

The Bhopal Medical Appeal

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Dear friend,

In our last letter we shared some difficult news about how the Sambhavna clinic, through no fault of their own, saw their permission to receive overseas funds revoked for a multi-year period. The good news was that, through sheer determination and a refusal to stop providing life-changing care to Bhopal survivors, they kept their doors open until permission was restored last year. *The responses we received to that communication were extremely moving, and we wish to thank you for your continued support of Sambhavna and their work.*

It has been some time since we have been able to share details of that work so, as promised, we have an update for you on Sambhavna's continued innovations in the provision of holistic, ethical, and sustainable healthcare to anyone affected by the Bhopal gas disaster or subsequent water contamination. *This information has been provided directly by the clinic, and some of the staff, themselves survivors of the gas disaster, have also chosen to share their stories of that night and how they found their way to working at Sambhavna.* With that in mind, we'll share news from Chingari and the children in our next update, after reacquainting you with Sambhavna and what makes it such a unique place of healing.



There is nowhere else like Sambhavna anywhere in the world. From the moment you step through the gates you know you've arrived somewhere special. The noise of traffic and the shouting of street traders fades behind you, and in front stands a striking brick building, its front covered with burgeoning greenery. Stepping through the open door, you are greeted by the sight of patients sitting in a row of wooden benches in front of an open space at the centre of the building. The hushed whispers of conversation blend with the sound of running water from a pool in the clinic's central open courtyard, and the chirp of birdsong from the beautiful medicinal gardens behind. It is a place not only to heal the body, but to quiet the mind and soothe the spirit. So let's explore some of the things you might encounter within.



The entrance to the Sambhavna Clinic

Healthcare Without Harm

The modern healthcare industry harms human and environmental health in many ways. The incineration of biomedical waste from hospitals, the end-of-cycle residues from medicines consumed by humans and animals, and the production of pharmaceuticals are all significant environmental hazards, while the latter also often hinders the delivery of occupational health. A large proportion of biomedical waste is PVC (Polyvinyl chloride), the burning of which produces extremely toxic dioxins and furans that cause cancers, birth defects and many other serious health problems. Pervasive oversubscription of antibiotics can be damaging to those with prior or underlying health issues, and contributes to the emergence of antibiotic-resistant strains of various illnesses. Survivors of the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster, many of whom have suffered multi-systemic injuries as a result of exposure to Carbide's chemicals, are particularly susceptible to further potential harms from modern medicinal drugs. This is why Sambhavna has chosen as its founding and guiding principle 'first, do no harm'.

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The Sambhavna Clinic offers safe treatment by combining three different systems of healing: modern medicine, Ayurveda, and traditional Panchakarma steam and Yoga therapy. This integration of different systems of medical care has proved to be more effective than following any of the systems alone.

Sambhavna takes full patient histories, then determines which of these forms of treatment is most suitable for the individual based upon their condition, symptoms, and circumstances. For example, according to the clinic's data, modern medicine is most appropriate to treat the thyroid problems experienced



by many gas victims, Ayurvedic remedies are best to manage symptoms like constipation or loss of appetite, and Yoga therapy is the most effective treatment for chronic back pain. Due to the multi-systemic damage caused by toxins in the methylisocyanate gas and polluted ground water, many people come to Sambhavna with several simultaneous injuries, diseases, or other health problems. For a patient population of this kind and quite possibly for all persons suffering from chemical poisons, a combination of different treatment modalities is the most appropriate and this is being given only at Sambhavna.

In Modern medical care at Sambhavna, unnecessary and harmful medicines are specially prohibited and antibiotics or other medicines are not given without necessary prior investigations. Ayurvedic care at Sambhavna includes modern tests for blood, urine, etc. before remedies are prescribed, and Ayurvedic physicians use modern scientific investigations to monitor their treatment strategies. Unlike Ayurvedic medicines generally available in the market, Sambhavna's medicines do not contain heavy metals like lead, mercury or arsenic. Sodium benzoate is a common preservative used in modern medicines as well as in Ayurvedic medicines. In an acidic environment, sodium benzoate is known to produce benzene, a harmful chemical. At Sambhavna an extract of the leaves of *lantana camara*, a commonly found plant, is used instead of Sodium benzoate. Panchakarma steam therapy is used at Sambhavna as a form of detoxification for those who need it. Those undergoing Yoga therapy at Sambhavna are taught Yoga postures, Pranayama breathing exercises, and other cleansing actions for their health problems.

