

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE WOMEN IN J.P NAGAR AFTER BHOPAL GAS TRAGEDY 1984**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Socio-Economic Conditions of the Women in J.P Nagar after Bhopal Gas tragedy 1984 is discussed in this paper. Target population was gas affected women. The research work proceeded with the help of detailed survey method in the field. Respondents said gas impacted the life of women in this city in instances such as mothers lost their kids, the women who exposed to gas on that day has not been able to become a mother ever since the tragedy .Male members in their family never supported them to come out and stand for a battle against Union Carbide India & against those errant Government Officials who stood in their way of fair relief and rehabilitation program. Victims have faced very demotivating approaches from Government agencies when they demanded compensations and came up with morchas and protests. The company paid \$470m to settle litigation stemming from the disaster but that amount didn't reach to the people properly. Due to some political and other underplays, the affected people in Bhopal didn't get their share of compensation. The authorities instead gave away very little money to shout down their protest temporarily. Half of the people are still not aware about the exact amount of compensation and how should they fight for their rights.

**Keywords:** Socio-Economic, Women, Bhopal Gas tragedy, Union Carbide India, rehabilitation, compensation.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The condition of women in Bhopal is worsened due to an improper standard of living and series of diseases that the population has to deal with in their day to day lives. Due to aftereffects of gas tragedy women are unable to work; therefore they have no money for a better life or even basic necessities.<sup>1</sup>The economy in Bhopal has suffered because people aren't able to go for work.

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<sup>1</sup>Ingrid Eckerman, "Chemical industry and public health, Bhopal as an example", Nordic School of Public Health, Goteborg, Sweden, 2001, p 62.

Local banks are giving loans over a high interest rate. Due to lack of awareness of government banking procedures and easy availability of loan from these local banks, these women prefer to take money from those banks and finally ends up in debt trap. They have no money for their health, education of children or even for primary necessities in their life. Women in Bhopal have no other option. Their husbands aren't able to go for any job thus they have to work hard to earn bread and butter for the family. The cycle of poverty is continuing in Bhopal. The women in Bhopal are still waiting for a complete fair justice.

### **SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE TRAGEDY**

It is more important to note the problems in establishing a factory in an industrializing country, before analysing the legal and environmental aspects of the tragedy that seems more important. India was a poor nation in 1984 with an ancient culture, with a set of norms, traditions and a worst caste system; in which majority of people belong to the group of lower caste and untouchables. The untouched are the most downtrodden of them all. Since the factory started in Bhopal, people belonging to such communities began migrating from villages towards the factory and began squatting in adjoining land, doing small business and working in odd jobs or as servants in the employee's houses. These areas developed as shantytowns and were the first affected during the tragedy. Majority of the victims were people from the lower strata of society.<sup>2</sup> The delay in rehabilitation affected their life terribly.

The class actions in Supreme Court representing the victims were also affected their life. Union Carbide India Limited could hire the best of lawyers. The poor, uneducated people cannot afford the best lawyers and administrators to support them. Even the distribution of compensation was affected by the rampant corruption in the Indian bureaucracy. Dominique Lapierre in his book "Five Past Midnight in Bhopal" gives an account of a New York lawyer promising 100 million rupees to the meeting of victims. After many years while researching for the book he encounters the same group of victims, who had not received much compensation and asking for at least an apology from Union Carbide. The unique social system of India and its ramifications contributed to the toughness of the relief and rehabilitation operations. The problems were exasperated with the change of western and eastern methods of thinking, works ethics and lifestyles. There was a lack of co-ordination from the parts of Union Carbide officials in India and Danbury in handling of operational details of the plant, handling of its maintenance and security. This is especially important because there was an accusation against the employees, but the details were never proven.

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<sup>2</sup> Moti Singh, "Unfolding the Betrayal of Bhopal Gas Tragedy", B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 2008, p 50.

