Disaster and the dynamics of memory

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Remembering Bhopal: Disaster and the Dynamics of Memory

By

Pawas Bisht

A doctoral thesis
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Abstract

Calls for examining the interrelations between individual and collective processes of remembering have been repeatedly made within the field of memory studies. With the tendency being to focus on either the individual or the collective level, there have been few studies that have undertaken this task in an empirically informed manner. This thesis seeks to engage in such an examination by undertaking a multi-level study of the remembrance of the Bhopal gas disaster of 1984. The gas leak in Bhopal (India) was one of the world’s worst industrial disasters and has seen a long-running political contestation involving state institutions, social movement organisations (SMOs) and individual survivors. Employing an ethnographic methodology, incorporating interviews, participant observation and archival research, the study seeks to examine similarities and divergences in how these institutional, group-level and individual actors have remembered the disaster. It identifies the factors that modulated these remembrances and focuses on examining the nature of their interrelationship.

The study conceptualises remembering as ‘memory-work’: an active process of meaning-making in relation to the past. The memory-work of state institutions was examined within the judicial and commemorative domains. The analysis demonstrates how state institutions engaged in a limiting of the meaning of the disaster removing from view the transnational causality of the event and the issue of corporate liability. It tracks how the survivors’ suffering was dehistoricised and contained within the framework of a localized claims bureaucracy. The examination of SMO memory-work focused on the activities of the two most prominent groups working in Bhopal. The analysis reveals how both organisations emphasise the continuing suffering of the survivors to challenge the state’s ‘settlement’ of the event. However, clear differences are outlined between the two groups in the wider frameworks of meaning employed by them to explain the suffering, assign responsibility and define
justice. Memory-work at the individual level was accessed in the memory narratives of individual survivors generated through ethnographic interviews. The study examined how individual survivors have made sense of the lived experience of suffering caused by the disaster and its aftermath. The analysis revealed how the frameworks of meaning imposed by the state are deeply incommensurate with the survivors’ needs to express the multi-dimensionality of their suffering; it tracks how the state imposed identities are resisted but cannot be entirely overcome in individual remembrance. Engagement with the activities of the SMOs is demonstrated as enabling the development of an alternative activist remembrance for a limited group of survivors.

Overall, the thesis seeks to provide a complex and empirically grounded account of the relations between the inner, individual level processes of memory linked to lived experience and the wider, historically inflected, collective and institutional registers of remembrance. The examination of the encounters between these diverse individual and collective remembrances in the context of an on-going political contestation allows the study to contribute to ongoing discussions within the field about memory politics in a global age and memory and justice.
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Chapter-1 Introduction

Remembering Disaster: Contested Meaning-Making

My story has to start with that night. I don’t remember anything about it, though I was there, nevertheless it’s where my story has to start. *When something big like that night happens, time divides into before and after, the before time breaks up into dreams, the dreams dissolve to darkness.* That’s how it is here. All the world knows the name of Khaufpur, but no one knows how things were before that night. (Animal, *Animal’s People*, Sinha 2008:14)

Has the world forgotten Bhopal? (The Lancet 2000)

On the night of December 2\(^\text{nd}\) and the morning hours of December 3\(^\text{rd}\) 1984, several tons of highly poisonous methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas leaked from a pesticide factory in the city of Bhopal, the capital of the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. The factory was owned and operated by Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL), the Indian subsidiary of Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), an American multinational corporation and one of the world’s biggest chemical producers. The suffering caused by the leak was immense: over 520,000 people were exposed to the gas, between 4000-7000 suffered an agonising death in the immediate aftermath, and thousands more experienced short-term and long-term health impairments (ICMR n.d., Muralidhar 2004/5, Amnesty 2004). The ‘Bhopal Gas Disaster’, as it came to be known, was and continues to be, in terms of the nature and scale of human suffering caused, one of the world’s worst industrial disasters.

Mass disasters like Bhopal are cataclysmic events simultaneously disrupting multiple levels of identity and meaning, a ‘discontinuity’ that requires ‘dealing with’ in national narratives, social identities and personal biographies. The multiple processes of remembering performed in the aftermath of a disaster like Bhopal are fundamental material, social and cultural engagements through which different actors seek to overcome this disruption and collapse
of the ‘social needs for physical survival, social order and meaning’ (Oliver-Smith 1998:186). This ‘totality’ of cataclysmic events in terms of focusing the attention of different processes of remembrance does not however ensure any harmony in the meaning making and identity-work undertaken by different actors (Feuchtwang 2000). In the case of Bhopal, the relations between remembrances undertaken by different actors have been distinctly marked by active contestation. What was the causality of the disaster? Who are the victims? What is the nature of their suffering? How should it be remedied? Who bears responsibility for the suffering? How does the disaster relate to issues in the present and the future? For the past 29 years all of these questions have been negotiated in a transnational and multi-layered mnemonic contestation involving national governments, judicial systems, transnational corporations, social movement organisations (SMOs) and ordinary citizens.

Indian state institutions attempted to contain the meaning of the disaster, removing from view connections, which might have delegitimised established and emergent statist discourses. State remembrance attempted a ‘settlement’ of the suffering caused by the event through judicial, bureaucratic and medical interventions. The SMOs in their remembrance seek to destabilise the state’s settlement of the event, foregrounding the continuing suffering of the gas survivors and the emergence of new categories of injuries and victims. They endeavour to expand the meaning of the disaster linking it to wider frameworks of class injustice and environmentalism. The survivors on their part have struggled to make sense of the violent disruption of their personal lives and social relations, the embodied experience of continuing physical suffering, and the long-drawn out process of claiming recompense for their losses.

This thesis undertakes a systematic examination of these different remembrances and their interrelationship. Employing a multi-level approach, I examine the historical trajectory and contemporary dynamics of the remembrance of the disaster by state institutions, SMOs and individual survivors. The key questions that the thesis seeks to answer are: how have
state institutions, social movement organisations and individual survivors remembered the disaster? What factors have impacted the meaning-making and identity work undertaken by these collective and individual actors? What has been the interrelationship between these different remembrances of the event? What kind of historical change is observable in this relationship?

In answering these questions the thesis seeks to make several key contributions to the field of memory studies. Firstly, the multi-level design of the study allows for an empirical examination of the relationship between diverse individual and collective processes of remembering. Examining the relations between the inner, individual level processes of memory linked to lived experience and the wider, historically inflected, collective and institutional registers of remembrance has been posited as the raison d'être for an interdisciplinary field of memory studies (Radstone 2005; Olick 2009). There have however been few studies that have attempted to empirically engage in such multi-level examination. The tendency has been to focus on either individual or collective levels (Radstone 2005). This propensity has been especially pronounced in examinations of the remembrance of past suffering, which has been marked by problematic mobilisations of the concept of trauma (Keightley and Pickering 2012). The thesis will remedy this tendency by empirically examining the relationship between the negotiation of past suffering at collective and individual levels without taking recourse to concept of individual or collective/cultural trauma. In doing so, the thesis will contribute to an examination of the relations between individual and collective forms of memory while avoiding the analytical pitfalls of asocial individualism or social determinism.

Secondly, the thesis will make a contribution to debates about the transformation of memory politics in a globalising world. A significant body of work within the field has been putting forward macro-narratives of an epochal shift in the nature of collective memory under the impact of the globalized ‘second modernity’. A deterritorialised and mediated collective memory is seen as transcending the traditional container of the nation-state and entering into a transnational framework. These accounts tend to be unequivocally
celebratory with the imagination of a mnemonic community transcending the nation-state seen as providing the basis for post-nationalist political alliances and a more democratic and just global polity. The analytical emphasis in these accounts is firmly on the ‘connectivity’ of memory, facilitating ‘affiliation across lines of difference’ (Hirsch, 2012: 21). More recently however, there has been a growing unease with this exclusive focus on the structural multi-directionality and connectivity of memory and its simplistic rendering as a site of progressive politics (Rothberg 2011; Amine and Beschea-Fache 2012). There is a clear recognition that while the study of memory needs to take into account global-local dynamics, emphasis has to be restored on the actors, contexts and processes of remembering. To facilitate this, calls have been made for studies empirically examining ‘encounters between different kinds of remembering’: global and local, public and private, individual and collective (Amine and Beschea-Fache 2012:100). Only by examining the relations between these different sets of remembering would we get a clear picture of the limits, contestations and inequalities characterising the field of symbolic politics enabled by a connective transnational memory (Bisht 2013). The thesis responds directly to these concerns in the adoption of a multi-level model of memory-work. By conceptualising remembrance as ‘memory-work’ the thesis focuses firmly on the work done by actors as they engage in remembering inflected by global-local dynamics; limiting the meaning of the disaster to local concerns and identities or expanding it to make connections with trans-local concerns and transnational communities requires an active shaping of remembrance. The thesis examines this active shaping, tracking how and why different actors frame their remembrance in local, national or global terms. The multi-level examination allows for an examination of the contestation that characterizes this connective memory-work and the inequalities in the capacities of different actors.

