shristi found chloroform, mercury, lead, pesticides and dichloromethanes in the milk of mothers living by the factory. Meanwhile, State pollution officials identified a slew of poisons in Gareeb Nagar’s well water — tri-chlorobenzenes, lindane, DDT, endosulfan.

When photographer Micha Patault visited nine years old Suraj to take the photos you see here, he found him crawling alone, unable to speak, unable to play. “Suraj is mentally backward”, Micha wrote bluntly. “The doctors can do nothing for his case.”

Suraj’s cover image was taken in December 2015. Gone are the ramshackle hut, the cracked mud floor — Suraj sits in a clean yard before a home of brick and mortar. His pose is familiar, the sores remain, but Suraj’s famous smile is also no longer there.

This IS the largest of Union Carbide’s ‘solar evaporation ponds’ — the most economical solution to the lack of a Bes or Betwa river into which to pour the tens of thousands of gallons of liquid wastes the Bhopal factory would produce. Two decades before Ramsiya and Malam moved into the area, American engineers tasked with designing these artificial lakes worried they would not be able to “prevent seepage of the chloride into the ground waters and therefore into the community water supply.”

“I cannot believe,” wrote one, “that we at the Tech Center would be held blameless if we recognize potential problems here and did not speak up”. So they spoke, advising higher US management that “new ponds will have to be constructed at 1-2 year intervals throughout the life of the project”.

Leaks ensued soon enough. Monsoon rains caused overflows, decanting toxic liquor into porous soil. Polyesterene liners began to perish. Cattle deaths prompted pay-offs to farmers. A panicky 1982 telex from India to Carbide’s US headquarters described how one pond showed “signs of leakage”, while another had “almost emptied”. A later telex wrote of “continued leakage”. Replies promised “close attention by the management committee in New York,” but the ponds were left in situ, their liners unreplace.

TEN YEARS later, Ramsiya began drawing water from a long-handled, cast iron handpump that pierced ground just yards from Carbide’s main pond — a chemical dump whose “essence”, as a design engineer noted in 1972, “lies in the less advanced environmental conscience[s] in India.”

Ramsiya recalls the time she began to suspect all was not well. “When I put baby Suraj’s head on my shoulder, his neck was so loose I felt it would break.” She raises a question for which there is no adequate response. “Maybe trying to use a walking frame...
THE POISONING of Bhopal’s groundwater was anticipated, approved, reviewed, tested, confirmed and still left to develop. No warnings came, no clean-up. The only thing carefully disposed of was consciousness of the approaching danger to people like Ramsiya, Malam & Suraj.

A seventeen year struggle for legal redress within a hostile New York court ended two years ago. “Sahu and many others living near the Bhopal plant may well have suffered terrible and lasting injuries from a wholly preventable disaster for which someone is responsible,” the court admitted. “Union Carbide Corporation,” it then declared, shockingly, “is not that entity.”

Carbide’s poisons are thus left to radiate outwards, to reach ever new wells, ever new wombs. Until recently, 22 communities — 50,000 people — were officially exposed to toxic water. Days ago, a national institute revealed the results of tests on the wells of a further 20 colonies, some lying over five km from the factory. These confirmed the presence of nitrates, chloride, heavy metals and alpha napthol, a chemical used in the manufacture of MIC.

Chingari & Sambhavna’s unique care of water-poisoned families like Suraj’s — able now to walk 20 steps & call his mother’s name — so grows daily more vital, just like your magical support, to help bring miracles to the margins of hope.
**Bringing Isha into this world, one word, one step, at a time**

“I was six when Union Carbide sent the gas into our city. I don’t really remember it.” Zainab knows she is lucky to live without recollections of that night; there is tragedy enough in her one memory. “The week of December 2nd, 1984, my mother had to go to Sagar. Because I was born five years after my parents’ marriage, my grandmother was her one memory. “The week of December 2nd — a thousand yard journey for the dense toxic cloud to roll south after midnight, with no access to water, Habeeb carried on over six unbroken hours, in temperatures up to 45°C, making a ‘hu-haa’ sound. “After three years, she finally began saying amma (mother), then abba (father). “There was little progress after this.”

