

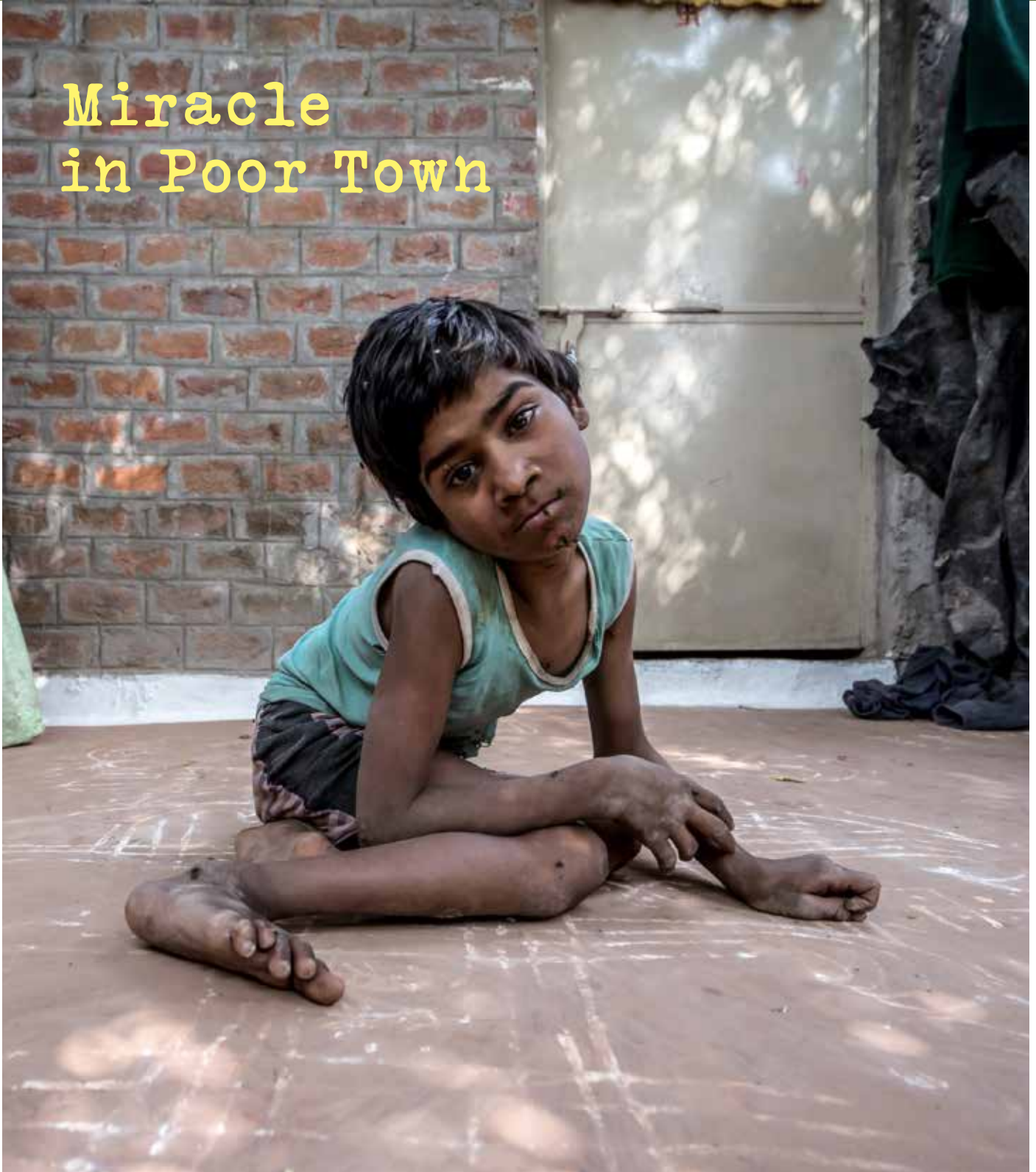
The Bhopal Medical Appeal

BHOPAL MATTERS

NEWSLETTER FOR SUPPORTERS OF THE BHOPAL MEDICAL APPEAL

AUTUMN 2018

Miracle in Poor Town



Sharing stories and keeping hope alive in Bhopal

Children of disasters untold, heirs to those still to unfold

“Nobody 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 1985, 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. “Toxic 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 Sambhavna (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 fetuses 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 Isha. Against all odds, they’re seizing life; their brighter futures, we owe to you.

The everyday miracle of Suraj Singh

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 Ramsiya 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 attests 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.



Suraj, age nine

RAMSIYA 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”, Ramsiya 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): *Ramsiya’s house is like many others, a hovel built of whatever materials came to hand. In it you may detect the debris of a sub-civilisation, its walls include jute sacking, palm fronds, planks, beaten-flat cans, rubber tyres, frayed plastic sheets.*

Two years earlier, visiting Sambhavna 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 Sathyu 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, unmindful, smiles on.”