Thirdly, the thesis, in choosing to assess the mnemonic contestation around Bhopal, draws attention to a set of memory struggles, which have so far been excluded from the purview of memory studies. Examinations of political struggles implicating memory have largely been focused on cases involving
ethnic violence inflicted by state regimes (see Misztal 2003; Levy and Sznaider 2010; Healy and Tumarkin 2011). In particular, there has been an extensive engagement with the role of remembrance in institutional processes of ‘truth and reconciliation’ mobilised as part of transitional justice. Instances where suffering and human rights abuses have occurred outside the framework of ethnic violence and derived from the actions of transnational corporations or from the intersection of multi-scalar processes involving both state and corporate actors have not found their way into academic discussions about memory and justice. This exclusion is partly explained by the fact that such injuries continue to struggle for recognition in transnational human rights regime and transitional justice mechanisms. Bringing Bhopal within the purview of memory studies will ensure that the field does not duplicate the institutional non-recognition of suffering generated by corporate and non-state actors. Further, examining memory politics around these ‘new’ sets of injustice will serve to expand the field’s current understanding of the relationship between memory and justice. One of the key issues the thesis will examine is how the absence of effective transnational and national forums, which can articulate, enforce and institutionalise the liability of transnational corporations, impacts the memory-work of different actors.

Outline of the Thesis

Aside from this introduction, the thesis is divided into six chapters:

Part I sets the stage for the thesis by introducing the theoretical and methodological framework for the study.

Chapter-2 sets up the theoretical framework to be employed in the analysis. It establishes the dynamics of memory approach, which informs the conceptualisation of the multi-level model of memory-work employed in the study. It outlines how memory-work has been theorised at each level and the conceptualisation of the relations between different levels. It lays out the issues and materials to be examined at each level. It then systematically
takes up the relevant sets of literature from within the field of memory studies to provide a context for the disciplinary contributions identified in the introduction.

Chapter-3 sets up the methodological framework employed for the study, outlining how the multi-level model of memory-work was operationalized. The chapter relates the research design of the study to existing multi-level studies indicating borrowings and adaptations. The chapter details the material that was gathered at each level and how it was analysed.

**Part 2** of the thesis lays out the three empirical chapters examining the memory-work at the institutional, social and individual levels. It culminates in a concluding chapter, which summarises the findings of the research and synthesises them to highlight the principal contributions.

Chapter-4 is the first of the empirical chapters examining the memory-work undertaken by state institutions. It principally focuses on memory-work within the juridical and commemorative domains. It outlines the factors, which impacted the state’s negotiation of the meaning of the disaster tracking how and why the narrative of corporate liability was subdued. It illustrates how the suffering of the survivors was abstracted and appropriated in service of the legitimation of emergent and established statist discourses.

Chapter-5 examines the memory-work of social movement organisations. It takes up a comparative examination of the two main social movement organisations operating in Bhopal, the *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan* (Bhopal Gas Affected Women Workers’ Union, BGPMUS) and the International campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB). It demonstrates how both organisations have sought to challenge the memory-work of the state but in different ways. It tracks clear differences in the meanings and collective identities mobilised in the remembrance of the two organisations. It explains these differences in relation to historical shifts in the nature of the disaster, transformations in transnational frameworks of meaning, and differences in the evolving institutional capacities of the two SMOs. It demonstrates how while the BGPMUS’s memory-work has seen a progressive limiting and
localisation in terms of the framing of injury and justice, the ICJB has been able to effectively mobilise remembrance to connect with other national and transnational communities. The chapter clearly indicates how social level memory-work is orientated not simply outwards seeking recognition from out-group forums and populations but also inwards, towards the individual survivors who constitute the membership of the organisations. The chapter reflects on the challenges of harmonising out-group and in-group memory-work.

Chapter-6 examines the memory-work of the individual survivors of the disaster. It examines the meanings that individual survivors make of their past suffering. It tracks two broad orientations in this meaning making and relates them to the influence of the memory-work undertaken by the state and the social movement organisations.

Chapter-7 seeks to bring together the insights gained from the empirical work. It summarizes and synthesizes the findings of key empirical chapters focusing especially on the broad patterns of interrelation revealed between the different processes of remembrance.
Chapter-2 The dynamics of remembering: a multi-level approach to the study of memory

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a short review of the different theoretical approaches to the study of memory and situates my approach in relation to them. The discussion will engage with two primary questions: How has memory been conceptualised in the literature? How can we think of the relations between individual and collective forms of remembering?

Discussions about levels of remembering and their interrelations are central preoccupations within memory studies, a thriving field of study but of relatively recent emergence. Memory studies is a broad enterprise involving scholars from multiple disciplines like social psychology, sociology, history, political sciences, literary sciences and neurosciences. The multidisciplinary nature has necessarily led to a differentiation of the field and the employment of ‘memory’ for the study of diverse processes and objects. The broadness of the term ‘memory’ – and what some have called its ‘overextension’ – has led to debates over its usage (see Berliner 2005, Klein 2000, Gedi and Elam 1996). I argue that the merit of a broad concept of memory is that it can help us to think of the individual and the collective together and to understand the social embeddedness of memory. Astrid Erll (2008), for instance, contends that ‘it is exactly the umbrella quality of these relatively new usages of ‘memory’ which helps us to see the … relationships between such phenomena as ancient myths and the personal recollection of recent experience, and which enables disciplines as varied as psychology, history, sociology, and literary studies to engage in a stimulating dialogue’ (2). In a similar vein, Olick (2009) posits that there are insights into the nature of remembering that can only be gained by the relational analysis of mnemonic practices and products, traditionally falling across disciplinary boundaries.
In this review of the literature, I will briefly focus on theoretical approaches, which provide different ways of conceptualising the relations between collective and individual levels of remembering. Employing Mistzal’s (2003) useful categorization of the social theories of remembering, I will critically assess four broad approaches to memory: a) the ‘traditionalist’ approach, b) the ‘invention of tradition’ or the presentist approach, c) the popular memory approach and d) the ‘dynamics of memory’ approach. I will demonstrate how the first three approaches have several shortcomings when it comes to conceptualizing the relations between individual and collective memory. While the ‘traditionalist’ approach does not sufficiently distinguish between the two levels, the ‘invention of tradition’ approach focuses entirely on the collective level conceptualising memory as a top-down process of elite manipulation. The popular memory approach does offer an expanded conception of memory in positing the presence of counter-memories at the level of privatised remembrance. However, as I will demonstrate, it too has a relatively limited view of the relations between public and private remembrance.

Following a critical review of the first three approaches, I will argue for a conception of memory as an active process of the production, negotiation and mediation of the meanings of the past involving multiple interrelations between individual and collective levels. In doing so, I will situate this study, within the broad perspective of the ‘dynamics of memory’ approach. I will furthermore, make some suggestions on extending this perspective by introducing a multi-level approach. Finally, I will outline the analytical benefits of such an approach in relation to the literature on memory and globalisation and previous studies on the Bhopal gas disaster.

2.2 The Traditionalist Approach: The Social Context of Memory

The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, is recognised as having laid the foundation of memory studies. Most scholars working with memory go back to his concept of ‘collective memory’, which has become part of the established
vocabulary of the field. Halbwachs’s concept of ‘collective memory’ was
developed both against the imagination of a biologically inherited memory (as
in C.G. Jung’s mystical ‘collective unconscious’) and individualist conceptions
of memory as mental operations. In his books, ‘The Social Frames of
Remembering’ and ‘Collective Memory’, Halbwachs developed a sociological
model of memory which locates memory on the social level.

According to Halbwachs’s central thesis, despite the appearance of
remembering occurring on the individual level, memory is always shaped by
the social world and would not exist devoid of frameworks of sociality: ‘No
memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to
determine and retrieve their recollections’ (Halbwachs 1992: 43). For
Halbwachs’s therefore, individual memory is closely linked to social groups:
the social frames of remembering are specific to social groups and determine
what is worth being remembered and how it should be remembered. This idea
that every group actively evolves a memory of its own past to explain its
unique identity in the present is still a primary reference point for studies in the
field. While Halbwachs concedes that ‘it is individuals who as group members
remember’ (1950[1926]: 48), he remains rooted in the Durkheimean tradition,
rejecting the possibility of the persistence of individual memories unsupported
by communally shared conceptual structures: ‘a person remembers only by
situating himself within the viewpoint of one or several groups and one or
several currents of collective thought’ (1950[1926]: 33).

