

Bhopal Lives

Suketu Mehta

Introduction

- **December 3 1984**
- **The biggest chemical accident till date**
- **Killed more than 10,000**
- **Injured about 50,000 people permanently**
- **Will affect 3 generations of Bhopalan very significantly**
- **The effects of the accident were drastically downplayed during the primary examination, to save money**
- **The only reason for this being looked at again was because of, all major effects that can still be seen, even after this long after the accident.**
- **Even though all are for very different reasons can be related to the greatest tragedies of Auschwitz, Chernobyl and even Hiroshima.**

The Night of the Gas

- Two years prior to the accident a safety team that visited the Bhopal plant found 61 safety problems, where 30 of them were reported as major(immediate check)
- These maintenance problems were occurring because of the cut in skilled labor.
- This was all being done to hit a better bottom line.
- When the gas finally descended onto the city of Bhopal, the people had to decide if they wanted to save themselves, or even between different members of their own family.
- There were reports from the people in charge of disposing the bodies that all the bodies were dressed in their best clothes and they had their hair done with all the best flowers, because this all happened on a Sunday when people must have been planning on going out for movies, dinner, or just to enjoy their weekends.

Arun's Story

- He was a 13 year old boy who lost most of his immediate family on that night.
- Arun is a fictitious name of this boy by the narrator, because of his current illegal lifestyle.
- He helps with all underground based works, from document forgeries, to most underground deals.
- This all happened after the fact that he was used as an ambassador for the gas victims of Bhopal.
- He was used as a symbol of a young survivor, who was also sent to America because of his good oratory skills.
- He despised being called a victim because it made him feel like he was weaker than all other people, even though he used it to his advantage at time to get his way with things, he needed to get done.

The Lifting of the Veils

- The most important part of this story for the women who lived in that part of the county is the role of the GBPMUS(The Bhopal Gas-Affected women workers organization).
- This was an organization fighting 2 fights at the same time, first and foremost was that of the gas accident and then the equality for women forced to wear a veil or burka depending on their family.
- On every saturday, these women who understood the importance of their could be seen opposite the women's hospital speaking(swearing) against these stereotypes and the government itself.
- There were many women who were either active or passive supporters, this could be seen in different ways, when some women continued to come in burkas and veils while some of them decided to stop using them.

Sajida Bano's Story

- While the GBPMUS was fighting for the rights of the oppressed women after the major accident, there were worse stories like the one of Sajida Bano's
- She was the widow of a technician in the plant who had died, before the major accident due to poisoning.
- When she moved to the slums because of her lack of sufficient funds to keep up her lifestyle, she decided to start wearing a burka, because she felt it helped her blend into her surroundings, and have to be looked at as an outsider and with pity.
- Not only did she lose her husband but she even lost her older son on the day of the real accident, and this caused her younger son to lose his sanity for the most of his youth.

Negative-Positive

- In this part of the chapter we don't speak of a negative-positive outlook of the accident, we look at the story of a man named Harishankar.
- He was involved in business of development the negative of a photograph into the positive.
- In this business he needed to move around a lot and to sell had to be able to shout.
- After the accident he had lost one of his legs and full usage of his lungs.
- He could not continue his business and had to begin trying to sell a scam of a telling someone's horoscope with a computer.
- He barely got any business and even when he did, he knew that he was just cheating his customers which he wasn't happy about.
- The irony in his story is that he lost his son in the accident who was only 6 days old and couldn't develop the negative of the photograph that he had of him.

The Plague of the Lawyers

- The accident was the best excuse for lawyers from America to India and make a name for themselves and while still(scamming) getting money for the victims.
- They came to India and cheated many of the people because of the misinterpretation that was taking place.
- This is when the Indian government decided to step in and help the people, and proclaimed themselves the only representation that the Indian people would receive.
- After this happened the Indian government asked for the trial to be held in India.
- Union Carbide was ecstatic over this decision, because this meant that the case would get tied up in the legal system for years, and the payoff decided would be substantially less compared to if it was tried in America, which could have bankrupted them.
- Finally the agreed settlement amount was 470 million dollars for almost 597,000 people.

The Qualification of Loss

- In this process the government was trying to figure how much money should be awarded to each victim, and how it would be distributed.
- The worst part was not that money that the victims were getting was meagre, it's that it was being held up because of corruption, and after paying all the bribes to release paperwork and speed up the process, they were getting less than 50% of the money they were supposed to be getting.
- The funny thing is that if we take a look at the schedule for railway accident compensation, it was a lot better than the money that these victims were getting.
- This was even after the fact that it was found that most victims would be affected very seriously, even up to the level for cancer for most people, which includes the next few generations.

Moral Responsibility

- When we think of an accident like this, we expect a senior member of the company to come and talk to the people, to try and ease their pain.
- But Anderson was the last senior executive from Union Carbide to visit India, which was during the time when all those maintenance issues were found, much before the accident.
- Union Carbide till date continues to stand its ground stating that the entire accident was because of industrial sabotage, by an upset employee.
- After all these years the company has not found it important enough to divulge the name of this employee who caused the death of all these people, and harm that follows.
- Even though they paid the settlement, Union Carbide never took responsibility for this accident

Brian Mooney's Story

- He was a lawyer fighting on the behalf of Union Carbide at Kelley Drye & Warren firm.
- He found that this did not sit well with his moral compass and this not what he thought was right.
- He left his job for a very substantial loss in pay for the simple reason of being happy with what he was doing.
- He then moved to India to personally understand the pain of the people, while trying to see how he could help these people.
- During this time there, he was once dragged in front of a mic, where that is exactly what he said, how he said he wanted to help them and was here on his own choice for their sake.

A Charge against Earnings

- The worst part of all this is that the people at Union Carbide were not just left with no impact, they actually earned money out of this.
- The stocks of this company actually if you can't believe actually went up(not immediately)gradually.
- Out of the settlement of 470 million dollar, 220 million came out of their of their insurance.
- Many of the senior executives were let off with very substantial golden parachutes(severance

Conclusion

- The people affected will be seeing the effects even in later generations.
- The responsible parties got off with very little consequences, compared to the mistakes they made.
- The Indian government's judicial system did not help the victims but, it also hurt them with the corruption at every level of the process.
- They not only got off easily, but were actually rewarded for this.