Nor was Isha able to make much physical headway. “I met a child three years younger than Isha who had started walking, but Isha could only just stand with full support, and even then her legs would shiver a lot.” Someone advised Zainab that Isha would eventually get stronger. “I believed she would start walking and speaking after more time.” But little improved. “If her feet touched anything cold, like water, she cried,” Zainab says. “When she tried to sit up, she fell backwards.”

By four years, Zainab was frantically worried. She took Isha to the nearest government hospital, but the doctor was no help. Next, a private doctor, who took his fee but gave nothing in return. Finally, Zainab ferried Isha across the city to Dr. Afzal, who prescribed Noorani oil (for muscular and joint pain). Zainab rushed home and rubbed the oil onto Isha’s back. On trying to sit up, Isha kept falling over; that day, the following, and the next.

**ISHA WAS BORN the year Zainab turned twenty-five.** Recently married, Zainab had just spent her 25,000 Rupees (£280) Union Carbide payoff on a home in Arif Nagar, a slum on the north-west perimeter of the factory.

“Time went by, but Isha hadn’t started talking. All the other children I knew of her age had,” Zainab says. “Isha wasn’t even making a ‘hu-haa’ sound.” After just two days after sickness forced Habeeb to quit working for Carbide, Zainab was born. On saying Zainab’s name, Habeeb’s face lightens. “I love her very much,” he says.

Zainab was sleeping in Qazi Camp on the freezing night of December 2nd — a thousand yard journey for the dense toxic cloud that rolled south after midnight, seeping under doors, through walls. Hundreds perished there. Like hundreds of thousands of others, Zainab evaded death, but she didn’t evade the gas.

Years of careful physiotherapy has enabled Isha to begin standing and walking. Throughout, Zainab’s family relied on a handpump that spat out water with reddish deposits and a bitter taste. After seven years, the family had to make way for a new road bridge. Relocated 1km north, their new colony was built without proper access to power or water. Locals spoke of venomous snakes ten feet long.

More years passed. Isha couldn’t sit, stand, speak or bathe herself. No children played with her. Her frustration growing, she spent much of the time crying. Zainab didn’t know where to turn.

ZAINAB FIRST heard of Chingari from Habeeb’s neighbours, but she didn’t believe then that a free clinic could really offer much help to a damaged child. Then Zainab herself began taking free treatment at Sambhavana. Her headaches became better. One day, the doctor in room no.4 advised her to take Isha to Chingari.

On a clear morning in 2015, after more than two years on the waiting list, a Chingari van collected Isha for her first 8km round-trip to the Centre. Initial progress was slow. Isha couldn’t sit without support. When spoken to, she didn’t seem to understand what was being said. In response, Isha’s own voice was so low as to be inaudible.

Our physios first concentrated on strengthening Isha’s back. It was six months work before a breakthrough: she was able to sit up and not fall. Slowly, after months of daily stretching, strengthening and balancing exercises, Isha found she was also able to stand on her feet without toppling over. Soon, she began walking with support. Now, Isha is able to take short steps — one-two, one-two — with absolutely no support at all.

A lifetime of small but regular defeats, misunderstandings, rejections, left Isha fragile, reticent, unwilling or unable to bring her voice into the world. Our speech therapists needed to draw her forward gently. Following a three year journey into a place of confidence, guided by patience and encouragement, it is now much easier to start Isha talking than to stop her! She speaks freely with everyone, but she talks non-stop with Sanjay, our physiotherapist.

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Isha, with an exceedingly proud Zainab

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Zainab and Isha are part of a larger movement towards change. For this arduous, noxious work, Isha’s parents rely on a handpump that spits out water with reddish deposits and a bitter taste. After seven years, the family had to make way for a new road bridge. Relocated 1km north, their new colony was built without proper access to power or water. Locals spoke of venomous snakes ten feet long.

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My Bhopal story

David Searle spent time volunteering at Sambhavna Clinic during February 2017.

“If you feel inclined to volunteer at Sambhavna, go for it. You will never forget it, for all the right reasons.”

I first learned about the Bhopal Medical Appeal charity a few years ago, when reading a copy of the Times newspaper. There was a full-page advertisement, explaining all about the Bhopal gas tragedy in the 80s and seeking support for those still affected by it. As I read through the text, every now and then the story stopped and a random piece of children's nursery rhyme was inserted. It seemed so intriguing; I had to ask the charity what it was all about.