This apparent dogmatism, criticised for its rigid social determinism (Fentress
and Wickham 1992), is however belied by Halbwachs’s assertion of the
multiplicity of collective memories (as opposed to the unitary nature of
History), as well as his readiness to acknowledge that each individual memory
is ‘a viewpoint on the collective memory’, forever changing as the individual’s
relationship to ‘other milieus’ changes (1950[1926]: 48). This creative tension
between an ever-shifting individual remembrance and the multiplicity of social
frameworks that seek to contain it has ensured the enduring relevance of his
work for current scholarship, which continues to struggle to reconcile
individualist and collectivist approaches. A more pointed critique of
Halbwachs’s account of collective memory is that he fails to make explicit the ‘actual acts of transfer that make remembering in common possible’ (Connerton 1989:39) offering an ‘autopoietic’ account of collective memory, as a ‘parameter of social organisation’ (Assmann 2006:93).

2.3 The Presentist Memory Approach: The Invention of Traditions

Halbwachs’s apparent anti-individualism is hardened in what is labelled by Misztal (2003), as the ‘presentist’ approach, illustrated best by Hobsbawm and Ranger’s Invention of Tradition (1983). In this state-centred approach, the management of collective memory i.e. socially organized forgetting and socially organized remembering, are seen to be used by those in power to naturalize and stabilize the political order. This is achieved through the means of introducing ‘invented traditions’: ‘a set of practices…governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules…of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition’, thus attempting to imply and establish a continuity with a ‘suitably historic past’ (Hobsbawm 1983:1). This reduction of the concept of collective memory to a tool of elite manipulation (ideology or false consciousness) ignores the social and cultural aspects of the process trapping it in a rigid functionalism. While Halbwachs’s account makes room for the simultaneous existence of multiple, evolving and ‘lived’ collective memories, the ‘invented traditions’ model suggests the idea of a ‘singular and univocal past’ imposed on an ‘acquiescent present’ (Negus and Pickering 2004:110).

Betraying a curiously nostalgic conservatism, Hobsbawm draws a distinction between ‘old or genuine’ traditions and ‘invented’ ones. He characterises the former as ‘specific and strongly binding social practices’ that were ‘adaptable’ and did not need to be ‘revived or invented’, tagging the latter as symbolic practices, ‘fixed’ and ‘formalised’, yet ‘unspecific and vague’ in their values and meaning and occupying a ‘much smaller space’ in the ‘private lives’ of people (1983:11). This distinction however, fails to take into account both ‘the
diverse interpretations possible within any tradition and the phenomenon of cultural traditions in its pluralised manifestations from small scale vernacular to grand scale national traditions along with everything in between’ (Negus and Pickering 2004: 110).

Nevertheless, Hobsbawm and Ranger’s approach of ‘instrumental presentism’ (Olick and Robbins 1998) emphasizing the malleability of social memory for ideological purposes, remains a dominant strand within memory studies, producing limited accounts of the dynamics of remembering and the interaction of the individual and social levels.

2.4 Popular Memory Approach: Confronting the Dominant Ideology

An approach that complicates this view of memory as a tool of ideological control imposed from above by suggesting the possibility of a ‘bottom up’ construction of ‘popular memory’, emerged from the work of the ‘Popular Memory Group’ (PMG) at the Centre of Cultural Studies in Birmingham.¹ They posited two main ways in which a ‘sense of the past’ is produced: through ‘public representations’ at the level of the ‘public historical sphere’, using ‘the historical apparatus’ and through ‘private memory’ and ‘intimate cultural forms’ at the level of ‘everyday life’ (PMG 1998[1982]: 44).

At the first level, they acknowledge the presence of a ‘dominant memory’, pointing to the ‘power and pervasiveness of historical representations, their connections with dominant institutions and the part they play in winning consent and building alliances in the processes of formal politics’ (44). As opposed to this, they formulate an alternate view of the ‘social production of memory’ linked to the active recovery of the history held at the level of ‘private remembrance’, a ‘lived sense of the past’ that has been silenced and marginalized. This ‘popular memory’ that needs to be actively recovered and then ‘consciously adopted, rejected or modified’, is thus both an ‘object of

¹ This approach was delineated as part of a review of “oral history” projects conducted in the 1970s and
study’ and a ‘dimension of political practice’ (43-44). In this conception, memory clearly emerges as a ‘stake in the constant struggle for hegemony’ (47).

Responding to the Gramscian injunction about the necessity of historical consciousness for a communist politics and aligning itself with Foucault’s concepts of ‘popular memory’ and ‘counter-memory’, this approach focuses its attention on two sets of relations: ‘the relation between the dominant memory and the oppositional forms across the whole public field’ and ‘the relation between these public discourses in their contemporary state of play and the more privatized sense of the past generated within a lived culture’ (46).

In its totality, this approach has significant advantages over the univocal instrumentalist presentism of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). It opens up memory as a contested site of competing constructions of the past; it rejects a view of dominant memory as ‘monolithically installed or everywhere believed in’ while still being aware of the ‘real processes of domination in the historical field’ (PMG 1998[1982]: 44); it expands the scope of popular memory to not just oppositional discourses in the public field but also to everyday talk and ‘intimate cultural forms’ like personal letters, diaries and photo albums (PMG 1998[1982]: 45); it calls for a self-reflexive oral history practice, a shift away from ‘its more empiricist forms’ to an understanding of ‘subjectivity’ as ‘an area of symbolic activity which includes cognitive, cultural and psychological aspects’ (Passerini 1979 cited in PMG 1998).3

Despite its strengths, this approach still fails to explain the mechanisms of the transfer and exchange between private and public fields. It also fails to allow that the politics of memory can be consensual and conflictual. As I will argue

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2 ‘There is a battle for and around history going on at this very moment which is extremely interesting. The intention is to reprogram to stifle what I’ve called the ‘popular memory’, and also to propose and impose on people a framework in which to interpret the present (Foucault 1989 quoted in Yoneyama 1999:32)

3 Suroopa Mukherjee’s recent work Surviving Bhopal (2010) can be firmly placed within this approach. Based primarily on an oral history project conducted with the women survivors of the disaster it attempts to “recreate the interface between what is reported ‘officially’ and the ‘lived experience’ of trauma and suffering as recorded through the neglected voices of the people” (3).
below, we need to conceptualise the relations between the levels of remembering not only as conflictual but allow for different ways of engaging with official memory that considers interrelations, appropriations and rejections. Furthermore, one shortcoming that the popular memory approach shares with the presentist approach is an overemphasis on the capacity to make over the past wilfully, reshaping it to suit changing interests. It fails to sufficiently acknowledge that ‘people are not solely rational actors who use history to their own ends, nor are they merely cultural puppets pulled by the strings of deep set values’ and that they are instead ‘creatures who are themselves inescapably historical’ (Schudson 1992:55).

2.5 The Dynamics of Memory

The above mentioned ways of conceptualising memory operate with a limited understanding of the relations between individual and collective levels: approaches that conceptualise memory at different levels tend to either overstate consensus or solely focus on relations of conflict. In doing so they fail to meet, what Cubitt (2006) calls the ‘challenge for broader thinking about memory’:

‘the exploration of the complex relationships that may exist between the ways in which individuals remember the past that fall within their personal experience, the ways in which they define or experience their social involvement, and the ways in which representations and understandings of a social or collective past are generated within the larger society’ (13)

Drawing upon the ‘dynamics of memory’ approach can help overcome some of the shortcomings of the other approaches. The ‘dynamics of memory’ approach is constituted by a broad stream of investigations into collective memory, which though emerging from a variety of disciplinary positions can broadly be said to share a desire to avoid ‘political reductionism and functionalism’ (Misztal 2003:73). Its defining characteristic is to conceive of
memory as a process of negotiation. Unlike presentist approaches, which are interested primarily in examining who controls the content of social memories, the analytical emphasis of work within the dynamics of memory approach is on examining remembering as an active process of the negotiation of meaning and in emphasizing the ‘limits to the power of actors in the present to remake the past according to their own interests’ (Schudson 1997: 4).

The dynamics of memory approach allows for the examination of the interrelation between individual and collective processes of remembering without the political reductionism of the presentist and the popular memory approaches. It refutes the suggestion that elite level discourses entirely determine the meaning of the past and meaning-construction at individual or private levels. It acknowledges instead that remembering can be the site of the transformation of both collective and individual identities through an active reconstruction of the past. At the same time however such reconstruction for both collective and individual actors is not a process marked by complete freedom or autonomy.

In my examination of remembering in Bhopal, I draw upon insights from this broad set of literature. My approach is however different from many of the existing studies in that it explicitly studies remembering across and between multiple levels. There have been many calls arguing for the need to consider both individual and collective levels. For example, Susannah Radstone (2005) argues that memory studies needs to go beyond conceived binaries and keep a dual perspective focusing both on the level of memory politics within the public sphere and the processes of personal meaning-making. She argues that ‘we need to attend not only to the articulation of memory by the discourses and institutions of the public sphere, but also to the absences, gaps and slips produced by such articulations – absences that might beg questions concerning both memory’s incommensurability or untranslatability and questions of power, politics and recognition’ (Radstone 2005: 148). However, there are few studies that have responded to this call by empirically
examining remembering at multiple levels. Usually, studies operating within the ‘dynamics of memory approach’ are situated at the level of official public remembering and consider the dynamics between different actors in the sphere of publicly conducted memory politics. Olick’s (2007) examination of memory politics in Germany and Schudson’s (1992) account on Watergate in American remembrance are two such prominent examples. While these studies provide us with a sophisticated analysis of the contested, constrained and evolving nature of remembrance in the public sphere, they do not engage with the personal or individual levels of memory at great length.

