

The Bhopal Medical Appeal

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Dear friend,

Thirty five years ago Bhopal did not just happen. It began.

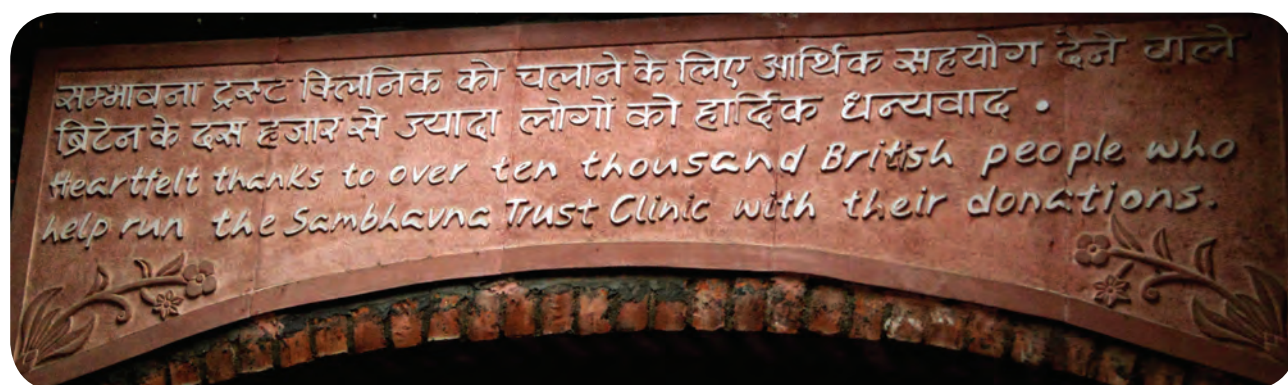
Over these 35 years Bhopal became an injustice that has never been righted, a disaster that has never ended, and a community that most of the world has forgotten.

In Bhopal today well over 100,000 people are still chronically sick. Another 100,000 live in communities where wells and standpipes are contaminated by chemicals leaking from toxic wastes dumped in and around the same accursed factory that gassed the city, a site which remains derelict and full of poisons. Union Carbide and Dow Chemical still deny responsibility for poisoning Bhopal's wellwater and still refuse to clean up.

Of 574,366 gas survivors, some 94% received less than £380 for lifelong injuries but both companies still resist efforts to provide more compensation to those their factory left suffering and in ruin. Two weeks ago Dow Chemical, abetted by the US Department of Justice, yet again ignored a summons to appear in court where charges of manslaughter, among other crimes, remain pending.

With numbers so dizzying and injustice so towering it would be easy to lose sight of the people left locked in this cycle of pain. But you never have lost sight of them. You never have forgotten.

Here is just one story. Two years ago a paralytic stroke left Mulayam Bee unable to stand or walk. The main wage earner in a poor family, Mulayam couldn't afford treatment she needed to become well until she found Sambhavna, the clinic made possible by you.





“Ammi, you have to walk!” How Panchkarma therapy got Mulayam Bee back on her feet

“I’m from Pipariya, a small town 100 miles south-east of Bhopal. My husband Kallu Khan is from Bhopal. We got married there. I think it was a few years before the Gas Tragedy because that night I was already a mother of two children.

“Kallu was a stonemason, he made pillars for newly built houses. We were not rich but Kallu earned enough for us to live peacefully and meet our daily needs. My mother-in-law was blind from birth. All living together, we were unaware that our happiness would be limited to just those few years before that night.

“We were in Tilla when our eyes began burning. We didn’t know that gas had leaked from Union Carbide, we thought someone was burning chillies. To protect Javed (two) and Pappu (one month) we wrapped them with wet clothes. Then, like everyone else, we ran.

“While running in that chaos for our lives Kallu’s ankle got wounded with a nail, or something else. We found an auto-ricksaw in the direction of Bairagarh. We didn’t know the driver, with no thought for himself in all that mayhem he was picking people up and driving them to safe places.

“Both my sons became ill after inhaling the gas. They have breathing and coughing issues, even now our eyes are affected still.

“At first Kallu didn’t give much attention to the pain of his wound. Slowly, the swelling on his ankle spread and became agonising. It was filled with pus. Then the hospital told him they needed to amputate. Kallu wasn’t ready for this. He said, ‘if my leg is amputated, who will earn for the family?’