Apparently, the original advertisement had been placed in all the broadsheets newspapers. All were content to print it as supplied, except the Times which had unhappy about the criticism of the US companies whose factory was the source of the disaster. The paper's deadline was approaching fast, literally in minutes, so the copywriter had to act instantly to change the controversial sentences – hence the appearance of short extracts from nursery rhymes!

I mention this because it taught me some important points about Bhopal. The human impact of the gas tragedy was huge – the biggest industrial disaster ever. It continues today – over 30 years later – and as ever, politics, commerce and money are the biggest obstacle to achieving a fair and just resolution for the people and the place.

I remember the disaster, but not that well. I was in my early twenties and had got married only days before. It’s strange; it was a huge world event and everyone remembers something about Bhopal, but the ongoing struggle seems not to get the recognition it needs and deserves.

Last year, I saw information about the 20th anniversary of the Sambhavna Clinic in Bhopal, inviting people to attend the celebrations and perhaps do some volunteering. I couldn’t make the celebrations but signed up to visit as a volunteer in February 2017. For the last few years, I have worked at voluntary projects in quite a few countries but felt particularly excited about this one because of its history and strong purpose.

I had read a couple of books about Bhopal and watched some films on Youtube - well worth doing and guaranteed to make you feel sad, mad and determined to try to do something useful.

I decided to travel via Delhi to spend a few days there and experience the train journey south to Bhopal. It was long, but better than taking another flight, in my view. I have got used to arriving in strange foreign places but Bhopal was different. A bit of a shock to all the senses - not one tourist to be seen, but charming helpful people everywhere (typical for India). After an interesting tuk-tuk ride, I was met at Sambhavna by Devendra (a volunteer who had stayed for five years!)

In addition, there were two other volunteers staying at the clinic; Thorsten from Sweden (who visits every winter) and Gwillem from Spain. Two or three other volunteers visited each day. The clinic was closed when I arrived but I immediately warmed to the place and got settled into the volunteer accommodation - which is basic but perfectly comfortable.

In the evening, Jaishree the cook arrived, as she has done every day for many years, and prepared amazing vegetarian food, which I never tired of. Everyone loves Jaishree, a modest and kind person, and her sons who often come with her.

Next morning, and time for work: There are lots of different opportunities for volunteers – especially if you have experience in medicine or therapy etc. My experience was mainly in business and, not being a speaker of Hindi, the best place for me was the garden. I wasn’t sure about this at first but I loved it. I have one or two health challenges so this was perfect for me. There is something for everyone!

I spent the best part of two weeks picking little orange flowers from some tall bushes. Apparently the flowers are a valuable ingredient for a variety of medicines and massage oil, but the bushes flower for only a very short time - so picking them is an urgent job. At other times I helped in the pharmacy, chopping, grinding and sorting ingredients, putting labels on bottles and filling with oil etc. It might sound a bit boring but Sambhavna is such a lovely peaceful environment, and the people are so warm and welcoming, it was just a pleasure to be there and enjoy the moment.

Old Bhopal is a busy and congested place but interesting too. I especially enjoyed early morning visits to the many tea bars – they take tea very seriously! Further afield there are some interesting historic and cultural sights. What is left of the Union Carbide factory site is just around the corner and I was curious to see it. After three trips to the local government office, we finally got permission for five of us to visit. It was a slightly creepy feeling to be shown around and see for real the source of such a major tragedy – we didn’t talk much. Quite a lot of the plant and buildings are still

If you’d like to chat about volunteering, please call Georgina: 01273 603 578
Email: admin@bhopal.org
Yoga for Bhopal was conceived following a yoga event in Edinburgh held to mark the 32nd anniversary of the Bhopal Disaster. Meaghan Delahunty, an accomplished writer and qualified yoga teacher, inspired its creation. We hope Yoga for Bhopal will serve not only as a way in which to raise funds for vital medical work, but also as a channel through which knowledge of yoga’s therapeutic benefits can be shared.

Sambhavna Clinic has been using yoga to improve the health of 10,000 survivors of Union Carbide’s disaster across 20 years. Yoga has been found able to treat chronic diseases involving the respiratory, musculo-skeletal, neurological and endocrine systems. Some women survivors also suffer from serious gynaecological problems, which Sambhavna has been managing successfully with yoga.