## **ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE TRAGEDY**

The studies published after the tragedy shows the abnormal return of the Union Carbide stock which increased after the lag of just a month before the tragedy. This lag might not have contributed by the catastrophe, but previous events supports the tragedy; such as profits for the corporation was dropping and several takeover bids. The increase in the stock process was explained as a result of restructuring and recapitalisation of the company before the sell –off. The Study of Marcus, published in 1991, in *Journal of Management Science* discuss about how stock prices respond positively to defensive activities by the management, rather than accommodative moves by managers towards victims. This explains how managers will try to deflect lawsuits to suppress their personal human reactions towards the tragedy and try to deny all responsibility.<sup>3</sup> By accommodative signals, the settlement of 470\$ million ,the shareholders see this action as an acceptance of responsibility to the tragedy and the acceptance of problems within the company and the stock reacts in a negative way, but they could not reject their full responsibility.

The Dow Chemical Company successfully took over Union Carbide in February 6<sup>th</sup> 2001, after that Union Carbide became a wholly-owned subsidiary, Dow owned all the stock of Union Carbide, but UC remained as a separate entity. Thereafter Dow claimed that the stockholders and the Union Carbide did not have any responsibility in the tragedy.

## **ECONOMIC LOSS**

The accident not only harmed the health of Bhopal. That has broken the economic stability of Bhopal. From the day of accident they had to cop up with, loss of jobs, loss of earning capacity of victims, business disruptions, cost of compensation, rehabilitation and legal costs. The UCIL plant which was an investment of 25\$ million was shut down immediately after the accident and 650 permanent jobs were lost. After some months the Union Carbide Research and Development Center located at one another part of Bhopal also closed down. Local business and state Government offices were also shut down for three weeks losing business and tax revenues. The two mass evacuations disrupted commercial activities for several weeks, with resulting business losses of \$8 to \$65 million.<sup>4</sup> Loss of work in Government offices was not included in these estimates. In the year after the accident, the Government took many well- intentioned steps to provide economic relief to victims. Compensation of about \$800 per fatality was paid to relatives of dead persons. Smaller cash compensation awards, like less than \$100 were distributed to 20,000 victims and 3,000 more victims were provided with part-time employment.

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<sup>3</sup>Marcus, “Bhopal Gas Tragedy”, The study published in *journal of management science*, Texas Christian University, US, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> “Organization: Union Carbide India”, *Ethics in Business*, Limited, ICMR, IBS Centre for Management and Research, Hyderabad, 2002.

New schools were also opened in the affected neighborhood. Unfortunately, in proportion to the tremendous relief needs these early 1985 to 1987 efforts were minuscule. Government relief failed to alleviate the misery of victims; it was simply too small in scale and limited in scope.

Beginning in March 1991 new interim relief payments were made to victims sums of RS 200 per month were paid to all victims who lived in 37 of the city's 54 wards that were officially classified as "gas affected". A total of \$260 million was distributed, but the money was given to everyone who lived in the affected wards, not just the victims. In fact, many of the people who lived in these 37 wards were not victims at all; they had moved in after the accident. As cash relief payments flowed into the city, the local inflation rate jumped to between 15 and 20 per cent annum. Most people pinned their hopes of long – term recovery on anticipated compensation from Union Carbide.

### **STRUGGLE FOR COMPENSATION**

Union Carbide paid \$470 million of a compensation settlement in January 1989. This money remained in a court –administered account until 1992, while claims were sorted out. By early 1993 there were 630,000 claims of which only 350,000 had been substantive on the basis of medical records. Hundreds of victims continued to die during the prolonged politico-legal and bureaucratic battles over compensation. The compensation that victims sought in mid-1985 was modest and reasonable. They asked that compensation for dead victims to be paid according to the standards of death compensation then prevailing in India: seriously injured victims were to be paid \$100-\$150 per month<sup>5</sup>, to meet their food and medical need; victims with minor injuries were to be paid a one-time compensation for medical costs and economic hardship. It was estimated that the total cost of all compensation would be between \$600 million and \$1.2 billion. The victim's quest for compensation took formal shape in a lawsuit filed by the Government of India against Union Carbide Corporation in New York, in March 1985.

