

33 years after Bhopal Gas disaster

A Typical Example of the Treacherous Role of Foreign Capital in India

Bhopal gas disaster in the world's worst industrial disaster, occurred on the intervening night of December 2-3, 1984 at the plant of Union Carbide India Ltd (UCIL), the subsidiary of the American giant chemical corporation, Union Carbide Corporation (UCC). It is undoubtedly a man-made industrial disaster created by the U.C.C.

This disaster has a devastating effect in various forms on the lives of people of Bhopal and its surroundings for many generations remaining as a constant like peril. Even after 33 years of occurrence of this U.C.C created industrial disaster, the people for more than 3 generations and the environment at Bhopal are suffering from its toxic affects without any hope or chances of remedy or recourse to alleviation.

Thousands of people were killed instantly due to release of a poisonous gas from the U.C.I.L. plant of Bhopal. Thousands more died subsequently due to the toxic effect of the released poisonous gas. Thousands of people were disabled mentally and physically. Some of them became blind losing their eye sights. Some of them were attacked with nervous ailments while some others were attacked with long ailments. Many women could not conceive and become mothers as the poisonous gas impacted the potency of both the women and men even after 3 generations. Many women are giving birth to mentally and physically deformed children. More than 5, 50,000 people were exposed to the poisonous gas and are suffering from its toxic effect with one incurable ailment or other. Even as on today many people suffer from disturbed sleep. Some people suffer from stomach sickness. Apart from those killed there are those who are struggling between life and death. Many of the disabled gas victims lost their lively-hood and are suffering for sustenance.

As around 40 metric tonnes of poisonous gas released from U.C.I.L. plant has dissolved in to the environment surrounding Bhopal, the environment is highly polluted. The soil is poisonously contaminated to an extent of 1,10,000 tons. Even after 33 years of the pollution and contamination of environment and soil no action is taken to re-mediate the pollution.

While the above mentioned are the glaring visible impacts of the Bhopal gas disaster created by the U.C.C, there are far more important invisible implications involved in this disaster which brought in to light about the horrible and inhuman dimension of the nature of the foreign capital invested in India.

U.C.C. had entered India at the wake of the U.S. aid programmes to India, particularly through U.S aid to agricultural development and agricultural commodities programmes to India. U.C.C started its subsidiary U.C.I.L, establishing its pesticides factory at Bhopal. The stated objective of U.C.I.L at Bhopal plant was production of pesticides to cater the needs for development of Indian agricultural sector.

But the Bhopal gas disaster of Dec 1984 and its devastation of gigantic proportions of killings and maiming of people, and its intensity of environmental pollution and soil contamination, causes to raise a justified doubt and suspicion about the truthfulness of the stated objective of U.C.I.L.

It is a well known fact that U.C.C was a chemical supplier to the U.S. war department during World War-II and that during that time it had experimented in chemical war fare.

Aftermath of the Bhopal gas disaster, a joint secretary of the P.M.O, Rajeswari Tandon in a note opened that "It appears that a powerful lobby of Union Carbide has been active in Bhopal ever since the tragedy, **to distort evidence of Cyanide poisoning and experiments earlier conducted on Union Carbide premises.**"

Till date the U.C.C has not disclosed what were the chemicals (gasses) that were released in to atmosphere on 2/3 December '84 and it denied to do so in the ruse of 'secrets of business'.

The U.C.C claimed that it was Methyl iso-cynate (MIC) gas that was leaked in to the atmosphere from Bhopal plant. However the findings of a German toxicologist volunteer hinted that autopsy results have shown indications of hydrogen cyanide poisoning.

Dr Heeresh Chandra, professor of toxicology and Medico-legal expert in M.P., who had conducted autopsies on gas victims has also strongly indicated the presence of hydrogen cyanide in the dead bodies.

U.C.C made various attempts to confuse scientists; leading to a division of opinion over the chemical cause of the deaths.

Union Carbide Corporation made every effort and let loose its considerable financial and lobby about to contain the matter.

It influenced Dr N.P.Mishra, Professor of Medicine, Gandhi Medical college in Bhopal, who also had conducted autopsies on victims by luring him by inviting to private seminars, purported to discuss the effects of Methyl Isocyanate (MIC) to which he attended by travelling USA bypassing the health ministry for such private seminars. He was also felicitated to meet the judge in the USA, who then also visited laboratories in USA and UK to discuss with scientists there on medical effects of MIC on human system. Thus Dr.Mehata was roped to its side by U.C.C, which claims that it was MIC that leaked in to atmosphere. This Dr.Mehata influenced by U.C.C had went even to the extent of making the Director of health service, health ministry of M.P, to decide to not use STS (Sodium try sulphate injections) on victims. STS is the right drug for hydrogen cyanide poisoning; thus he colluded with the U.C.C, to support the claim of UCC, that it was only MIC that caused the deaths of victims.

