



Visitors appreciate Kokila Bhattacharya's painting at the 'We All Live in Bhopal' event.



Jayshree Chander, founder, Beyond Holistic.

For Bhopal, in America

RITU JHA

San Francisco Bay Area nonprofit Beyond Holistic hosted a weeklong commemoration, 'We All Live in Bhopal,' of the gas disaster of 1984. It was held at the University of California-Berkeley's University Hall.

"I do not want people to just come and attend the event and go back with some information," Jayshree Chander, founder of Beyond Holistic, told *India Abroad*. "I really want people to participate."

She first visited Bhopal, she said, in 1997 to help survivors of the 1984 disaster and worked as a volunteer at the Sambhavna Clinic. Within months, she fell ill due to the toxic water.

"I was infected by the environment there and had to return to the United States. It took me over three years to get better," she told the audience. "Currently, the concern is second generation and the future generation, who we believe will be impacted."

She said the world has not learnt from Bhopal. "It's quite remarkable that such disasters keep happening, whether it's Union Carbide disaster in India or an oil spill in the US."

"This is a big issue," Chander added. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi is very eager to have foreign investment but he is not prioritizing the environmental, health and safety issues along with that. We could



Snapshots of the event.

be setting ourselves up into another Bhopal or worse than the Bhopal tragedy. Although it's wonderful that his administration spoke to the activists who were on hunger strike and decided on increasing compensation, we are concerned on the regulations the new government should implement."

She asked why the Indian government was giving out taxpayers' money as compensation. "Dow Chemical should be coming up with the extra money," Chander said.

On a recent visit to Bhopal, she said, she saw many nonprofits doing good work but observed that environmental cleanup was lacking.

"What is really disrupting is that there might be higher rate of birth defects for generations," she added. "Union Carbide didn't pay for any effects it had on the children exposed to the disaster."

Rick Hind, legislative director at Greenpeace who has worked on chemical disaster prevention policy since 1984, said both the US and Indian governments should enforce laws.

"At Greenpeace, we are pushing for new regulation in the US to use safer process of using chemicals and if those regulations are adopted by President Obama, they could become standard for the whole world to enforce," Hind told *India Abroad*.

"We are not going to give up. If this (Bhopal disaster) had happened in the US, he (Warren M Anderson, the then Union Carbide chief) would have been held accountable and the company would have been thoroughly compensated people. But since they had the plant in India, they knew they had less liability and perhaps were less careful."

Pradeep Sundriyal, who helped organize the event, told *India Abroad*, "There are so many of us who are not aware of what happened and what is happening in Bhopal. We need to make people know about the risk of industrial accidents which can happen near their cities and we hope we will do that."

Kokila Bhattacharya, from Bhopal, whose painting was exhibited at the event, said, "My painting shows a mother holding her suffering child. Toxins are found in the breast milk of mothers in Bhopal."

She said her painting talks of Bhopal's second disaster — generation of deformed babies due to the lingering chemicals in and around the contaminated site.

Bhattacharya, who also exhibited in Mumbai last week, said her father and sister are victims themselves.