Finally, at Sambhavna, biomedical waste is disinfected and made harmless by using solar energy. This technology has been considered one of the best methods for safe disposal of biomedical waste by the World Health Organization, and is another example of the clinic's many healthcare innovations.

Shabnam: A Nurse's Story

"I was about 3 or 4 years old at the time of the disaster. All of us were asleep when the gas hit our area. We were eight in the family, my three brothers, two sisters and our parents. My parents told me, a neighbour came and banged on our door that night telling us that a nearby farmhouse had caught fire. We got up and I went out with my father who brought me in when I started complaining of burning in the eyes. My father told all of us to stay indoors and himself went out. Next morning we found that our goats had died, so had the chicken.

Despite prolonged medication and even a surgery and after so many years I still have vision problems. Except two of my siblings, all members of my family who were hit by the gas that night needed to wear glasses following the disaster. My mother was diagnosed with chronic kidney disease and she suffered a stroke that left her paralyzed. She passed away in 2013. My father was diagnosed with cancer in 2016 and he passed away the same year. The first time I came to Sambhavna was when I accompanied my sister there. By then I had become a trained nurse and was working in a private hospital. *What struck me at Sambhavna was how nicely every one spoke there and with so much love. I remember thinking, half of people's health problems must be going away because of the lovely behaviour of the doctors and other staff.* I so wished I was working there. My wish came true in 2009 when I was selected to work at Sambhavna. Here everyday as a nurse I witness the magical effect of demonstrating care and love to the patients."



Herbal Medicine Manufacturing

The Ayurvedic medicines prepared at Sambhavna are totally unique. About a hundred kinds of herbs are grown organically in the garden of the Clinic and 85 types of Ayurvedic medicines are prepared from them by Sambhavna's medicine team. First they lay out the herbs and flowers to dry in the sun, then employ a variety of specialist machines to grind them down. Once ground, they can be used to create either pills or liquid solutions. These remedies are then bottled and labelled, ready to be prescribed to patients.



To achieve this purpose, the medicine team work closely with Sambhavna's gardeners, who grow the herbs and other plants and maintain the grounds. For understandable reasons, the gardeners do not use any harmful pesticides or chemicals on Sambhavna's plants. Instead, they prepare a solution called Vanaj, created by harvesting beneficial bacteria (soil microbes) from forests close to the city. Periodic spraying of Vanaj on plants and trees provides effective protection from harmful insects, as well as increasing the yield of the garden. In addition to Vanaj solution, Vermicompost, made with help from earthworms and green compost, is also used to increase the productivity of the garden.

Rajiv: A Gardener's Story

"I was 4 years old at the time of the disaster. There were five of us in the family, my parents and my younger brother and sister. My mother told me our parents carried all three of us and joined the crowd running away from the gas clouds. She said our eyes were burning as the gas had the pungency of smoke from a burning chili pepper. Both of my parents remain chronically ill ever since the disaster. My mother has breathing difficulties. My sister complains of pain all over her body and she gets tired easily.

In 2008 I was diagnosed with a mental illness. I have been under medical care for last 18 years. Most often I stay okay when I take my medicines. Without the medicines my head gets filled with all kinds of ideas. I start fearing that someone was following me and may attack me. I worry that people around me were conspiring against me to cause harm. I am unable to sleep because of the thoughts that fill me. Sometimes I go through episodes of illness despite being on medication.