### **SOCIO ECONOMIC PROFILE OF VICTIMS**

NIREH [National Institute for Research in Environmental Health] is ICMR's institute [Indian Council of Medical Research] dealing in health and environmental research. NIREH's second technical report is likely to reveal long-term epidemiological data of Center for Rehabilitation Studies (CRS) carried out from 1996 to 2011. CRS carried out research on gas victims in the city and the report would cover prevalence of morbidity, mortality and socio-economic profile of gas victims. According to them medical needs of gas victims would be paramount, when it comes to up gradation of the BMHRC [Bhopal Memorial Hospital and Research Center]. After clearance

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<sup>5</sup> Ashok S Kalelkar, Arthur D Little, "Investigation of large magnitude incidents Bhopal as a case study", Cambridge Massachusetts, USA, 1988, p 17.

from the ICMR, BMHRC, a super specialty hospital set up for gas victims is being upgraded to a post-graduate institute.<sup>6</sup>

### **VICTIMS REMAIN VICTIMS**

During 1991, seven years after the accident and two years after the settlement, victims were poised to receive compensation payments. But bureaucratic procedures delayed the initiation of payments until 1993.<sup>7</sup> The population of Bhopal had nearly doubled since the accident. The Government was in the process of setting up 17 administrative courts for validating claims and distributing funds. It lacked good medico –legal documentation of damages to sort out valid claims; there were 13,000 death claims, whereas Government figures showed 400 deaths. Out of the 630000 claimants 280000 failed to appear before officials to validate their claims. At the beginning of 1993 distribution of compensation money was started. Union Carbide’s original \$470 million had calculated considerable interest and now totaled \$700 million. By March of that year 700 victims had received \$2 million. This includes relatives of the dead, who received \$3,200 per fatality. Those who suffered serious injuries receives \$3000 each; people with minor injuries were to receive much less. Bhopal has been in a chronic crisis since the accident. Only one visible change was, the parameters of the crisis have changed with time. At the time of the accident, medical and ecological damages were most salient; today the economic and social damages are more important. The city has experienced a steady transformation of social and cultural attitudes towards the disaster. For people not affected by it, the disaster became a nuisance. It was a source of political conflicts and economic decline of the city. This segment of Bhopal viewed gas victims as a burden on the city’s limited resource. They preferred to forget about the accident and get on with their lives. The precautious and explosive situation in Bhopal was apparent during the Hindu-Muslim’s riots of December 1992 and early 1993. Bhopal was among the three worst-affected cities in India and incurred 150 deaths; 1,300 gas victims had their homes and compensation documents destroyed in fires.

### **GOVERNMENT’S INTERFERENCE BEFORE AND AFTER THE TRAGEDY**

While comparing to other states of India, Madhya Pradesh is weak from economic and developmental perspective. But they always tried to attract multi-national companies and plants. They even tried to help their people to uplift from their poor economic background. Still that couldn’t fulfill the requirements; Government was lethargic in case of development. They didn’t focus the basic needs of development but they never wanted to leave chances to encourage business related projects. Thus they invited multinational companies to open big factories,

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<sup>6</sup> “Bhopal gas tragedy: Report on victims' socio-economic profile, mortality”, The Times of India Oct 11, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Shrivastava, “Long-term recovery from the Bhopal crisis”, United Nations University, Website. <http://unu.edu>

industries and plants in Bhopal. It was found in many reports and write ups that Government officials were vanished at the time of gas leak. Even the Chief Minister had fled from city. Not only this, after that Government tried to show that leak's effects are not for long time and everything is normal. Gas has taken many lives of the people from slums and colonies they were the poor in Bhopal. They didn't have any social, economic, political contact or conditions to voice their needs. They were unable to force Government to do justice for them. They have also failed to ask strongly for their demands. According to Mothi Singh, who was the Collector or District Magistrate of Bhopal, response from other bureaucrat in Bhopal during gas tragedy was really demotivating. No one came with a helping hand, Instead of that they all left the town. They came back to town to remove and bury the dead bodies of humans and animals. Respondents itself said during tragedy no one was there to help or assist them. Thus they lost their trust over administration and politicians.