Another prominent example of an explicit analytical disregard for the relations between collective processes of memory construction and individual remembering linked to lived experience is evident in the work of Jeffrey Alexander (2004, 2012). Alexander in theory of ‘cultural trauma’ provides an excellent framework for the examination of the negotiations between collective actors as they engage in the process of collective memory construction. In the book ‘Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity’ (2004), Alexander and his collaborators introduce a sociological model for studying instances of collective suffering. As Alexander writes: ‘Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways’ (Alexander 2004:1). They conceive of trauma not as the primary result of a group experience but as a social construction – when collective actors see suffering as part of their identity. This process of constructing cultural trauma is conceptualised as a negotiation between different actors and audiences. While Alexander provides us with a clear conceptual framework for studying the negotiation of meaning at the social level (some of its elements will be used in examining memory at the level of social groups in Chapter 5), one of the central shortcomings of this model is that it does not link trauma back to personal experiences. Consequently, there is an analytically unproductive and theoretically unsound rejection of the relations between these public processes of representation and individual
remembrance linked to the lived experience of suffering (see Keightley and Pickering 2012 for a critique). There are some studies of individual remembering which provide interesting examinations of negotiated meaning-making activities in relation to the official level but the characterisation of official memory tends to be underdeveloped or imprecise (see Skultans 1998).

2.6 Multi-level Study of Memory-work

I aim to address this clear gap in the empirical tracking of relations between individual and collective processes of remembering through a multi-level examination of the remembrance of the Bhopal disaster. Mass disasters like Bhopal, due to their cataclysmic nature, have been specifically identified as providing an opportunity for examining the relations between different registers of the transmission of the past. Feuchtwang (2000) views them as ‘focal events’ that allow for the analysis of the gaps and links between the ‘different histories’ of ‘social memory, life history and nation-formation’ (59). I propose to undertake such an examination tracking the relations between the remembering of the Bhopal disaster by state institutions, social movement organisations (SMOs) and individual survivors. There are three clear advantages to a multi-level approach of the kind being proposed here: firstly, a multi-level approach allows us to account for the specificities of remembering at each level. Analysing memory-work at the level of the state, social movement organisations and personal meaning-making activities allows us to capture their main patterns. It avoids schematic characterisations of the different levels and takes personal memories and experiences into consideration – elements often ignored in studies on memory politics. Secondly, the multi-level approach to memory suggested in this thesis facilitates the examination of multiple interrelations between the levels. The interrelationships can be more accurately charted and the complexity of interconnections can be better highlighted. In doing so, it is possible to trace both conflictual and consensual relations between the different levels. Thirdly,
a multi-level approach is particularly suitable for a study that seeks to foreground new injustices caused by multi-national corporations and account for the role of SMOs in commemorative processes. Examinations of political struggles implicating memory have largely been focused on cases involving ethnic violence and genocides inflicted by state regimes (see Misztal 2003; Levy and Sznaider 2010; Healy and Tumarkin 2011) and on state efforts at coming to terms with difficult pasts. In particular, there has been an extensive engagement with the role of remembrance in institutional processes of ‘truth and reconciliation’ mobilised as part of transitional justice. By recognizing the work of SMOs as constituting an important level of memory-work, the study highlights new actors and processes shaping the struggle over the meaning of the past.

As I have argued above, there is a clear lack of empirical studies examining memory-work across different levels. Brian Conway’s (2010) book-length examination of the commemoration of the Bloody Sunday incident is a rare example and provides a good model for undertaking a multi-level study of remembering. Conway’s study seeks to explain the historical trajectory of the commemoration of the ‘Bloody Sunday’ incident. It does so by framing commemoration as ‘memory-work’, an active process of interpreting and representing the past and proposing a multi-level design for its analysis. Drawing on the standard conceptual categories in the sociological analysis of social structure, Conway posits four ‘ideal-typical’ levels of analysis: individual, small group, social and institutional. Individual level memory-work is the site of ‘autobiographical memory’ based on ‘first hand experience of the past’; it also includes everyday communication within the domain of the family, personal artefacts and participation in commemorative events (2010: 6). The ‘small-group’ level is concerned with the memory-work of individuals coming together to remember the past. At this level, Conway (2010) situates the presence of ‘memory choreographers’: ‘human actors involved in creating and propagating commemorative discourses and strategies’ (6). These ‘memory choreographers’ bring in ‘values, ideologies and resources to their memory-
work’ through which they produce a representation of the past and ‘negotiate the spaces between local conditions and the global contexts, private remembrance and public commemoration, and official memory and vernacular memory’ (6). When the memory-work at this ‘small-group’ level manifests itself in a public act of commemoration, it constitutes the ‘social level’ of analysis. The memory-work at this level assumes an identifiable temporal structure or ‘career’, the evolution of which can then be examined over time. The final level of analysis, one above the social, is the ‘institutional’, which involves memory-work performed by state institutions and organizations. This can range from a judicial inquiry or a parliamentary report to state sponsored commemorative activity or memorial.

Conway (2010) further characterizes these four levels of memory-work as having two key properties. First, the four levels are ‘mutually embedded’, with memory-work at one level being oriented towards memory-work at other levels. If memory-work at the different levels is incongruent then the modality of this orientation can be conflictual. The second characteristic is a ‘hierarchy of memory-work’ among the different levels in terms of ‘claims to legitimacy’ with state-level memory-work having ‘the strongest claim on power and authority’ (7). This power is seen to be based upon ‘the state’s claim to legitimacy as the monopoly source of truths about the past’ (7). Moving up the memory-work hierarchy from the individual to the social and institutional, Conway suggests an increasing abstraction and homogenization, with successful memory-work at higher levels seen as requiring the suppression or simplification of individual memories.

Conway’s study provides an excellent framework for the multi-level examination of remembrance of Bhopal. It conceptualises remembrance as an active negotiation of meaning, which is in keeping with the dynamics of memory approach. Further, it allows for a clear delineation of the different levels of memory-work while being firmly aware of their ‘mutually embedded’ nature and power-inflected interrelation. There are however key differences between Conway’s analytical concerns and the current study. Conway’s primary focus is on the historical tracking of shifts in the public
commemoration of the ‘Bloody Sunday’ incident. He explains these shifts by primarily examining the memory-work of organisations located at the small group level; the contested negotiation of memory is primarily examined within the domain of public representations of the past. Memory-work at the institutional and individual levels is only peripherally examined.

Unlike Conway’s focus on the small group level, this study has a comparative multi-level focus with a view to empirically examining relations between individual, group level and institutional remembrance. It seeks to track the negotiated meaning-making at each level and establish the nature of their inter-modulation. It is concerned with documenting the encounters between the different levels of memory-work. It wishes to examine the nature of the ‘mutual embeddedness’ of the different levels and establish if and how ‘asymmetries in power’ between different remembrances come into play. The multi-level framework will be operationalized in relation to the memory-work of state-institutions at the institutional level, SMOs at the small-group level and gas survivors at the individual level.

A detailed discussion of the materials and processes to be included in the examination for each level will be provided in the methodology chapter. Broadly, all three levels of memory-work are examined as sites of meaning-making in relation to the suffering generated by the disaster. At the state-institutional level, memory-work will be accessed within the judicial and commemorative domain. At the level of SMOs, memory-work will be addressed in relation to both the symbolic representations and public performances of memory mobilized as part of anniversary activities and the more everyday memory-work happening in group meetings involving members from the survivors community. While the content and forms of their memory-work differs significantly, the remembrance of the state institutions and the SMOs will be examined as being engaged in similar interpretative and representational processes: the process of developing narratives addressing key representational elements including the nature of the injury caused, the identity of the victims, establishing responsibility for harm and the scope of redress. These analytical categories are derived from the cultural trauma
model developed by Jeffrey Alexander (2004, 2012) for the examination of collective memory construction in relation to incidents involving collective suffering. At the individual level too, making meaning of the disaster is the central element of memory-work. Individual memory-work will be accessed in dialogic narrative interviews with individual survivors. This approach derives from an understanding of conversational remembering as being the primary and dominant site of individual and interpersonal remembering. The emphasis will be on the survivors’ remembrance of the disaster and its aftermath. The analysis will trace if and how the meanings, narratives and identities mobilized by the SMOs and the state institutions modulate personal narrations. In the following sections, I will outline how this multi-level approach can be used to address some of the shortcomings in the literature on memory and globalisation and existing studies on the Bhopal gas disaster.