I joined Sambhavna in 2012 as a Community Health Worker. After 5 years of working in the community I sought a change as I was finding it very difficult to speak in public meetings. I moved to the herbal garden and I am very happy working here. Before joining Sambhavna I worked in a few other places but faced much disrespect and ill treatment. *Here at Sambhavna staff have a right to equality. Staff are treated with respect and there is an atmosphere of camaraderie.*"



A gardener sprays Vanaj

Workable Solutions to Climate Change

Diluted Vanaj can also be used as a cleaning solution. Common cleaning products used in hospitals and healthcare centres contain harmful chemicals and needless antibiotics that have long-term adverse effects on the environment and human health. To avoid risking patient health, most of the cleaning work in Sambhavna Clinic is done with Aritha (*sapindus mukorossi*) solution. Wherever disinfectant is needed, Neem (*azadirachta indica*) leaves are boiled in water and that water is used for cleaning. To keep the Clinic free from mosquitoes, instead of synthetic chemicals, smoke from burning leaves of wild Basil, Neem and Adusa (*adhatoda vasica*) is used as a natural deterrent.

Industrial pollution and climate change are two major crises endangering all life on earth today. Along with fighting corporate crimes, Bhopal survivors believe it is important to demonstrate the possibility of a world without human driven climate change. Sambhavna aims to be fully sustainable through the use of both solar energy and the production of bio gas from kitchen residue.

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All of the Sambhavna staff bring organic kitchen waste from their homes, and the sanitary workers use this to produce biogas in a small unit in a little patch in the garden. Through this relatively inexpensive unit, waste that would have otherwise added methane to the atmosphere, contributing to climate change, is instead converted into fuel gas and used to make steam for Panchakarma detoxification procedures. This simple, practical, and inexpensive technology can be applied on a large scale in any community, and further demonstrates Sambhavna's status as a blueprint for sustainability.



A Community of Equals

Formally, like all Trusts, the Sambhavna Trust has a Board of Trustees responsible for running the clinic. In practice, the responsibility for the day-to-day and long-term running of the clinic rests on its staff. Every two months, all staff elect members of the Steering Committee that runs the clinic. Two staff members become conveners to take care of day-to-day operations. Each staff member, in addition to his or her primary job responsibility,



is also required to be a member of different committees to handle different tasks for the clinic, such as preparing the annual budget, building repairs and construction, arranging for volunteers, etc. The weekly meeting of all staff members plays a central role in the running of the clinic. It is in these meetings that rules for running the clinic are framed, work plans are finalized and various tasks and activities are reviewed.

Shweta: A Registration Assistant's Story

"I was six years old at the time of the disaster. We lived in a "kutcha house" (clay walls and terracotta roof tiles that could not keep gas from entering) in Shajahanabad (about 2 kms from the factory). I remember waking up coughing and screaming "mirchi, mirchi!" and our dog barking non-stop outside, before my grandmother opening the wooden front door and a rush of gas clouds filling the room. My baby brother, just six months old, was crying and my mother was trying to comfort him. I went back to sleep coughing. That night there were 12 of us in our family. In the long-term, all my family members had the same chronic diseases that affect the survivors of the disaster – lung diseases, tuberculosis, thyroid disorders, diabetes, heart diseases. My granny, aunt and brother were diagnosed with TB, my father had chronic lung disease and he died of a heart attack.

I joined Sambhavna in 2002 as a computer operator and in 2014 I started working as a registration assistant. It is difficult to find words to describe the way working at Sambhavna has transformed me. Before joining here, I was terrible at communicating my thoughts and feelings.



I was ultra passive and tended to cry more often than speak out. *Working at Sambhavna gave me the confidence to present my thoughts and feelings and to argue for what I believe and most of all to have an identity of my own.* Working in different committees in the Clinic has also been great learning opportunities. I have been part of the Steering Committee on 5 occasions and they have meant sharing huge responsibilities. This year for the first time I am in the "Heart" committee (the committee that looks after the Clinic's weekly meeting)."

