

Preface

Four years after the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) was founded, and eight years before *Down To Earth* began publishing, a catastrophe was to leave a terrible blot on industrialising India. On the intervening night of December 2-3, 1984, methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas leaking from Union Carbide's factory in Bhopal claimed more than 5,000 lives. More than half a million people still suffer the side effects of that exposure; the toxicity has been passed on to the second and third generations.

This book is about that tragedy. It is a chronicle of the criminal oversight of environmental crimes, incompetent governance and the highly unacceptable lack of responsibility towards human lives. After 30 years, this book underscores how the tragedy has become a continuing disaster.

Anil Agarwal, CSE's founder, was in Bhopal in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy. His vivid reportage of the first 15 days of the tragedy—the book starts with this—almost reads like current state of affairs. Whether it is about punishing the culprits, treating the victims, giving the right compensation or, most importantly, working on environmental protection to avoid a repeat of Bhopal, the book has painfully come to the conclusion that the country has developed selective learning disability. The conclusion, as the book will unfold, is based on CSE's continuous engagement with and examination of issues related to the tragedy. CSE also tested samples of water and soil from the Union Carbide factory and its vicinity. We report with considerable concern and anger that this hazardous waste still needs to be disposed of, and the polluters brought to book.

In the 22 years of its existence, *Down To Earth* has retained a deliberate focus on the Bhopal tragedy. The book combines CSE's rigorous scrutiny and *Down To Earth's* ground reportage. There are three aspects of this tragedy, and expectedly of this book: what caused it; how did India respond; and what has it learnt? Every page will inform you, force you to pause and ask a few questions on these three aspects. In the end, the book gives a blueprint for how the country can avoid such a tragedy. We must keep Bhopal in our consciousness; we must bring justice to the victims of the tragedy. We all should know we are safe; that the lessons of Bhopal have been learnt.