Against this even the Congress leader Digvijay Singh had written a letter to P.M. Rajiv Gandhi on 29/8/85 complaining that “many victims have died because the government doctor refused to administer the right drug viz STS”. He also stated that with the administration of STS, there was a subjective improvement and objective improvement in a good number (of victims).

Moreover the U.C.C even refused to suggest treatment to the gas victims, according to a secret note in the PMO file Oct.10, 1985, which states that “U.C.C’s technical team which came on 6th December 1984, included one occupational health specialist of Indian origin. The team was repeatedly requested to provide information on toxicity and medical treatment. They did not provide any”. Such was the monstrosity of the U.C.C.

All these above evidence clearly indicate that it was not MIC, but Hydrogen Cynate that was released from UCIL Bhopal plant that caused devastation.

U.C.C propagated that “it was proved that MIC at a temperature of more than 200 degrees Celsius breaks up in to Hydrogen Cyanide molecules”. But it chose to not to explain what made the Bhopal plant to keep MIC at a temperature of more than 200 degrees Celsius, knowing full well of the outcome. U.C.C. cannot argue that the atmospheric temperature at Bhopal on that day was more than 200 degrees Celsius.

With the above available paltry information with a correct reasoning one can easily arrive to the conclusion of probability that: a) It was not MIC but Hydrogen Cyanide that was released from Bhopal plant. b) UCIL is not indulged in the production of pesticides only as per its stated objective. c) When connected with its past history, there is every probability to UCC being engaged in experiments of chemical war-fare, with trails of those chemicals on human beings for finding their effect. d) Since it was not easy and possible to conduct such chemical experiments on human beings, under rigorous regulations, laws and checks in USA or in any other developed country, U.C.C chose to conduct such horrible and inhuman experiments in the developing country India, which was dependent on foreign assistance, US aid and foreign private capital-in this case US private capital-for development. U.S.aid programmes for development of agriculture and agricultural commodities has proved the way to UCC to enter India under the pretext of production of chemical pesticides, enabling it conduct chemical war experiments on the people of India. Even in the case of mass deaths during these chemical war experiments, U.C.C. can easily come out by paying paltry amounts in compensation against huge compensation amounts payable in U.S., by class-action suites.

So it is plausible to conclude that U.C.C. has chosen Bhopal plant, to conduct its chemical war experiments using people of India as guinea pigs. Thus monstrous and horrible dimension of the role of foreign capital in the borrowing countries particularly in India can easily be seen in the present epoch of imperialist globalisation. In the ‘clinical trails’ industry run by foreign capital through its subsidiaries, the people of our country are used as ‘guinea pigs’ with impunity. In the same way in the ‘surrogacy’ industry run by foreign capital through its agencies and agents the women employed as surrogacy mothers too are treated inhumanly as ‘guinea pigs’.

Such has been the horrible dimension of the role of foreign private capital in India, which aspect has to be noted and recognised as an unpardonable evil attached to foreign capital. This is a sacrilege against the very humanity. With its creation of Bhopal gas disaster the U.C.C has brought this evil dimension of the role of foreign capital, besides it’s already noted features of ruthless exploitation, loot of natural and human resources, drain of capital to the parent corporate organisation under various pretexts undermining the sovereignty of the borrowing/permitting developing country for business and reducing the local governments in to subservience by controlling their economies, as well through nurturing the local (indigenous) capitalist class, which also happens to be the ruling-class. This is another serious aspect of foreign capital which is not only abominable but also obnoxious which has to be fought against uncompromisingly.

U.C.C to cover-up its treacherous monstrosity of experimenting on Indian people to find out the effects of chemical weapons, had skilfully diverted the attention of the world towards the issue safety arrangements, safety regulations and machinery of safety control at U.C.I.L. plant of Bhopal impressing that the occurrence of gas disaster was only due to breach of safety regulations at Bhopal plant.

In this connection it is noteworthy that the giant transnational DOW chemical corporation, which is the present owner of Bhopal U.C.I.L. plant premises by its own self had sponsored two French writers who had written "FREEDOM AT MIDNIGHT"(Dominique Laperro and Javier More) to visit India-Bhopal-and write a book on the Bhopal disaster, who in turn using their talents and skills of fictional writing had written book called "FIVE PAST MID NIGHT AT BHOPAL" in an attractive fictional form implying that U.C.C. has given highest importance to safety standards and safety arrangements with rigorous safety regulations; and gave the best safety training and provided a safety manual to the concerned Indian safety supervising staff. Despite these arrangements sophisticated safety equipment, training and regulations, the Indian staff had failed in understanding and following the safety precautions on the night of 2/3 December 1984, which led to the industrial disaster. Thus U.C.C has designed a perfect plan to absolve itself from its criminality of causing the worst industrial disaster at Bhopal.