Community Health

Sambhavna has always maintained that prevention and control of diseases has as much role in improving the health of the survivor community as appropriate healthcare. This work is carried out by the clinic's dedicated team of Community Health Workers. Sambhavna's Community Health Workers find, identify, inspire, train and support health volunteers in making their communities self-reliant in matters of community health.

Over the years, more than 100 health volunteers have reduced the rate of pulmonary TB by 10 times in a population of more than 30,000 survivors, eliminated dengue and malaria from the area, and have received praise from international experts for their effective work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sambhavna provides health volunteers with medical equipment as well as training so they can use it to treat those in their local communities. They are also taught how to chemically test groundwater so that they can themselves monitor the spread of contamination from the factory site.

Farhat: A Community Health Worker's Story

"My parents have told me that I was just three months old at the time of the disaster. The entire family had gone to watch a movie that evening and were asleep when the disaster struck. Our house was next to the main road so all of us were awakened by people screaming "run, run!" outside. Our family joined the crowd that was running towards the hospital.

My elder sister Afroze used to be very sick and was often admitted to the hospital when we were growing up. 15 years back she was diagnosed with a kidney disease and had to be put on dialysis. My mother has severe breathing difficulty and has been diagnosed with interstitial lung disease. At times when she is breathless, she turns blue and needs to be given oxygen.

I had a younger sister Neha, who was born four years after the disaster. She died of a kidney disease at 24 leaving behind a daughter, Aina, with cerebral palsy. As her father abandoned her, we look after our niece who is now 15 years old.

I joined Sambhavna in September 2009. *Working at Sambhavna changed my perspective in a major way. Earlier I used to feel sad and stressed because of the health problems in our family. My work as a community health surveyor requires me to go visit survivors and others in their homes. Through this I realized that the problems in my family were not ours alone, but thousands of families were in a situation similar to ours. Along with problems, I also learnt about possibilities.*

During my regular visits to the communities I saw that a child named Ashar with cerebral palsy had improved considerably in a matter of few years. From his mother I found that his improvement was mostly because the mother spoke to the child constantly even if he did not respond for the first few weeks. I started doing the same with my niece Aina and indeed it has helped a lot, now she smiles when she recognizes us and responds when we call her name."



Dear friend, as you have just read, many of the staff at Sambhavna are themselves survivors of the 1984 gas disaster. In the aftermath of that disaster, when the Corporation responsible refused to disclose the nature of the chemicals that had poisoned half a million people, government hospitals were overrun and patients were treated like numbers, the survivors had a vision for their future. They saw a possibility for healthcare that would be free and accessible to all, would not further harm either patients or the environment, and be provided by people who understood the experience of those they were treating. *Sambhavna is the realisation of that vision: a clinic run by survivors, for survivors, and a replicable blueprint for ethical, holistic, and sustainable community healthcare. But the truth is that Sambhavna's community extends beyond Bhopal, into homes around the UK and abroad. If you are reading this, you are a part of that community, and you have helped to make that vision a reality.*

The past few years the Sambhavnac clinic has faced more challenges than at any time since its founding, and the need for support remains urgent. During the period the clinic was unable to receive funds from overseas we have seen a series of crises: a global pandemic, a series of international humanitarian disasters, a cost of living crisis that has affected ordinary people everywhere. We know many of you will be feeling these pressures too. *Anything you can give to support Sambhavna's life-changing work will always be welcome, but there are also other ways to help.* Tell a friend or loved one about Sambhavna's work, or help spread the word online. Hold an event or fundraiser; we can provide materials and help to publicise it. Or, if you wish to leave a gift to the survivors in your will, we have recently partnered with the National Free Wills Network and can help connect you with a solicitor to access a free will writing service. See the enclosed Legacy Leaflet for details of how pledging a legacy gift in your will could help support the work of either Sambhavna or Chingari into the future.

Most of all, we want to thank you for remaining part of this community and reading these stories from our friends in Bhopal. *It is of the utmost importance to them that their work is enabled by ordinary people like them across the globe, and that together we can continue to achieve the extraordinary.*

With love,

Jared Stoughton

Campaigns and Communications Executive