2.7 Memory and Globalisation

A growing body of work within the field of memory studies has been proposing an empirical shift in the nature of collective memory under the impact of the globalized ‘second modernity’. Collective memory is seen as transcending the traditional container of the nation-state and entering into a transnational framework. This transformation is seen as deriving from global processes characterized by the ‘deteritorialisation of politics and culture’ (Tomlinson 1999) and an increasing ‘internal globalisation’ or ‘cosmopolitanisation’ (Beck 2006) where global concerns become part of the everyday local experiences and moral life-worlds of people around the world. While global interdependencies linked to migration, economies, ecological and terrorist threats are seen to be animating this shared consciousness, the primary site for the development and proliferation of this transnational memory is located firmly in the representational domain of mass media and electronically based communication. Broadly, this shift is rendered in a positive light with the imagination of a mnemonic community transcending the nation-state seen as
providing the basis for post-nationalist political alliances and a more
democratic and just global polity. This epochal transformation has been
theorized most extensively by Levy and Sznaider (2002, 2005, 2010), who
label the new entity ‘cosmopolitan memory’. This conceptualization of a politi-
cally progressive or emancipatory transnational memory is shared by a much
wider body of work articulating a ‘connective’ turn and a move away from
‘competitive’ or ‘appropriative’ frameworks of conceptualizing collective
memory. The analytical emphasis is on the ‘connectivity’ of memory,
facilitating ‘affiliation across lines of difference’ (Hirsch 2012: 21). It is my
contention, however, that in this connective turn there is a tendency towards
over-emphasizing the utopian potentialities of the mediated ‘connectivity’ of
memory and an under-emphasis on the empirical examination of the limits,
contestations and inequalities characterizing the field of symbolic politics that
it enables.

Similar expressions of unease about the exclusive focus on the structural
multi-directionality and connectivity of memory and its simplistic rendering as
a site of progressive politics have been put forward by others in the field
(Rothberg 2011; Amine and Beschea-Fache 2012). There is a clear
recognition that while the study of memory needs to take into account global-
local dynamics, emphasis has to be restored on the actors, contexts and
processes of remembering. To facilitate this, calls have been made for
studies empirically examining ‘encounters between different kinds of
remembering’: global and local, public and private, individual and collective
(Amine and Beschea-Fache 2012:100). The thesis responds directly to these
concerns in the adoption of a multi-level model of memory-work for examining
the remembrance of Bhopal. By conceptualising remembrance as memory-
work the study focuses firmly on the active shaping of the past undertaken by
actors such as state institutions and SMOs: examining how they limit or
‘down-scale’ the meaning of the disaster to local concerns and identities or
‘up-scale’ it to make connections with trans-local concerns and transnational
communities. This work of ‘scaling’ the remembrance of the disaster will be
charted explicitly in the chapters examining state level and SMO memory-work (Chapters 4 and 5). The multi-level design will allow for an appreciation of the diverse global-local dynamics affecting memory-work at each level. Further, it will allow for a charting of differences and contestations in global-local scaling within each level and across levels. For instance, the thesis will examine how state-level memory-work sought to remove the transnational significance of the disaster and frame it as a limited local problem. The examination of the SMO memory-work will demonstrate the diverse ways in which organisations at the small group level responded to this scaling ranging from tacit acceptance to explicit contestation. This charting of diverse interrelations between and across levels of remembrance will provide a rich sense of the constraints and inequalities characterising memory politics in a global age.

2.8 Expanding the Understanding of Bhopal

The vast majority of literature on Bhopal has been written from the perspective of disaster management (Mac Sheoin 2010). There is a limited set of critical studies which can broadly be divided into anthropological and oral history accounts. While these studies have provided insightful accounts of how the state, social movement organisations and survivors have dealt with the disaster, they fail to fully engage with the interrelations between them and reproduce some of the above mentioned tendencies in the field of memory studies.

In relation to the state-level negotiation of the disaster there have been some fine accounts outlining the appropriation of the survivors’ suffering (see Das 1997). These accounts however do not examine its impact on the meaning-making undertaken by SMOs or the survivors. Following the assumptions of the ‘popular memory approach’ outlined above, the general tendency in studies of the Bhopal disaster is to posit an ideological opposition between official discourses of the state that sought to ‘forget’ the event and popular
discourses of survivors seeking to resist such forgetting (see Mooney 2002 and Mukherjee 2010 for two such examples). Further, in some accounts, there is a propensity towards a theoretically determined post-modern valorisation of the survivors’ narratives of bodily suffering as constituting a critique of appropriative meta-discourses of the state (see Das 1997). These claims however are not supported by any empirical examination of individual narratives.

Other anthropological accounts also positing a state-survivors opposition have tended to produce bleak assessments of individual remembrance characterising it as being marked by paralysis and asphyxiation (see Rajan 1999, Fortun 2001 and Mooney 2002). More recent oral history accounts while persisting with the state-survivors dichotomy have put forward more optimistic narrations of successful popular resistance. Some of these have tended to focus on the work of SMOs and others on the narrations of survivors (see Scandrett and Mukherjee 2011, Mukherjee 2010). These accounts usefully trace the trajectory of the development of SMO activity in Bhopal. They accurately capture historical shifts in the nature of political claim-making undertaken by the SMOs identifying the turn to global-local dynamics around the late 1990s.

However, these studies do not provide an empirical examination of the interactions between state institutions and SMOs or SMOs and individual survivors. There is a tendency to focus simply on identifying and categorising the SMOs in terms of the discourses employed. When survivor narrations are explicitly considered, as in the oral history study of Mukherjee (2010) focussing on women survivors, the discussion obscures the diversity of the survivor population and their engagement with the social movement. There is a politically well-intentioned but empirically untenable extension of an activist identity upon the entire survivor population. Further, the individual accounts are treated as transparent records providing a popular history from below challenging the official narrations. The constructed nature of the narrations as acts of contingent meaning-making is not considered.
The analytical adoption of a basic duality between official and vernacular remembering hinders recognition of multiple levels of remembrance in Bhopal and their diverse interrelations. For example, as I will show in Chapter 6, the negotiation of the disaster at the state-level, particularly the system of categorisation used to classify survivors and distribute compensation, generates a diverse and conflicting set of meaning-making activities at the personal level. Overall, in empirically tracing interconnections between the memory-work of different actors – state institutions, SMOs and survivors – my study is able to probe connections that have been under examined by previous studies due to a narrowly differentiated conceptualisation of official and vernacular levels and the relations between them. Separating these levels allows for the clear identification of diverse interrelations between different levels going beyond a simple state-survivors opposition.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined a significant body of literature within the field of memory studies, in particular, engaging with diverse conceptualisations of the relations between individual and collective levels of remembering. I have demonstrated that some theoretical approaches provide relatively limited understanding of these interrelations in privileging either consensus (as in Halbwachs’s conception of collective memory) or opposition (as in the popular memory approach). I argued for a need to broaden the conception of these relationships and to examine memory not as a simple acceptance or rejection of meaning but as an active negotiation.

My study, by clearly delineating the remembrance of state institutions, SMOs and individual survivors and by empirically determining the nature of the relations between them, will avoid the problems of simplification signaled above. A multi-level approach like the one adopted in the thesis can enrich existing studies by drawing attention to both the specificities of remembering at each level and their interrelation. Such an approach, keeping these two
analytical dimensions simultaneously in view, is capable of providing a more grounded and richer conceptualisation of the dynamics of memory in an age of globalisation.
Chapter-3 Methodology

This chapter sets up the methodological framework employed for the study, outlining how the multi-level analysis of memory-work was operationalized. I elaborate on the research design developed to study the dynamics of memory in Bhopal. I will provide details of the data collected at each level, the methods employed and the nature of the analysis undertaken. The remembrance of the Bhopal gas disaster takes place in different settings, involving a multiplicity of mnemonic processes and products. To secure a comprehensive insight into the dynamics of remembering the disaster, an extensive period of continuous fieldwork was undertaken in Bhopal between November 2010 and April 2011 (this was preceded by earlier preparatory visits of shorter duration). In this chapter, I will first situate my methodological approach in relation to existing multi-level studies of remembering and relevant debates around ethnographic practice. Secondly, I will discuss provide details on how the fieldwork was conducted: the manner in which access to the field was negotiated and the different sets of materials that were collected at the level of state commemoration, SMO memory-work and individual remembrance.