#### **AFTER EFFECT OF TRAGEDY**

The tragedy taught people about the threat could cause by pesticide plant. Thus other nations in the world who have pesticide plant became cautious and they became strict in their safety regulations. Brazil banned MIC, the Union Carbide Plant in France got shut down completely after Bhopal incident they also banned MIC pesticide, other countries who have signed proposal with UCC stepped back from their proposal and they moved it to the other level. Scotland project of UCC was almost about to begin but they have rejected the plan. In 1987 the first petition was filed by a lawyer in New York, on the behalf of a gas victim .Judge asked UCC and Union of India to pay reconciliatory substantial interim relief of \$270 million to the victims. There are different organisations working for supporting the victims. But not many NGOs are effectively working in this scenario. There are some organisations working with Government support. Some NGOs are old, they were found in very beginning years after the tragedy and some was founded by students or human right activists.

In 2001 Union Carbide Corporation was bought by Dow chemicals a Michigan based chemical company and it refuses to accept any responsibility of disaster. According to one of its official "we have tried to identify some humanitarian initiative. It is strictly philanthropic activity and shouldn't be confused with any assertion that we are responding to demands on liabilities". In Texas where Union Carbide was facing an asbestos litigation Dow Chemicals has agreed on taking responsibility. Their argument was because on Bhopal UCC had paid \$470 million settlement so they don't have any liabilities but in Texas there had not been any previous settlement. Indian Oil Corporation was well aware about Dow Chemicals' attitude but in 2004, it was trying to make a deal of technology transfer with Dow Chemicals. People started huge

protest and finally that has got cancelled in 2005. But this deal showed that for business community the only thing is profit and same for Indian Government too.

## **FINDINGS**

UCC paid \$470m to settle litigation stemming from the disaster which never reached the intended recipients. Half of the people were not aware of the exact compensation amount and procedures to secure the same which meant that bulk of the affected people were left with pittance than when compared to the original amount. The unique caste system in India and its social ramifications contributed to the toughness, leakage in the relief, rehabilitation and compensation distribution process. Stock Market conditions and reactions of the times prompted the UCC management to do defensive activities than accommodative activities. Legal aspects regarding the jurisdiction of Indian Courts only worsened the already delayed relief and rehabilitation plan of Govt of India.

## **CONCLUSION**

In Bhopal women and girls need more support to strengthen and to empower them. Peaceful family life, stability, human rights, equality, equal wages, good governance to strengthen health and to reduce gender gap, availability of clean water and proper sanitation, elimination of domestic violence, compensation, support for employment and other facilities for women are significant agenda of Bhopal NGOs. At present women are getting supports from NGOs to uplift their standard of living and health facilities. Still the socio economic condition of women in Bhopal is the same. Goals should be focused to facilitate better living conditions for marginalized communities. Disasters are such a threat that they do not just cause development challenges, but also have long –lasting impacts on less privileged survivors who have very limited access to resources to recover from trauma. Focus should be given for poverty eradication, better health care, gender equality, women empowerment, schemes for women and overall human development. Women in disasters and in conflict situations are often the most vulnerable group because of various impacts; this is same in the case of Bhopal gas tragedy. Women in Bhopal were not financially independent while tragedy happened; this has increased the intensity of disaster. Widowhood and living in families without male household heads also increased vulnerability of women. In case of Bhopal women who have suffered severer loss, lack of privilege, or have faced sexual harassment are often vulnerable than other women. Age also play a role in women’s vulnerability. The young girls faced problems of continuing education; middle aged women faced higher economic burden and each and every one face health disaster. Cultural norms, biological conditions and sociopolitical conditions all has added women’s burden. Women in Bhopal are still fighting for their justice with the support of NGOs and some self-help groups. Their fight is for their right to life.

**Statistical Analysis on Socio-Economic Conditions of the Women in J.P Nagar after Bhopal Gas tragedy 1984**

**Variable – I**

- a. Head of family.
- b. Any special economical relaxation from Government for the houses head by women

**Correspondence Table**

Head of family	Special economical relaxation from government for the houses head by women			
	Yes	No	Not Aware	Active Margin
Elders	1	12	11	24
Husband	31	170	151	352
Respondent	2	28	22	52
others	5	33	34	72
Active Margin	39	243	218	500

**Table 1:** The Correspondence Table displays the frequency for each category of each variable. The relationship between two variables has given in the graph. The head of family and special economical relaxation from Government for the houses head by women are not closer. Thus both variables are not related. Correspondence analysis studies the relationship with non-parametric variables.

