THE SAMBHAVNA TRUST CLINIC
BHOPAL, INDIA

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.”

Rehana, a survivor of the disaster, lighting memorial lamps

IN BHOPAL, TWENTY YEARS ON, THE WORLD’S WORST INDUSTRIAL DISASTER CONTINUES

TWENTY YEARS after the Union Carbide gas leak disaster in Bhopal, 150,000 people still suffer severe illnesses due to the damage caused to almost every system of their bodies. Conditions like breathing difficulties, chronic fatigue, pain and inflammation are often beyond cure, and the sufferers need regular treatment to bring them much-needed relief.

Union Carbide left Bhopal without bothering to clean up its killer pesticide plant. Thousands of tons of highly toxic chemicals were simply abandoned in sacks and drums, and strewn on open ground. Nineteen monsoons have washed the poisons deep into the earth and into the groundwater, contaminating the drinking wells of 20,000 people who live near the derelict plant and causing a spectrum of illnesses. Breast milk of local women has been found to be toxic and recent research shows that children born to exposed parents are also affected by the poisons leaked into the air, soil and water by the Union Carbide Corporation.
WE ALL LIVE IN BHOPAL

Wherever we may live on this planet, we have between 50 and 100,000 chemicals in our environment. In 1999 - 2000, blood samples of 9,282 people from different parts of USA were tested for chemicals. Each sample was found to contain at least 3 pesticides, and an average American was discovered to carry 13 pesticides in her body. This could be more or less true for most of us living on this planet.

THE DARK END OF A DEEP BOG

In Bhopal, 20 years after the disaster, Union Carbide and its new owner Dow Chemical are still refusing to pay for long-term medical care of the victims. Nor will they share medical data they hold on the effects of MIC, the main gas that leaked. In the absence of a proper treatment protocol, the care provided by the state government remains ill-informed, inappropriate and ineffective. There is indiscriminate use of antibiotics, steroids, psychotropic and other medicines, which provide only temporary relief, if any at all.

CREATING POSSIBILITIES IN A ZONE OF DESPAIR

Sambhavna is a Hindi word meaning ‘possibility’. Over the last eight years of caring for the survivors of the disaster in Bhopal, we have shown that it is possible to develop safe, simple, inexpensive and effective therapies for the gas survivors by careful combination of different systems of medicine. We have demonstrated that people can take control and improve the health of their communities. This work is of relevance to poisoned people and communities worldwide. Our work is funded through small donations by a large number of individuals from India and abroad.

Sambhavna’s protocol for gas victims includes yoga. Ayurveda, Panchakarma as well as allopathic treatment. Yoga therapy at Sambhavna has been shown to be effective in improving the lung capacity of victims. Ayurveda, an indigenous system based on herbal medicine, has enabled survivors to reduce their intake of synthetic drugs. Panchakarma is an Ayurvedic procedure for detoxification through medicated oil massage, steam bath and medicinal enema. Our allopathic unit has two general physicians, a gynecologist and a psychiatrist supported by an in-house pathology laboratory. Much care is taken to ensure that no harm is done through medication.

REGISTRATION WITH EFFECTIVE MONITORING

As each person is received at Sambhavna she is given a booklet that will contain her medical records. The data is also maintained in the person’s file at the clinic and in a computer where it can be used to track the frequency of complaints, correctness of diagnoses and effectiveness of treatments.

HEALTH AWARENESS IN THE COMMUNITY

A good part of Sambhavna’s work is in the communities. Our Community Health workers go out daily to involve people in health education sessions on common health problems, to train them to be community health leaders, and help them run a very successful TB control program. Health workers follow up on persons receiving care at the clinic, and collect information on their health and related issues.
AIDING AUTONOMY

Sambhavna is also involved in running a school for children in one of the communities and a community clinic in another. In both places the staff are from the community and local committees are encouraged to take charge of the activities.

DOCUMENTING LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES

All official research on the health consequences of exposure to Carbide’s poison was ended in 1994 and there is no current data on rising cancer rates and other long term complications. With very limited resources, our team at Sambhavna documents adverse effects on the next generation and monitors the effectiveness of individual therapies. This research has been published in national and international journals including the Journal of the American Medical Association.

A goat tries to butt in on our community research

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Sambhavna maintains what is probably the world’s most comprehensive collection of original source material related to the disaster, including newspaper clippings dating from December 1984 onwards, medical and scientific research papers, legal transcripts, government publications, corporate documents, pamphlets and posters from local and international campaigns. This information is frequently used by researchers, journalists, activists, survivors and staff.

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

32 full time staff members carry out the work of Sambhavna. More than half of our staff are themselves survivors of the disaster. The six trustees who administer the trust are scientists, doctors and social workers who have been involved with the disaster from its beginning. The staff takes most decisions about the running of the clinic collectively at weekly meetings, and all without exception share in the daily round of chores.
MAKING CONNECTIONS

Sambhavna regularly holds health camps and workshops in the community. We have organized three local, one national and two international conferences and have participated in several others. Socially committed professionals from all over the world continue to make significant contributions to our work.

LIGHTING A LAMP & CURSING THE DARKNESS

Our staff members take part in cycle rallies, poster exhibitions and signature campaigns as part of our involvement with local and global communities to stop the medical disaster in Bhopal and to prevent such tragedies from happening again.

WE ARE MOVING

In March, 2005 Sambhavna will move to a new building in the middle of the severely affected communities. The new clinic is about eight times larger than our present facility and is being built as a model setting for appropriate health care with community involvement. Designed to make the best use of natural light and wind, the building will store rain-water, generate solar energy, recycle waste water and use solar power to disinfect medical waste. The new clinic will help us open new facilities, make us more effected in our work and enable us to care for three times as many survivors.

GROWING MEDICINES

The new clinic includes a one-acre organic garden of medicinal plants and trees. The harvest is used to make the highest quality Ayurvedic medicines. Our gardeners inspire and train people from local communities to grow medicinal plants for safe, effective treatment of a great many common ailments.

FUELED BY COMPASSION

Read as "sama + bhavna," Sambhavna can also mean compassion. In the last eight years the funds for our work have come from over eight thousand compassionate individuals from India, France, UK, Japan and the USA. We take no corporate money, no large grants from foundations, no government assistance. French author Dominique Lapierre makes regular contributions from the royalties of his internationally bestselling book on the Bhopal disaster, Five Minutes Past Midnight in Bhopal.

Children at the Orriya Basti school

POWERED BY VOLUNTEERS

Professionals, students and others from Belgium, France, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and USA have visited Sambhavna to train staff members, help with research studies, assist in the garden and participate in other activities of the clinic. Volunteers who usually spend one week to three months at the clinic are provided with simple accommodation and food.

AWARDS FOR OUR WORK

Sambhavna Trust has received the Japanese Tajiri Muneaki Prize, the Inner Flame Award from the Governor of the state and the international MEAD 2001 Award for exemplifying the words of the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world."

DONATE YOUR MONEY OR YOUR TIME

You can join us in our efforts by contributing money, donating equipment or volunteering your time.

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