“Suraj is so naughty,” Ramsiya told Sathyu. “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 ‘w’ — harbours no waterfowl, rare or otherwise. A severe drought once left Vidishi’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.



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

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".

But the dark lake lying next to the house in which Suraj was born never was rebuilt. In January 1977, a few days before a 'Revised Capital Budget' proposed sweeping cutbacks across the Bhopal factory, Carbide managers met with contractors hired to build the ponds. Though the company knew that the neutralised acids, saline and lab wastes to be pumped into it presented "drinking water pollution hazards", managers informed the builders "that certain seepage/effluent from the pond can be accepted... providing there is corresponding reduction in the cost."

Leaks ensued soon enough. Monsoon rains caused overflows, decanting toxic liquor into porous soil. Polyethylene liners began to perish. Cattle deaths prompted pay-offs to farmers. A panicky 1982 telex from India to Carbide's US headquarters described



Liquid industrial wastes were pumped into 'holding ponds' north of Union Carbide's factory; solid wastes were dumped into 21 unlined pits south-east of the main plant. Suraj's house stands 150 feet to the east of the largest waste pond.

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 unreplaced.

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 conscienceness [sic] in India."



Suraj sits alone in 2007

"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 stomachaches, 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."

Only after Suraj's 1998 birth did Ramsiya learn from neighbours that pond water was mixing with the groundwater she'd already been drinking for years. And none in her community yet knew that Gareeb Nagar's water may by then have been holding other, even darker secrets.

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

Suraj was born like this because of the water?"

Less than half a mile southwest 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.

Done "primarily for our own understanding of the situation", the tests revealed the spreading environmental impact of 21 dump sites inside the plant. Here, thousands of tons of solid toxic wastes had been indiscriminately buried in unlined pits. The explosive results confirmed that contaminants had spread beyond the factory's perimeter to begin impacting community wells. But even after learning that the hydro-geology of the Betwa river basin, on which the factory stood, steered underground flows north by north-east,

directly toward rapidly growing poor communities, where lived thousands of families like Suraj's, Carbide kept their results "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 year 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.





Suraj receives 'continuous passive motion' therapy at Chingari in 2018

WHAT IS A MIRACLE? Some say that it is as wondrous to see the support of a family for somebody in trouble as it would be to witness the parting of the Red Sea. This alone is the miracle of Suraj Singh. Few believed it could become so much more.

Before Suraj reached 18 years of age, Chingari community worker Shankar knocked on Ramsiya's door. A decade earlier, Suraj had been part of Chingari's first intake, but a clash of duties forced Ramsiya to end their visits.

Chingari had evolved since 2006, Shankar explained. Ramsiya didn't need to travel: Suraj would be collected each morning, he'd be given a square meal and brought home each afternoon. Suraj could receive professional care. All would be entirely free of cost.

"A mother has to face all the problems — I've fed and bathed Suraj with my own hands," says Ramsiya of her years spent coping. "Wherever Suraj sat he peed and poo'ed. I had to clean him and wash his clothes each time." Her efforts left Ramsiya unable to earn, the family reliant on Malam's daily-wages. After nearly half-a-lifetime of care work, Ramsiya says, "I had accepted our fate".

"Suraj couldn't hold his neck up and would fall back just trying

to sit," says our physiotherapist Rishi of initial assessments. "His muscles were highly stiff, with less real chance of improvement."

Neither Chingari nor Suraj were deterred. Three painstaking months of targeted therapy, six days per week, enabled Suraj to gain some neck control. Next came three months dedicated to strengthening his torso. A month after, Suraj sat without support for the first time. Now began motion therapy work on the lower limbs: stretches gauged by the finest degrees, a glacially slow millimetre at a time. After months of unflinching effort, Suraj was able to stand. Balance and coordination work came next.

The frames you see opposite immortalise, at 19 years of age, Suraj's first unaided footsteps. Witnesses left in tears. 116 other Chingari kids had walked before Suraj, none so impossibly.

One morning last year, after six months of speech therapy, Suraj turned to Ramsiya. With careful effort he forced his lips to close and open on the first word of his 19 years of life. "Amm-ma," he said.

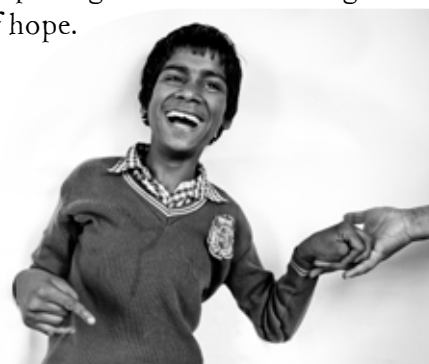
Reaching Chingari these days, Suraj often stands to walk past the office door. "Arey, hero!" someone shouts. Suraj raises an arm in the air, and opens his luminous smile.