“There were few medical facilities in Bhopal then. Someone told us Kallu’s injury could be treated in Indore. This would cost nothing but we had no money for the journey. We didn’t even have enough to buy cotton to wipe Kallu’s wound – I used to tie a piece of cloth around it to prevent flies sitting on it. So to travel to Indore and back we had to sell our household utensils.

“After the treatment in Indore Kallu’s wound finally healed, but his ankle was now deformed. He hasn’t been able to rest his heel on the ground since. Now Kallu has to lean on his left toe when he walks. He never was able to earn much again. Things became very difficult for us. We had to sell jewellery given by my parents for Kallu’s treatment.

“Before the gas tragedy everything was good, but we have never lived happily since. A year after, I gave birth to a baby girl. Three days went by before she turned green, and passed away. The next year I had a baby boy, but three days after being born he, too, died. I didn’t know what was happening in my life. I am an illiterate person: if I had known it was because of exposure to gas I would have filed for compensation.

“In the meantime, our financial state went from bad to worse. I began taking my children to *Anganwadi* [a type of rural mother and child care centre tackling hunger and malnutrition] to get bread and milk for them. I will not lie, as I was also hungry I asked for bread and milk for myself, too. You don’t feel ashamed asking for food when you are this hungry.

“Parveen madam, who ran the Anganwadi, saw the difficulty I was in. She told me of a job for a caretaker at an Anganwadi in Bhopal, and even offered to write a request on my behalf – all I needed to do was submit it in the office at D.I.G. Bungalow.

“I do not know how to read and write. I got the job of caretaker only because of Parveen Madam’s kindness.

“I was paid ninety rupees a month, the same amount as our rent. Whatever little money



Mulayam Bee at her home in Bhopal last year

Kallu was able to make went on daily expenses. Many times Kallu and me slept without eating but we never left our children hungry. If we had four chapattis for lunch and there was nothing else we kept two for the children's dinner. We have gone to work hungry many times, but we've also learned to live with our condition.

"Life has slowly, slowly moved on. A few years ago, one beautiful morning as I was washing my face, I felt a tingling sensation in my legs. On trying to stand up I fell down. I screamed and called for my younger son, Pappu. He and Kallu rushed me to the Bhopal Memorial Hospital. The doctors told me that diabetes and hypertension caused paralysis in my lower limbs. I was admitted for a week but there was no change in my condition. The doctors said I should go some place I could get massage and other treatment; they said that medicines wouldn't help me much.

"I saw a doctor at Nariyalkheda, but again there was no relief. The constant pain in my legs meant I couldn't sleep, and as I couldn't walk, I couldn't go to work. If I do not go to work, all of us cannot eat.

"For a very long time Kallu had received treatment at Sambhavna. He said he'd seen people who arrived there in wheelchairs get relief after massage. So I registered there and after my assessment with Doctor Jay he referred me for Panchkarma.

"Beena Didi [Panchkarma therapist] and Geeta madam worked really hard with me. The pain in my legs ended soon after Beena began massaging them. She massaged my whole body, and also put me in the steam box with a towel on my head. She would tell me, 'don't worry Ammi, I am here.'

"I went to Sambhavna in a wheelchair. During my treatment I wasn't confident I'd be able to stand up again. So Beena Didi held my back. At first my legs would shiver. Slowly, slowly, after one month I started standing again. Beena Didi would then say to me, 'Ammi, you have to walk!' And I did.

After two months I started walking. I am so thankful to them for making me walk again.

"I could not afford treatment, so without Sambhavna I wouldn't have become well. The people who are kindly helping should know that, because of them, many many others like me are getting relief.

"I soon began again at the Anganwadi. Sometimes I fetch children to have meals there. I used to come here for food, now I am sharing it. To be able to help others really makes me happy."



Beena carefully adds herbs during Panchkarma



Medicinal oils and steam are followed by massage

Kidney disease, cancers, breathlessness, birth defects: death & life in Bhopal, 35 years after

The first project designed to monitor the long-term health of Bhopal survivors ran until 1994, when it was abruptly ended. Set up in 1985 by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), its findings did not emerge until ten years after it was shelved, 2004, when they finally confirmed worst fears. But by the time of its follow-up study, 1996-2010, the ICMR had lost 79% the gas-affected cohort population and, with this, any credibility for its results.

With doctors facing a knowledge-vacuum, Sambhavna began the most important and ambitious medical research project since the first weeks after Union Carbide's disaster. Preliminary results from this vital work were recently published.