3.1 Studying Memory at Multiple Levels: Methodological Approaches

There is a clear recognition in recent literature that for memory studies to develop its own identity and relevance as an inter-disciplinary field, it needs to engage directly with both the ‘methodological and epistemological issues at stake when using memory’ (Keightley 2010:67). Demands for developing and systemizing the methodological foundations of the field have been made as ‘prerequisites for cumulative progress’ (Roediger and Wertsch 2008:19). The sheer diversity of the subject matter, levels of analysis, epistemological positions and disciplinary contexts, converging under the broad umbrella of memory studies, has however made this an extremely tricky enterprise.
As outlined in the previous chapter, there are few studies in the field of memory that seek to empirically operationalize a multi-level framework. Usually studies concentrate on either memory politics at the state level or at the level of individual remembering. Even if a study examines individual remembrance in relation to official narratives about the past (see Skultans 1998), very rarely does it try to bring different levels together into a fully developed comparative framework. Within existing literature, Conway’s (2010) study of the commemoration of the ‘Bloody Sunday’ incident reviewed in the previous chapter provides a good starting point for developing a multi-level examination of remembrance of Bhopal. It conceptualises remembrance as an active but constrained process of meaning-making, which is in keeping with the dynamics of memory approach. Further, it allows for a clear delineation of different levels of memory-work while being firmly aware of the ‘mutually embedded’ nature of individual and collective remembering. Its focus on asymmetries of power in encounters between different levels of memory-work is also relevant to the current studies’ theoretical concerns about the political potentiality of memory signaled in the introduction and literature review. There are however key differences between Conway’s analytical concerns and the current study, which necessitate an adaptation of research design.

Conway’s (2010) primary focus is on tracking the shifts in the public commemoration of the ‘Bloody Sunday’ incident. He explains these shifts by primarily examining group-level memory-work: meaning making, agency and constraint at the small group level. Memory-work at institutional and individual levels is only peripherally examined. Unlike Conway, this study has a comparative multi-level focus with a view to empirically examining the relations between individual, group level and institutional remembrance. It seeks to examine the nature of the meaning-making at each level and the nature of the inter-modulation. It focuses on encounters between the different levels of memory-work. It wishes to examine the nature of the ‘mutual embeddedness’ between the different levels and if and how ‘asymmetries in power’ between different actors come into play. To do so, this study focuses
on memory-work happening at three levels, institutional, small-group and individual, thereby examining the relation between individual memories linked to the lived experience of suffering with the wider, social and historical forces determining collective narrations.

3.2 Conducting a multi-level study in Bhopal

Drawing upon these considerations, the study chose to focus on the institutional level at the memory-work of state institutions, at the small group level on the memory-work of social movement organisations (SMOs) and at the individual level on the memory-work of the survivors. The three levels included in the study constitute the most prominent sites of the remembrance of the disaster. Examining and understanding the meaning-making occurring in the diverse forms and processes of remembrance at each level of memory-work required the mobilisation of a variety of qualitative methods including interviews, participant observation and archival research. The study employed an ethnographic approach which enabled the effective combination of different qualitative methods and different sets of data.

Ethnography is a broad methodological approach that evolves in design usually through one or more periods of field-work and involves a sustained engagement with social environments and meaning-making processes (O’Reilly 2009, 2005; Gobo 2011). In methodological discussions, ethnography is sometimes reduced to ‘participant observation’. However, it can span a wide arrange of additional methods and activities including interviews, documents and other sources (O’Reilly 2009). While participant observation is probably the most distinctive characteristic of the methodology, an ethnographic approach can include diverse methods of data collection allowing the researcher to get insights into situated ways of meaning-making and patterns of acting and speaking. As Karen O’Reilly (2009) argues ‘ethnography draws on a family of methods, involving direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives (and
cultures), watching what happens, listening to what is said and asking questions’ (3).

Ethnographic studies have been traditionally situated in one site and are based on a conception of the ‘field’ as a static and contained space or community in which social relations are embedded (for critical evaluations see Marcus 1995, Gille and O Riain 2002). However, in view of globalisation processes, researchers have begun to reconceptualise the ‘field’ in line with a more complex model of social relations. Some scholars have argued for a multi-sited pursuit of research objects due to the ‘perceived inadequacy of the local’ (Falzon 2009a, 4). In an influential essay, Marcus (1995) makes the case for a multi-sited ethnography that follows people, social relations and ideas across space, thereby reconceptualising ethnographic practice as essentially mobile. Marcus’s approach has however not remained without criticism; critics argue that multi-sited-ness is often used as a buzzword trading on the illusory promise of being able to provide a complete picture of the social and the ‘world system’ (for a good introduction to these debates, see Falzon 2009b). Other scholars have suggested retaining a focus on one field site and examining the local as a vantage point for engaging in the study of multiple scales (Candea 2007, Gille and O Riain 2002). In their discussion of what they call ‘global ethnography’, Gille and O Riain (2002) argue that ‘ethnography is an especially suitable methodology with which to investigate social structures that are constituted across multiple scales and sites (…) ethnography can strategically locate itself at critical points of intersection of scales and units of analysis and can directly examine the negotiation of interconnected social actors across multiple scales’ (279, also see Buraway et al. 2000).

Both set of considerations, ethnography as a multi-method approach and the refiguring of the ‘local’ ethnographic site as a vantage point for examining the intersection of multiple scales inform my study of the remembering of Bhopal at multiple levels. Firstly, I use multiple methods of data collection including participant observation, interviews and archival research to access memory-work happening at each level (more details to be provided in later sections).
Secondly, I draw upon discussions charted above which conceptualise ethnography as the appropriate method for examining processes occurring at multiple spatial scales while at the same time grounding the study of wider (global or transnational) processes at the local level. While I engage with processes occurring at national and transnational scales, my analytical interest is in examining their intersection with different levels of remembering and in pinning down their located manifestations and local effects.

3.2.1 Accessing the Field

The majority of the data collection was carried out in a six-month period of continuous fieldwork in Bhopal between November 2010 and April 2011. The fieldwork in Bhopal was helped by my earlier acquaintance with the SMOs working there to secure justice for the survivors. As an undergraduate university student in Delhi, I had been part of a student group which helped the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB) in the organisation of their campaign activities in the Indian capital. ICJB is one of the key SMOs working in Bhopal and it was this interaction that first introduced me to the ongoing political struggle around the Bhopal disaster. I subsequently maintained this connection by participating in ICJB’s campaign activities that were organised in Delhi. This sustained association provided me with a good understanding of the evolving nature of the struggle. In 2007, I had an opportunity to visit Bhopal with another student group on an ‘orientation tour’ organised by the ICJB. This allowed me to engage in first-hand interaction with the survivors and become familiar with the physical and social environment in which they lived. The visit also helped me deepen my knowledge of the evolving nature of the disaster, including the issue of groundwater contamination. This prior first-hand acquaintance with the situation in Bhopal and the long-term connections with activists and survivors were vital in the successful design and execution of the fieldwork. As I will indicate in the sections below, these prior connections were vital in establishing relationships of trust without which access to organisational
archives and the everyday activities of the SMOs would have been very difficult. A preparatory visit directly informing the research design was undertaken in April 2010. This visit was used to determine the location and the nature of the archives available, gauge the scope and nature of the memorial activities undertaken at the institutional, small group and individual levels, and map the diversity of the survivor population. The visit confirmed the continuing relevance of engaging in a multi-level examination of remembrance in Bhopal and established the availability of material to undertake such an examination. In the sections below, I list the different sets of data that was gathered at each level, the methods employed, and the problems encountered during the process of data collection.

For the data analysis, I draw upon these different sets of data and analyse them in relation to the main research questions: how have state institutions, social movement organisations and individual survivors remembered the disaster? What factors have impacted the meaning-making and identity-work undertaken by these collective and individual actors? What has been the interrelationship between the different remembrances of the event? Addressing these questions, I engage with processes of memory-work – their characteristic forms and effects – occurring at each level and seek to identify the main patterns and relations to other levels. As O'Reilly writes, one of the key aims of ethnography is to “identify and comprehend some of the recurrent patterns and relationships that emerge from the web of specific events” (2009, 16-17). This also entails examining the internal variations within each level; in particular, I trace different patterns of remembering at the level of SMOs and individual survivors.
3.3 Studying the State Commemoration in Bhopal

In contrast to other cases of memory politics where the state and state actors function as prominent memory entrepreneurs, as for example in the national commemorations of the WWI or WWII, in the case of Bhopal, the state has played a vastly different role. Its primary concern has been to effect a judicial and bureaucratic settlement of the event; activity within the domain of commemoration has been limited with no state memorial or national day of remembrance. Nevertheless state institutions have been important actors in defining the meaning of the Bhopal gas disaster (as will be examined in Chapter 4). The two key domains of state-level meaning-making in relation to the disaster are the judicial and the commemorative. The judicial domain relates to the legal negotiations over the injuries caused by the disaster. The courts were the primary site for state actors to define the nature of the injuries, establish the causality of the event and attribute responsibility. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 4, the meanings and identities mobilised within this domain were institutionalised in the bureaucratic frameworks of compensation disbursal and have been continually reiterated impacting both group-level and individual remembrance. The commemorative domain relates to the explicit commemoration of the disaster undertaken by state-institutions in terms of memorial performances, textual and visual representations. As mentioned earlier, state-level memory-work within this domain has been extremely limited. However, there has been a sustained low-level annual commemoration undertaken at the level of the state government, which provides a good site for examining the trajectory of the symbolic representation of the disaster. These two sets of state-level memory-work were accessed primarily through a diverse and substantial set of documentary archival material.
The judicial memory-work and its bureaucratic institutionalisation were accessed in the following documents:

- Detailed legal rulings produced by the courts between 1989 and 1991 in which they justified the legal settlement of the disaster. Full texts of all key legal rulings were secured through online databases.
- Key reports detailing the processes of injury categorisation and classification produced by state institutions such as the Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Madhya Pradesh Government (BGTRRD) and the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR).