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 — over 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 naphthol, 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, which reaches around the earth to help bring miracles to the margins of hope.



Suraj gathers his strength



Knees straining, he pushes upwards



Core muscles force Suraj upright



To cheers, a beaming grin bursts out



Now the difficult part, balance is key



Suraj thumps his left foot forward



Now the right, onlookers are gasping



Left again, intense focus



Two more fiercely determined steps



Momentum is taking Suraj sideways



Sensing danger, he loses balance



Hearts stop, but Suraj is safely caught!

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 very protective of me. She begged my mother to let me stay so she could keep me safe in Bhopal.”

Zainab’s father Habib knew Carbide was making dangerous chemicals — he just didn’t know how dangerous. Until illness forced him to leave work, Habib spent most of 1978 carrying 50 kilo sacks of pesticides upon his head, load by load, stumbling the 35 feet from the Bhopal factory main gate, through clouds of white dust, to the transport trucks waiting outside.

Habib had no idea what was going on inside the factory. “I was a hired hand. The contractor did tell me the powder was poisonous, he

asked me to cover my head while carrying it,” he remembers. “As there was no special equipment I used my own sweater and scarf as protection. I covered my ears and other body parts, but while lifting and carrying, I also needed to see and breathe.”

For this arduous, noxious work, carried on over six unbroken hours, in temperatures up to 45°C, with no access to water, Habib was paid 12.5 Rupees (equivalent now to £2) a day.

Just two days after sickness forced Habib to quit working for Carbide, Zainab was born. On saying Zainab’s name, Habib’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.

ISHA WAS BORN the year Zainab turned twenty-five. Recently married, Zainab had just spent her 25,000 Rupees (£380) 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

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.



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 3km 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 Habib’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 Sambhavna. 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.



Isha, with an exceedingly proud Zainab

“It’s really tough when a 15 year old girl still can’t bathe herself,” Zainab says. “But how far Isha has come. I realised it on 15th August last year. Surya (special educator) helped write it, Amarjeet sir (speech therapist) helped her learn it, then Isha delivered her speech in front of everyone in Chingari. When I showed the film my family were so happy — most of all Habib. And after seeing Isha’s progress, two neighbour’s kids registered with Chingari!”

From grasping just a few words, Isha now reads books. At a level only three grades below her peers, Isha began school this year.



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 broadsheet newspapers. All were content to print it as supplied, except the Times which was 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



Shaikat Mahal, Old Bhopal



'Subzi' seller, Berasia Road, Bhopal

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.

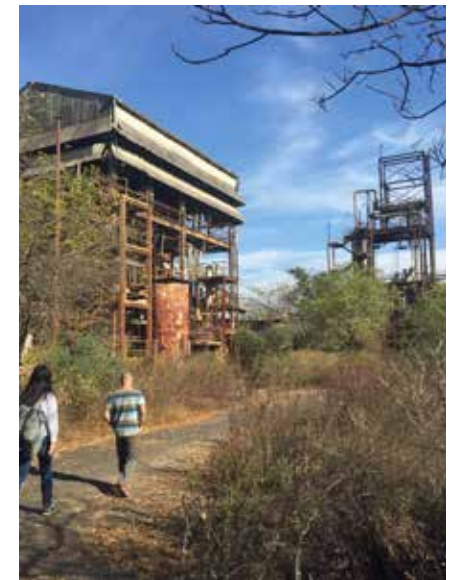
Next morning, and time for work: There are lots of different opportunities for volunteers – especially if you have experience in medicine or therapy etc. My experience was mainly in business and, not being a speaker of Hindi, the best place for me was the garden. I wasn't sure about this at first but 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



Abandoned Union Carbide factory

there – it felt important to gain a greater understanding.

MY TRIP to Bhopal was, overall, a truly memorable experience. I learned some history, experienced a diverse culture, undertook new work, ate some fantastic food – but most of all, I met wonderful people at every turn. If you feel inclined to volunteer at Sambhavna, go for it. You will never forget it, for all the right reasons.

*If you'd like to chat about volunteering, please call Georgina: 01273 603278
Email: admin@bhopal.org*



From left to right: Ayurvedic medicine making at Sambhavna; paints for Holi celebrations; harvesting amla fruit from Sambhavna's garden, used for its antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and immune boosting properties

Supporter events

Healing Bhopal with yoga



From left to right: Abigail Peck, Isle of Wight Yoga ©Erling McCracken, Isle of Yoga. Adele Robertson, Somerset.