**Chi-square Test :** The two variables which have given here consist of more than two categorical variables. The value of test statistic is 2.702. The variables such as Head of family and Special economical relaxation from Government for the houses head by women are dependent, they are related each other. Sig. value is less < 0.05. Since the p – value is less than our chosen significance level < 0.05 we can reject this hypothesis and finalize that there is relation between Head of family and Special economical relaxation from Government for the houses head by women.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.702 <sup>a</sup>	6	.845
Likelihood Ratio	2.997	6	.809
Linear-by-Linear Association	.350	1	.554
N of Valid Cases	500		

a. 2 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.87.

Table: 2

**Variable – II**

- a. Annual savings
- b. Monthly income

Correspondence Table

Annual savings	Monthly income					
	Less than Rs5000	Rs5000- Rs 10000	Rs 10000 - Rs 15000	Above Rs 15000	No fixed income	Active Margin
Less than Rs5000	40	2	0	0	92	134
Rs5000- Rs 10000	27	1	0	0	44	72
Rs10000 - Rs 15000	3	0	0	0	7	10
Above Rs 15000	0	0	0	0	0	0
No saving	87	3	0	0	194	284
Active Margin	157	6	0	0	337	500

**Table 3:** Correspondence Table displays the frequency for each category of each variable .The relationship between two variables has given in the graph. The annual savings and monthly income are closer. Thus both variables are related.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.800 <sup>a</sup>	6	.937
Likelihood Ratio	1.879	6	.930
Linear-by-Linear Association	.098	1	.755
N of Valid Cases	500		

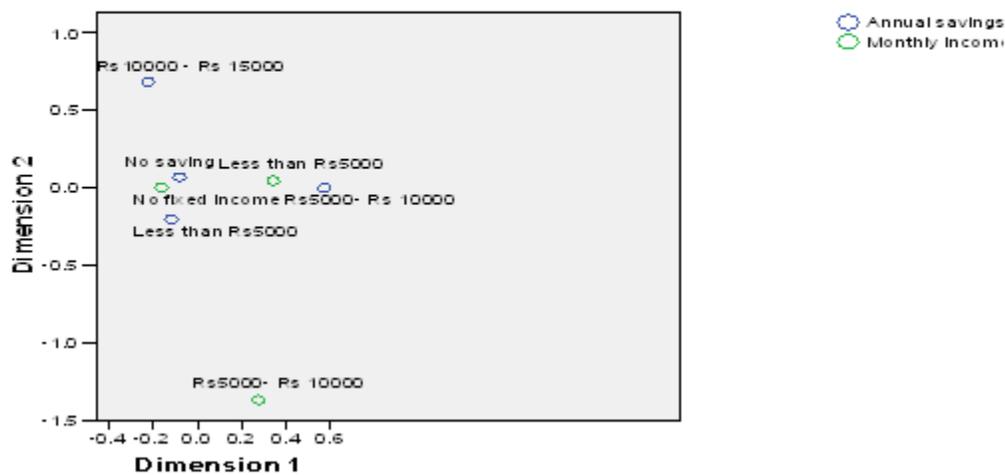
a. 5 cells (41.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .12.

**Table 4:** shows the two variables which have given here consist of more than two categorical variables. The value of test statistic is 1.800. The variables such as Annual savings and Monthly income are independent, they are not related each other. Sig. value is greater  $>0.05$ . Since the p – value is greater than our chosen significance level  $> 0.05$  we can accept this hypothesis and finalize that there is relation between Annual savings and Monthly income.

The above tables can be better understood by the graph. The relationship between two variables has given in the graph. In that blue colour represents annual savings and green colour represents monthly income. The annual savings and monthly income are closer. **Graph :1** below shows both variables are related

Row and Column Points

Symmetrical Normalization



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