Further contextual information was secured in terms of reports produced by SMOs and other civil society organisations outlining the problems and deficiencies of the frameworks established by the state. Media representations of the judgements were collected through the online Nexis database as well as the news archives maintained by the SMOs.

The state’s commemorative memory-work was accessed in the following documents:

- Commemorative Literature Issued by the State (Madhya Pradesh Government): Copies of ‘Smarika’ (Memento), the annual publication of the BGTRRD released to commemorate the anniversary of the disaster. This publication has been issued continuously since the first anniversary of the event. Copies of this publication were secured from the archives of the SMOs. These provide an excellent site for tracking the long-term discursive trajectory of the state’s commemoration of the event. Further, they provide images and accounts of the state’s anniversary performances to mourn the victims. They also contain important information about the gas relief infrastructure and the evolution of legal and bureaucratic apparatus.

Further contextual information about the state’s commemorative memory-work was secured through interviews with state representatives. These included the Chief Secretary of the BGTRRD, the highest-ranking bureaucrat overseeing the gas relief department and the chief architect involved in the overseeing the planning of a proposed state memorial to the disaster.
3.4 Studying Commemoration at the Level of Social Movement Organisations (SMOs)

Due to the lack of state commemoration and the continuing nature of the injustice caused by the disaster, SMOs in Bhopal have been one of the most prominent set of actors shaping the remembrance of the disaster. These organisations have been involved both in managing the annual commemoration of the disaster in Bhopal and in undertaking memory-work at an everyday level as part of their mobilization activities. For my study, I focused on two SMOs: the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB) and the Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan (Bhopal Gas Affected Women’s Workers Forum, BGPMUS). Although there are other groups representing the survivors working in Bhopal, these two are the most prominent in terms of community membership and activity. For studying the memory-work at the level of the SMOs, I focused on two sets of material.

The first is centered on the commemorative events organised by the SMOs around the anniversary of the disaster (in particular the 26th anniversary of the disaster, this included events organised in the week leading up to 3rd December 2010). The second set of material is from the weekly meetings of the SMOs. These two sets of materials provide insights into the staging of memory in public performance as well as the daily meaning making in relation to the past. In the following sections, I will briefly outline the process of data collection and the concrete material collected in studying the commemorative and the weekly meetings.

3.4.1 Anniversary Activities

Having reached Bhopal about two weeks before the anniversary events (the 26th anniversary of the disaster was on 2nd-3rd December 2010) and due to my past association with the groups, I was quite naturally expected to help out with the preparations for the activities being planned by them. This meant that
I was able to participate in and observe the process of the putting together of these events.

As expected, the activities were not as extensive as they had been in the previous year; 2009 had been the 25th anniversary, the SMOs were able to generate more funds for commemorative activities and there was more attention from national and international media attention. However, with multiple SMOs operating in Bhopal, even the ‘standard’ yearly rituals ran over almost a weeklong period from 30th November to 4th December and included a broad range of different activities. Over the course of these five days some of the key events that I was able to participate in and document included:

The annual Chingari Awards function with women Bhopal survivors (part of the ICJB) honouring other women grassroots activists from across India ‘for their contribution to the fight against corporate crime and for environmental conservation’. Apart from the awards ceremony, this memorial function had a second component featuring a ‘cultural talent show’ put together by the physically and/or mentally handicapped children being treated at the Trust’s rehabilitation centre. These are children born to the communities living around the factory site, the disability being attributed to the parents exposure to the gas leak or groundwater contamination.

A function organised by the ICJB for honouring survivors over the age of 60 in recognition of their contribution to the struggle for justice. Oral testimonies were gathered from some of those felicitated; these were then published and released for the media. The function also included speeches by survivors, a street theatre performance involving children from the affected community and poetry readings by locally renowned poets.

Furthermore, I conducted participant observation of the protest rallies that were part of the anniversary activities.

The annual ICJB torch light procession from Bhopal Talkies to the statue of the mother opposite Carbide factory gates.

The annual ICJB daytime memorial procession with the Dow/Carbide effigy from Bharat Talkies (the intersection point of the old and new parts of the city) to the statue of the mother opposite the Carbide factory gates.
Two other daytime processions including one by BGPMUS involving effigy burning.

Outdoor screening of a documentary film ‘Tank No.610’ about the disaster at Top’N Town- a commercial plaza in the heart of the affluent New Bhopal, followed by a street theatre performance involving oral testimonies of gas survivors.

Participation in this extensive set of anniversary activities provided a comprehensive insight into the SMOs’ public performance of the memory of the disaster. For the study, these commemorative activities were documented through photographs, field notes and audio recordings. Alongside this, information was gathered regarding the planning of the events through interactions with the organisers. The events also provided a site for interacting with individual survivors as they participated in these public events; these interactions in turn fed into the examination of individual remembrance. The representativeness of the anniversary activities documented as part of the fieldwork was established through an extensive survey of the organisational archives of the two SMOs, which provide a comprehensive record of the anniversary activities. These archival records were also vital in gaining a sense of the shift in the historical trajectory of the commemoration (see analysis in Chapter 5).

3.4.2 Weekly Meetings of SMOs

In addition to participation in the anniversary activities and archival research linked to SMO commemoration, I attended the weekly public meetings of ICJB and BGPMUS for the period of five months. These meetings provided access to the everyday workings of the organisations, in particular the in-group memory-work undertaken to maintain group identity and sustain participation from the individual survivors (analysed in detail in Chapter 5). More concretely, I collected the following data:

Participation in the weekly Saturday meetings of the BGPMUS at the Yaadgar-e-Sahjahani park (a public park, a key memorial site- the group has been meeting here on a weekly basis continuously since the
time of the disaster). The main speeches of the leaders were recorded in their entirety as well as the follow up interaction with the women survivors who came to participate. It is through these interactions that I tried to get a sense of what functions these meetings perform for the women. Participants for individual interviews were identified.

Participation in the weekly Wednesday meetings of the ICJB. The meetings were conducted in a communal space located in the middle of gas and water affected communities. Audio recordings were made of the proceedings. Participants for individual interviews were identified.

Other contexts of group remembering (linked to SMO activity) that I could access was the filling up of forms, an almost daily activity in the survivor communities. This activity often becomes the occasion for the sharing of remembrances. I accompanied activists (from the ICJB) on their trips into the bastis (colonies) as they went around helping women fill forms to claim widow pension. The women were asked to produce documentation, which demonstrated their husband’s death as having resulted from a medical condition that could be traced back to the gas exposure. Most women in the colonies were illiterate; the attempt at producing documentary proof was accompanied by communal retellings/reaffirmation of loss etc.

The data analysis at the level of the SMOs drew upon fieldwork notes, photographs and recorded group discussions described above. The main focus was on tracing similarities and differences in the memory-work of the two SMOs: the meanings they attributed to the disaster, the identities and narratives mobilized in anniversary and everyday discourse and the relations to survivors and state institutions.

3.5 Studying Commemoration at the Individual Level

In addition to the material collected on state commemoration and SMOs, 28 interviews were conducted with gas survivors and victims of water contamination from the Union Carbide plant to access memory-work at the personal level. As outlined in the theoretical chapter, the level of personal meaning-making activities is an important part of my multi-level conceptualisation of memory. I was interested in examining personal memory-
work in relation to the remembrance performed by the state and the SMOs as well as in itself – as an attempt at making sense of the disruption to individual lives caused by the disaster.