Yoga techniques used at Sambhavna were hailed for their success in 1999 at the World Conference of Asthma in Buenos Aires. A Sambhavna study showed that after six months’ of yoga practice, all participants had significantly increased lung function and a decreased use of medicines. For people suffering chronic breathlessness, yoga therapy is an effective and cost-free means to sustained relief.

We hope Yoga for Bhopal can build a network of teachers and organisations able to benefit from techniques developed at Sambhavna but also, equally, share the benefit of their own studies.

TO MARK the 33rd anniversary of the Bhopal gas disaster in December 2017, yoga studios around the country held classes designed to bring awareness of ongoing issues, the pioneering medical work of Sambhavna, and to raise funds to support the vital work being done by Sambhavna and Chingari.

In Somerset, Adele Robertson held a successful event at Pilton Working Men’s Club which featured postures to help breathing and meditation practices. Refreshments and a showing of the film Sambhavna was added to the experience.

In York, Dr Laura Potts, an Iyengar Yoga teacher, led a restorative session designed to relax and inspire at Clements Hall. This was a gentle session of asana and pranayama to restore energy and soothe the nervous system and was followed by a showing of the Sambhavna film with Indian snacks and warming chai provided.

In Sheffield, Emma Rattenbury hosted a session at the Sheffield Yoga Centre followed by a showing of Sambhavna with tea and cake provided. Those viewing the film found it moving and thought provoking.

The Isle of Wight saw a special, one-day antenatal Yoga workshop hosted by Abigail Peck. Abigail is a perinatal Yoga teacher, doula and co-director of the Acquaviva School of Yoga. She specialises in prevention and recovery from common injuries associated with pregnancy and childbirth.

Erling McCracken from Isle of Yoga, arranged the event and diverted funds for vital medical work in Bhopal.

Our thanks to all those who organised and participated in these Yoga for Bhopal events. The passion for the cause, along with the enthusiasm and energy to host the events, gives us enormous hope for the future of our movement.

This anniversary we hope to inspire many more yoga studios to hold events. If you would like to get involved, or even host your own event, please contact yoga@bhopal.org or call us on 01273 603278.

Mural by Elm Grove School on display in Chingari

Our lovely Yoga for Bhopal T-Shirts, which are ethically produced, responsibly sourced and made from organic Indian cotton in a wind-powered factory on the Isle Of Wight, are available at www.bhopal.teemill.co.uk/collection/womens-tee to get to throw non-toxic paint in the air, at each other, and sometimes also at their teachers – a messy delight!

Whenever we’ve asked the children if they would like to get involved in helping our clinics, there has been a sea of hands. Last year, children and parents from St Luke’s and Elm Grove took part in the Brighton ‘Color Run’ and raised a staggering £1,000 for Chingari.

A pan of poha, gone moments later!
Supporter news

Though thanks are simply not enough, we thank everyone who has supported us, at whichever time. Without you, none of our work, none at all, would have been possible. We say a particular thank you to the following people for their notable commitment, creativity and heart.

To Jeff Mathews who raised funds by selling wooden craft items in the run-up to Christmas.
To David Fogg who last November held a cakeathon to mark his birthday.
To bestselling author and supporter Annie Murray whose Reading Quaker friends have helped us many times. She has also run the London 10K five times.
To Olivia Dall for all her wonderful fundraising activities on our behalf, such as her September Open Studio event.
To Barbara Vidian and her women’s group from Sidmouth.
To Linscre College, Oxford who held a supporter event last November.
To Somerby and District Leisure Club who made a gift in memory of our long-term supporter Mr M Weeks.
To all our amazing Brighton Marathon, Hackney Half Marathon and London 10K runners. And to the Langford family who volunteer each year, serving the post-run picnic. Also to Mo Haque from Al Amin restaurant in Bethnal Green for his invaluable help in recruiting runners, for supplying the picnic and securing free sponsored Mongoose beer for our runners to enjoy at the end.
To Martin Hodges who ran again for us in 2018 in the British 10k.
To Devon Quakers and our friends at Hastings Local Quaker and Sutton Coldfield Local Quaker meetings.
To the Missionary Society of St. Columban for their donation.
To Stamford Methodist Circuit for making us their chosen charity for 2016-17.
To church and faith groups around the UK who have held collections for us.
To David Nield who took photographs in Margate.
To Sylvia Cornfield who invited Margaret F orbes who held a gilt-edged dinner for us in 2018 in the UK in September.
To Janet Pitt who marked her 80th birthday last August by making us one of the beneficiaries of her exhibition of sculptures and photographs in Margate.
To Dominique Hudson who, for the third time, held a Bhopal Medical Appeal stand for us at Leffest 2018 in Southampton.
To Margaret Forbes who held a table top sale for us this March.

