

The bhopal, india disaster essay example

[Business](#), [Company](#)



The Indian ambition of prosperity in the post-independence era led to the path of industrialization. As a matter of caution and to avoid the perils of an absolute communist or capitalist economy, the leaders of independent India chose a middle path, i. e., to allow private companies to operate but with government control. The opening of the economy witnessed allowing setting up of industrial units by private companies but subjected the same to license raj. The ineffective implementation of the government controls resulted in one of the worst industrial disasters known to mankind.

THE COMPANY

Union Carbide (India) Limited was in operation in India even prior to independence. It commenced its operations in India with the manufacture of dry cell batteries and later got diversified into agricultural products division. Subsequently, it opened a pesticide manufacturing plant in the Bhopal district of Madhya Pradesh, which was welcomed with both the state and the central government. The government was anxious about the industry in the anticipation of creation of jobs and improving the economy of the region. The immediate results of the opening of the plant were as per the expectations of the government and it provided employment at good wages to the unemployed to the locals residing near the plant. As a result, more people started migrating towards the region and settled in the vicinity of the plant. The plant started manufacture of various pesticides including SEVIN, which comprised of the toxic methyl isocyanate. UCIL's demand to import methyl isocyanate was rejected by the government in order to force local production and boost employment opportunities. Accordingly, methyl isocyanate was produced indigenously at the plant.

Peterson M J points out that the demand for the pesticides from the plant in Bhopal reduced on account of the availability of the cheaper local substitutes and the market and the shift of the users in Europe and USA to upgraded pesticides (3). Due to the decline in the demand of the pesticides, the plant started incurring losses and UCIL started cutting down costs. The workforce declined and in the year 1984 the focus of the company was on utilizing existing stocks and hence bare minimum expense was incurred on the safety systems at the plant.

THE DISASTER

It was in these adverse conditions that the disaster occurred on the night of 2 December 1984, when there was a leakage of the toxic gas methyl isocyanate from the plant. The additional storage of methyl isocyanate due to shortage of demand in the market coupled with disregard to the safety norms by reducing the workforce and turning off the safety systems led to one of the worst industrial disasters of the world.

THE CATASTROPHE

The leak of the lethal gas created a cloud which soon spread in the vicinity and proved fatal to thousands of human beings and cattle. Sriramachari S suggests the early symptoms of exposure noticed among those persons who inhaled the poisonous gas were irritation in eyes and respiratory problems. Soon thousands of persons died due to exposure to the poisonous gas (3). The long term effects of the gas leak include deformities, genetic disorders in the coming generations.

The survivors, who were exposed to the toxic gas, were either living with

deformities or/and without their relatives and friends who have lost their lives in the accident. This resulted in multiple litigations against the company. According to the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster (Processing of Claims) Act, 1985, all individual claims were clubbed by the government and Government of India was appointed as the legal representative for all the victims. Supreme Court of India, on 14 February 1989 ordered Union Carbide Corporation to pay U. S. Dollars 470 million as per terms of the settlement entered into between the government of India and Union Carbide Corporation. Although the settlement involved suspension of both civil and criminal proceedings but the court ruled against settlement of criminal proceedings. While in criminal case Warren Anderson, CEO of Union Carbide Corporation was convicted, but couldn't be taken custody off. He was declared absconded by the Indian courts and recently his demise resulted in the end of the criminal case.

CONCLUSION

The objective of achieving economic growth of a nation needs to be harmonized with the safety and needs of the society and the environment. Economic development should be the way forward by integration the concerns of the business with that of the society and the environment. It is quintessential to keep a check and regulate industries which may have an adverse impact on the society and the environment. The development has to be holistic and sustainable in nature and should look into the needs and aspirations of the future generation and strive to avoid such undesirable circumstances. The government of the country should adopt a pro-active approach and constant surveillance should be undertaken as no amount of

compensation can repay for the loss of the victims who have suffered injuries and lost their near and dear ones at the calamity. Nevertheless, the legal enforcement mechanism of a country needs to be strengthened and the penalties should be severe to act as a detriment to such industries from flouting the safety norms.

WORKS CITED

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