According to statistical analysis of the ICMR's original data, between 1985-1993 at least 8,489 people died of injuries sustained on Bhopal's night of terror, an average of almost three deaths per day - each yet another personal tragedy, each unique, every single one deeply-felt.

The data also confirmed survivors to be suffering respiratory, ocular, gastrointestinal, reproductive, neurological, immunological, psychological and other illnesses. But by the time of its publication Bhopal's health authorities had already spent two decades giving survivors non-evidence-based treatments that were typically useless, and often harmful.

When the ICMR produced a second technical report covering the period 1996-2010, it emerged that India's apex agency had somehow lost 8 in 10 of the original cohort of 80,021 survivors, and over 6 in 10 of the 15,391 control group. This gross negligence, which the agency has never explained, left health authorities no credible scientific information on the long-term impacts of gas exposure.

Sambhavna step up Anticipating this fiasco, Sambhavna's Community Research Unit mobilised a team of 25 researchers to begin studying the long-term impacts of Carbide's gas and water-borne poisons. Working door-to-door across dozens of affected communities, the team painstakingly collected data on deaths, cancers, birth defects, tuberculosis, growth and development of infants and young adults, spontaneous abortions, and other related health issues.

In this way, Sambhavna's team has been able to register a cohort population of 94,000 people, equivalent in scale to the 1985 ICMR project. The massive study includes groups exposed to gas; to water contaminated by Carbide's hazardous wastes; to both gas and contaminated water; and also a control group of similar socio-economic status.

Pending final analysis of the full data, Sambhavna researchers recently took a sample of 2,221 people from severely gas-exposed areas and matched them against 953 people who were unexposed. Though preliminary, the findings are deeply alarming.

Cause of Death	Gas exposed Population						Unexposed Population					
	Female		Male		Total		Female		Male		Total	
	Nos.	Per '000	Nos.	Per '000	Nos.	Per '000	Nos.	Per '000	Nos.	Per '000	Nos.	Per '000
Heart	15	15.22	19	15.37	34	15.31	7	14.07	4	8.26	11	11.54
Cancer	10	10.30	13	10.40	23	10.36	3	6.40	2	4.13	5	5.25
Lungs	9	9.27	16	12.80	25	11.26	1	2.13	4	8.26	5	5.25
Kidney	4	4.12	11	8.80	15	6.75	0	0	2	4.13	2	2.10
TB	3	3.09	8	6.40	11	4.95	0	0	3	6.20	3	3.15
Stroke	1	1.03	3	2.40	4	1.80	0	0	2	4.13	2	2.10
Typhoid	2	2.06	0	0	2	0.90	1	2.13	0	0	1	1.05
Other*	9	9.27	18	14.40	27	12.16	2	4.26	16	33.06	18	18.89

A table from Sambhavna's preliminary report on causes of death in two cohorts

A still rising death toll Twenty two years after registration of gas-related deaths in Bhopal was terminated, Sambhavna's data finds *28% more deaths among gas survivors than the control population*. It confirms that Carbide's gases continue to kill, and that by refusing to register additional deaths Indian authorities have been cruelly denying thousands of victims' families any possibility of justice.

The data indicates that *twice as many gas survivors are dying of cancers*, diseases of the lungs and tuberculosis, and *three times as many of kidney diseases* (see table on previous page).

General rates of illness are 63% higher among gas survivors but are especially pronounced in those exposed as children, who commonly suffer breathlessness, chest pains, and panic attacks. The technical report of the full study is being delivered to international peer review journals in due course. In the meantime, Sambhavna's loving care continues.



Nearly one in ten children being born damaged

As we were writing this letter to you it emerged that members of a governmental Scientific Advisory Committee took the decision to suppress publication of a study that found congenital malformations in 94 out of 1,048 children born in recent years to gas exposed mothers. Members of the 2017 Committee “expressed concern on the high incidence of malformed children recorded in the present study” and queried the quality control applied to the data. Survivor groups point out that the same study design was approved at three successive meetings over two years. The methodology was disputed only once the appalling results became clear.

The documents, gained via right to information, say nothing of the care given to the 110 damaged children identified by the study. They say nothing, because none was given. That is left to Chingari alone. Over 1,000 children disabled by Carbide are now on our register. Presently we care for almost a third of this number, a number that grows by the day.

Your gifts are the lifeblood of this good work in Bhopal, all of which is funded by friends and supporters. They enable all of the treatment given at Chingari and Sambhavna – without you we would have been unable to care for even one person.

For all that you do, for all you make possible, our thanks can never be enough.