To Angela Corrie who, together with her husband John, marked her 70th birthday by climbing Ben Nevis for us in June 2017.
To Donald Willats who organised a collection for us at a colleague’s retirement dinner.
To Sylvia Corsfield who invited Tabish Ali, our Information Officer in Bhopal, to address a collection for us at a colleague’s retirement dinner.
To support from you.
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To Margaret Forbes who held a table top sale for us this March.

For justice and a life of dignity

The cover-up and neglect of Bhopal’s damaged children, left to struggle on without official recognition, rehabilitation or restitution, is a window into the many shocking injustices Bhopal survivors continue to challenge.

WELLWATER TESTS by Sambhavna last year led India’s Supreme Court to order local authorities to provide clean water to twenty more contamination-impacted communities. National scientific agencies later confirmed Sambhavna’s findings, without which thousands of families would still be drinking Union Carbide’s poisons. Before being dismissed in 2016, and despite countless pleas, the New York case to make Carbide accountable for this mess (see p.6) received no support at all from Indian officials. A related Indian case, recently announced closure of the Gas Relief dept. due to a lack of adequate work. The bright new yoga centres are being used to host offices and wedding parties.

SHAREHOLDERS OF the newly (2017) merged DowDuPont brought three Bhopal resolutions to the company’s inaugural AGM in Chicago in April, highlighting still pending Bhopal legal liabilities – criminal, civil and environmental – left undeclared in merger documents.

Chingari founder Rashida Bi made a statement to the assembled directors and shareholders:

“I heard the screams of the dying as I choked on the gas that was killing them, but I haven’t come here to ask you for justice.

I felt my loved ones’ suffering across endless years until only death could end their agony, but I’m not here for your sympathy.

I watch the waists from your factory poison new wells and new worms, but I’m not here to force you to act.

We are suffering and dying still in Bhopal but I’m not here to trouble your conscience, I’m not here to beg. I’m here to make one thing completely clear to you all.

I’m here to promise you that I will give my dying breath to stop your company investing in my country. I’m here to tell you that there are thousands more like me and that we will never stop.

Don’t ever say that you were not warned, that you did not know.

No justice in Bhopal, no business in India!”

Contributors

To keep costs down, we write and design Bhopal Matters in-house, and only use photography freely available to us.
Special credit must go to Sambhavna and Chingari, our partners in Bhopal, who record the experiences we share, also to the photographers whose work offers a window into them. Giles Clarke (Getty), p.1, 2 & 15; Micha Patault, p. 3-5; and Judah Passow, p. 6, 8, 9, provided photos.

Most of all, we are inspired by the fiercely dedicated staff of our two clinics; by Bhopal’s survivors, their extraordinary resilience and positivity; by you, the wellspring of all care given, received and felt.
Old friends, new memories

At a weekly meeting, shortly before the clinic’s twentieth anniversary, staff at Sambhavna held a long discussion on a matter that had been troubling them for a number of years.

The problem was one of memory. The clinic owed everything, in the words of Milan Kundera, to the struggle of memory against forgetting. But the clinic itself had not yet found a way to honour or keep alive the memory of those who refused to forget Bhopal.

The idea of a ‘Tree of Memories’ emerged from this meeting. A tree reflecting the dark, subterranean reality of Bhopal, but also the continual reaching for light and life. A tree upon whose branches could be placed the memories of cherished friends, beacons within the darkness, passed but unforgotten.

This tree, handmade by a local metal worker, is now in place and we will soon begin placing leaves. We invite you to add memories, and to visit in future.