It is a well-known fact even from the time of the famous American writer, Jack London who in his famous novel "IRON HEEL" had vividly described how the big capitalist industrialists at the time of an industrial accident, to evade their responsibility of payment of compensation to injured workmen, argue about the negligence of workmen, which the bourgeoisie law accepts. Even in the different conspiracy case in India, the communists raised this issue of industrialists arguing the 'negligence' of workers to evade compensation, which is being accepted by the colonial law which was nothing but an unequal law. Now the same tricky argument was put forward by U.C.C to absolve itself even from a minimal liability of its creation of the Bhopal disaster.

According to an advice note given by Attorney general K.Parasaram "If by American standards it is not a big amount and union carbide deposits the amount in the court without contesting the suit in full settle- ment **but only pleading that they do not accept any negligence on their part..**"

To support its litigative and false argument, U.C.C has hired the voices of prominent officials from the Indian administration and mediators and make believe the world that U.C.C was in no way responsible for the disaster.

One Mr Ashok S.Kelkar, senior vice president of the U.S. based Arthur D Lithe inc. written a note to Rajiv Gandhi, P.M. of India stating that "I know and have had several inter-actions with Mr. Warren Anderson, chairman of U.C.C. I and my staff visited dozens of U.C. facilities and not met with their plant personnel and evaluated their operations from safety perspective. Through this interaction with both the senior management and the plant management of U.C.C., I have formed the following personal opinion: **UCC is a decent and honourable company. From top to down it is a caring company which places safety concerns on even footing with financial ones. Mr Anderson and his senior management team are interested in a rapid and fair settlement of Bhopal litigation.** In this letter dated 22-01-1986 Mr.Kelkar also reminded Rajiv Gandhi that he was his Doon school batch mate and that his father was advisor to Indira Gandhi.

Again another one called Mr. Paul Srivatsav, executive director industrial crises institute, New York wrote a letter on 3-2-1986 to S.Singh, Joint secretary in ministry of external affairs, reminding of his meetings with Hansaraj Bhardvaj, minister of Law and Justice on behalf of U.C.C., and of the brief meeting held with S.Singh in August 1986 with MS Mabel Rebello of Bhopal and subsequently that he discussed the problem of Bhopal 'tragedy' victims with many political leaders and government officials in India, and also discussed with top management U.C.C. and observers there; informing that he would be available in Delhi for 3 weeks from December 8, 1986, proposing to mediate in the issue, if he is contacted at two specified phone numbers.

Thus the mediators hired and sponsored by U.C.C. were in active advocacy of the visitors of U.C.C, the culprit.

Even Eagle Busher, former undersecretary of state of USA, who was then working for Dr.Kisinger had contacted P.M. Rajiv Gandhi on behalf of U.C.C., through L.K.Jha, advisor for P.M. Rajiv Gandhi and made that advisor to parroting on behalf of U.C.C, that "Mr. Warren Anderson is anxious for as generous a settlement as possible on an amicable settlement." (Letter from L.K.Jha dated December 15, 1985).

But, however in practice it is proved that the U.C.C. was not interested in a generous settlement of compensation to the victims as has been propagated. It is proved that the objective of U.C.C was "to safe guard its high stakes at any cost, and the future of all pesticides/herbicide/pharmaceuticals multi-nationals who are covertly behind Union Carbide in this matter. Their manipulations/actual working need to be closely monitored", as has been warned by one Ajit Hutheesing, Rajiv Gandhi's green which based uncle".

U.C.C fought tooth and nail to lessen the amount of payment of compensation to victims. In 1988, the U.C.C was allowed to be totally bailed out from its responsibility with an out-of-court settlement with a payment of paltry amount of \$470 million to Indian government against the 'grand claim' of the Indian government for more than \$ 3.1 billion at a Bhopal court through the initial demand of the government was for \$ 1.5 billion.

Initially the Indian government claimed damages to a tune of \$ 1.5 billion before a U.S. court. But after dealing with the U.S judge concerned with the case, it reduced its claim to \$ 500 million. But the Indian government sued UCC for more than \$ 3.1 billion in a Bhopal court which was of no consequence; merely to hood-wink the people of India and make believe them as if it was fighting for justice.

The treatment of the Indian government, rulers and the ruling-classes of India towards the treacherous, inhuman and culpable corporate criminal U.C.C is highly deplorable. No independent, sovereign rulers and governments with even an iota of patriotism will act in such a shameful way.

Within 3 days of the occurrence of the Bhopal gas disaster, the culprit, Warren Anderson, the chairman of the U.C.C. who is responsible for the disaster was allowed to escape from India, facilitating him to abscond with royal treatment and facilities. No sincere efforts whatever were made to punish the U.C.C corporate criminal before the Indian courts or elsewhere by the then Congress party government of Rajiv Gandhi in power or the successive governments of other ruling parties in power. Knowing full well of the machinations adopted by the criminal UCC and its culpability, the Indian governments and rulers have cringed before UCC and craved for some sort of a settlement with it, exclusively to appease the anger of Indian people against the monstrosity of UCC.