Yoga for Bhopal was conceived following a yoga event in Edinburgh held to mark the 32nd anniversary of the Bhopal Disaster. Meaghan Delahunt, 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* 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



From left to right: Emma Rattenbury, Sheffield. Sambhavna yoga class, Bhopal. Abigail Peck, Isle of Wight Yoga ©Erling McCracken, Isle of Yoga.

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

is particularly interested in the exchange of information with Sambhavna Clinic.

Sunday 3rd December saw the main anniversary protest rally in Bhopal with the five assembled survivors' organisations marching to the gates of the abandoned Union Carbide factory, while *Yoga for Bhopal* returned to its spiritual roots in **Edinburgh** where **Meaghan Delahunt** arranged a series of yoga classes at the Santosa Yoga and Meditation studio.

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.



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

Schools project

For several years we have given presentations and workshops in Brighton secondary schools that are designed to bring to life parts of the Key Stage 4 Geography curriculum.

The workshop focusses on the environmental impacts of rapid urbanisation in developing countries. It has brought out keen and passionate insights from the students themselves, a number of whom have later spent time in our office for work experience.

In 2017, we also began a series of workshops with Key Stage 2 children. A presentation on India



Mural by Elm Grove School on display in Chingari

includes a gentle introduction to the work of the clinics in Bhopal.

We bring Indian food, scents and tastes into the classroom via a large pan of Poha, a North Indian flattened rice dish customarily eaten for breakfast. We've yet to take a morsel of this food back out of class, it has always been finished in minutes!

Next, the children take part in yoga classes. Led by a professional instructor, the sessions have proved so popular that children at one school set up their own lunch-time yoga club.

The most eagerly-awaited activity of all is a Holi-style celebration in which the children

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 £3,000 for Chingari.



Elm Grove children playing Holi



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.



Angela reaches the summit of Ben Nevis

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 reunion event last September.

To **Sylvia Cornfield** who invited Tabish Ali, our Information Officer in Bhopal, to address her local church, St Peter's in Gildersome, during his visit to 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 Leftfest 2018 in Southampton.

To **Margaret Forbes** who held a table top sale for us this March.

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 Dell** 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 **Linacre 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 J 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 **Exeter 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.

Glastonbury Festival



Our Glastonbury 2017 litter-pickers ©Francesca Moore

Glastonbury 2017 was blessed with sun and, after the previous year's mud-bath, no one appreciated this more than our **volunteer litter-pickers!**

The Festival give us a donation for each person who completes their shift so **THANK YOU** to you all and here's to Glastonbury 2019!

Thank you to our patron and Glastonbury co-founder, **Michael Eavis**, and to Glastonbury Recycling Team Co-ordinator **Fiona Case** who have supported us for many years. We are hugely grateful to **Fiona and Mike Case** for their fundraising work during Advent last year.

If you would like to organise your own fundraising event or volunteer at the clinics in Bhopal, we would love to hear from you. Please contact us on 01273 603278 or email admin@bhopal.org

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 naming Dow Chemical has not been heard for several years.

EIGHT YEARS have now passed since India's Law Ministry, responding to intense national outrage, filed a 'curative petition' seeking

\$1.3 billion additional compensation from Carbide and its owner Dow Chemical. It is over seven years since the last hearing. Survivors have now told national party politicians in Bhopal, "no compensation, no votes."

INSPIRED BY Sambhavna's successes, in 2014 the Bhopal Gas Relief dept. built seven new yoga centres at a cost of four million Rupees. In June, State-run hospitals said that yoga had helped no patients. But freedom of information work by Sambhavna revealed this to be contradicted by official hospital reports. The State govt. 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 agonies, but I'm not here for your sympathy.

I watch the wastes from your factory poison new wells and new wombs, but I'm not here to force you to act.

I've met thousands of children corrupted by your chemicals, for whom every day is a struggle you could never imagine, but I haven't come here for charity.

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.

Sambhavna memory project



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.

No us & them. All of us, together

The Bhopal Medical Appeal is an effort of ordinary people round the world to bring free medical help to victims of the gas and water disasters. Who are we? We're survivors, Sambhavna and Chingari staff in Bhopal, donors, volunteers, supporters and organisers in the UK and elsewhere. We're all equal, all together, and all together we're the Bhopal Medical Appeal.

This newsletter raises vital funds for our work and we ask you to be as open-hearted as ever in your support. Call **Freephone 0800 316 5577**, visit **www.bhopal.org/donate** or send a cheque/CAF voucher payable to The Bhopal Medical Appeal to:

Freepost RTGT-XHTG-ZEET
The Bhopal Medical Appeal
Unit 2 The Foundry
St George's Mews
Brighton
BN1 4EU

We'd love to hear from you. Please write to us at:
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