Even almost after 6 months of the disaster, the government failed to come to the rescue of the victims. It did not provide satisfactory relief or medical treatment or facilities for the treatment of the poisonous gas affected victims.

The governments (central and state) could not prepare even a full list of affected persons. Compensation has not been paid to all the families of persons who were killed by the poisonous gas. Persons who were disabled or incapacitated were not fully treated and recovered. Right drug was not administered to victims, despite finding it to be STS. The governments did a little to rehabilitate the victims. In fact the governments were insensitive to the suffering victims. The callous attitude of the governments towards the victims or the devastation caused by the disaster was unprecedented even surpassing the gravity of callousness of Emperor Nero!

On the other hand the central and state governments chose to win over a substantial section of public opinion to the side of the rulers and ruling party in power, to promote Rajiv Gandhi's role in finding a 'solution'. They also made efforts to deflect public attention to the development work done by Arjun Singh government in M.P. To achieve this objective they roped in the voluntary organisations to their side to organise seminars focusing attention on the work that has been done by the government and the work that remains to be done. To save the face of the state government they also made non-left voluntary organisation to focus on the guilt of UCC rather than against MP government; in the lines of an international seminar intended to be conducted by the 'The world peace council' which was supposed to be a left front. Thus they tried to build consensus with left, instead of taking much more required action towards rehabilitation and relief of the gas victims and cost gating the corporate criminal the UCC.

The successive non congress governments in the centre and MP state too did little to throw the book at the culprit UCC. Even the central government led by the P.M, A.B.Vajapayee of BJP could do nothing in this issue to book UCC, than merely sending a formal letter of request to U.S.government for extradition of warrant Anderson to be tried in Indian courts which was never strongly pursued further. Nor even the successive governments have ever tried to better the relief and rehabilitation programmes and activities alleviate the unending sufferings of the Bhopal gas victims. Leave alone the gas victims even after 33 years of the occurrence no government whatever in power had even acted sincerely and honesty to remediate the toxic polluted environment or the toxic contaminated soil in around Bhopal. Not even the tonnes of toxic waste lying in the premises of U.C.I.L Bhopal plant has been removed.

While the present day legal owner of the Bhopal, UCIL Bhopal plant-The DOW chemicals-is stubbornly denying to accept the liability and responsibility to clean and clear the toxic waste and to take remedial measures of environment in and around Bhopal, the Indian governments are accepting it mukly have meted out royal treatment to the DOW company facilitating its business activities in India.

The big capitalist industrial class of India-the dominant ruling class in India-under the leadership of Ratan Tata have opposed the just proposal that the DOW company shall take up the responsibility for remediation of Bhopal, supporting the gaint transnational corporation DOW chemicals with utmost insensitivity and disregard towards the suffering of people of India not ashamed of its lack of patriotism or national instinct which it has supposed to have.

No doubt on the outside all this appears to be the improper and unpatriotic conduct of the government of Congress party, of Rajiv Gandhi in power at the time of Bhopal gas disaster. But in reality even the non-congress governments subsequently in power at the state and centre done nothing in this case. Which in other words means this is not a failure or improper conduct of an individual prime minister or of a particular ruling class party. On the contrary it is the shameful failure of our very ruling system directed by our ruling classes.

These ruling classes and their representative rulers are dependent on the foreign imperialist capital including foreign private capital. They have subjected our economy to the domination and exploitation, draining away our capital and looting our national resources. This state of affairs made them to be subservient to imperialist foreign capital making them satraps to the rule of imperialism and particularly to the American imperialism and its interests. That is why they couldn't and did not do anything against U.C.C., even at the cost of betraying the people of India in safeguarding the interests of U.C.C.

We have been witnessing at every minute of the day, how our rulers and the big industrial-capitalist ruling class is kow-towing the American imperialist master craving for their FDI investments in India. Neither the nationalistic pretensions of the ruling BJP government in power nor the secular pretensions of the other ruling parties in power in different states, nor of the contending other ruling parties for power, are coming in between against their loyal subordination and servitude to the imperialism and imperialist foreign capital particularly the American imperialism.

Such are the lessons to be drawn by the democratic and patriotic forces in India from the episode of the Bhopal gas disaster created by the U.C.C., and take up the necessary tasks to establish a real people's democratic system (new democracy) in India with an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal programme to totally and such betrayals and sacrileges against people of India. Such a course of action alone will be the true patriotic and nationalistic task before the people of India.

(By courtesy of Yatish yadav for inputs from the article "Justice sabotaged" published in the Sunday Express dated 27-08-2017)