For recruiting interview participants, I initially sought the help of contacts within the survivors’ community, most importantly, survivor activists working with the above-mentioned SMOs. These survivor activists had an extensive and intimate knowledge of the diverse survivors community; they aided the selection of potential participants, enabled primary contact and helped in the communication of the aims and objectives of the study. While the sampling was partly guided by pragmatic choices and established contacts, it involved a process of purposive selection. A map of variables was evolved during the course of the study identifying different social positionings in relation to the disaster and its aftermath. These included: impact from the disaster, medical category assigned by the gas department, residential location in relation to the Union Carbide factory, degree and nature of involvement with the SMOs, age, gender, religion and education. These variables ensured that a diversity of different experiences and social positions were represented in the sample. This ensured that the data would adequately represent the diversity of meaning-making practices in relation to the past. It also meant that patterns of variation in relation to the memory-work carried out by the state and the SMOs could be tracked. A table indicating the basic split in terms of age and gender is provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-30 yrs.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40 yrs.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-50 yrs.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-60 yrs.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-70 yrs.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1 List of interviews conducted with survivors of the gas disaster
Interviews are one of the most widely used methods in the social sciences and different ways of interviewing and their epistemological implications have been extensively discussed in methodological literature. However, work conducted in the field of memory studies often lacks such methodological considerations. As Mihelj (2013) writes: ‘Interviews tend to be treated as transparent windows onto recollections of the past, as if these were a stable element of an individual’s psyche, permanently stored in one’s brain and retrieved on demand’ (60). In my study, I use qualitative interviews to access meaning-making processes on the individual level. The interviews sought to initiate and engage with processes of individual memory-work: the recollection of personal experiences of the disaster and its aftermath and personal practices of remembering. To achieve this, I used open interviews with a strong narrative and biographical focus.

Traditional approaches to interviewing often consider participants as passive ‘vessels of answers’. This approach assumes that the interviewer needs to formulate questions and provide an atmosphere in which ‘undistorted communication’ is possible and in which for example people narrate their experiences (and remember the past) as ‘accurately’ and ‘truthfully’ as possible (for a critique see Holstein and Gubrium 2011, Gubrium and Holstein 2009). In particular, structured interviews often seem to work with these assumptions. In contrast, narrative interviews have an open questioning technique, which aims to elicit stories and creates a space for people to independently structure their accounts. It is then not primarily the interviewer who sets the agenda but the informant and his or her experiences (the interviews do have an overall focus, in this case, the remembrance of the disaster). These interviews enable participants to actively reflect upon their experiences and articulate their concerns. Holstein and Gubrium (2011) posit interviewing as an active activity of meaning-making; following such a conceptualization they argue for a shifting of focus ‘from distortion to interpretative practice’ (150). In other words, we need to move away from seeing memory as a reflection of past experiences and understand it as a process of active meaning-making undertaken in the context of an interview.
Holloway and Jefferson (2000) point out four basic principles for conducting narrative interviews (34-36): to ask open-ended questions, to elicit stories, to follow up using informants' ordering and phrasing, and to avoid ‘why’ questions as they lead to argumentations and disconnections from people's lives. Following these principles, interviews with the survivors were open: at the beginning of each interview I asked participants to narrate their experience of the gas disaster and subsequent life trajectory. Additionally, more specific questions were asked about memorial practices at the level of the family and the home and objects used in private remembrance. The final component of the interview invited survivors to reflect upon their participation in collective commemorative activities (like the anniversary celebrations) and provide evaluations of other levels of memory-work (state and SMO). The interviews differed in length but were usually between one and two hours long.

Recalling the memory of the gas disaster was for many survivors a painful experience – many had lost family members and suffered from chronic health problems caused by the disaster. The majority lived in poor conditions and had limited access to medical services. Ensuring ethical practice in relation to the survivors’ participation in the study was rendered even more significant in view of these specific vulnerabilities. Participation in the study was completely voluntary. Participants were assured of appropriate confidentiality with all data being suitably anonymised before publication. Furthermore, participants were made fully aware of their right to withdraw from the study and terminate the interview if they did not wish to continue. The open nature of the interviews also meant that the participants had full control over which memories they wanted to share. In my position as an interviewer, I sought to create a supportive atmosphere ensuring the dignity, privacy and well-being of my participants; the nature of the questioning at all times was sensitive and unintrusive (for a discussion of ethics in narrative research see Josselson 2007). Interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants and in the presence of their family members or friends, which ensured comfort and emotional support.
3.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the methodological approach used in the thesis. As I have argued above, ethnography as a broad methodological approach is best suited to capturing the dynamics of memory in Bhopal. The remembering of the Bhopal disaster takes place at multiple levels and each level presents different forms and materials of remembrance. An ethnographic approach allows me to combine participant observation, archival research and interviews for a wide-ranging analysis of the different levels and their interactions. At the level of the state, the study draws upon legal documents and commemorative literature as prominent sites for accessing memory-work. At the level of SMOs, memory-work encompasses a wider range of activities primarily studied through participant observations at weekly meetings and the annual anniversary celebrations, archival research, and interviews with movement leaders. At the individual level, interviews were the main source of accessing memory-work. While a study of remembering that engages with multiple levels cannot provide a complete account of the dynamics at each level, the research design facilitates a sufficiently comprehensive engagement allowing for a credible identification of the main patterns at each level and a charting of their interrelations.
Chapter-4 Disaster and Suffering in State Institutional Remembrance

4.1 Introduction

This chapter principally examines the remembrance of the Bhopal disaster by Indian state institutions. The investigation is focused on the judicial and commemorative fields, which were the dominant sites for the state’s remembering of the event. The first part examines how legal negotiations over Bhopal began with the Indian state performing an exemplary remembrance assigning the disaster a transnationally relevant historical meaning. The promise was spectacularly extinguished by an out of court settlement absolving the corporation of all liability in February 1989. Facing widespread criticism, the court had to admit to the ‘lost opportunity’ of ‘pronouncing’ on the wider implications of Bhopal and establishing clear principles of legal protection from the ‘exploitative and hazardous industrial adventurism’ of multinational corporations (UCC vs. UoI May 1989). The ‘pragmatic’ settlement signalled a negative narrative of the limits of third world sovereignty and dependence on multinational capital. In the discussion, I demonstrate how this potentially delegitimizing capitulation was countered in legal discourse through an appropriation of the suffering of the survivors. I will also outline how this appropriation facilitated the detachment of suffering from the question of liability and justified the establishment of a bureaucratic and medical system that required the survivors to bear the burden of proving their suffering. The discussion situates this deeply problematic memory-work in its historical context to identify the conditions that structured the process.

In the second half, I examine the state’s limited commemoration of the disaster. Through an analysis of the state’s anniversary publications and performances, I illustrate how the survivors’ suffering did not find recognition within this domain too. I trace how the commemoration became the site of prominent self-display for the state through the mobilization of a narrative of
an untroubled linear transition from suffering to revival. In particular, I identify how the survivors’ suffering gets literally effaced by the iteration of a ‘science-state-nation’ triad in the commemorative representations and performances.

Theoretically, in keeping with the framework elaborated in the introduction, the analysis employs a processual and relational understanding of memory. A key element of this approach is to understand memory as ‘a part of the more general relations of meaning and within historical conjunctures’ (Olick 2007:107). Employing this approach, the state’s memory-work is historicized and explained in relation to the larger national and transnational political meaning systems characterizing particular historical conjunctures. The state’s erasure of the transnational liability of the corporation in the juridical and commemorative memory-work is connected to unequal power relations between national jurisdictions and shifts in the domains of economy and foreign policy. This rendering historicises the performance of remembrance and is therefore also more capable of understanding both shifts and continuities in institutional remembering.

4.2 Contested suffering- a view of the immediate aftermath

The gas leak from the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal caused mass suffering unprecedented in both its scale and nature. More than 4000 people died in the immediate aftermath, almost 500,000 suffered injuries in differing degrees (Muralidhar 2004/5). The suffering was spectacular: bodies of dead human beings and animals lining the streets, hospitals overflowing with the dying and the injured, mass burials and cremation fires burning non-stop for days. Both the nation and the world watched fascinated by the spectacle of suffering brought to them by the press and television media (see Wilkins 1986). While the existence of suffering in the aftermath of the leak was undeniable, the nature, degree and causality of this suffering became an immediate site of contention.
Confronted with the possibility of massive liability claims and crippling loss of public confidence in their operations across the world, Union Carbide adopted the strategy of downplaying the toxicity of the leaked gas MIC and mobilised expert medical opinion refuting claims of chronic effects and long-term multi organ damage (Everest 1985; Jones 1988; Varma & Varma 2005; Eckerman 2005). On their part, state institutions also appeared to ‘cover-up’ the extent of the suffering. Claims were made about unaccounted burials, cremations and dumping of bodies in the Narmada River (URG 1985 cited in Jones 1988), all in an attempt to limit the official death figures. Further, having been found wanting in its ability to prevent the disaster from happening and in its absolute incapacity to deal with the immediate aftermath, the state sought to reassert its authority through a strict control over the medical relief and treatment protocols. Any attempt by non-state actors to seek information, contribute expertise or indicate deficiencies in the state response was perceived as a threat and violently repressed (see Jones 1988:116). The situation was further complicated by the complex nature of the chemicals involved, the extreme lack of knowledge about MIC exposure available in the public domain, the corporation’s refusal to share its medical research, and the influence it wielded over the local medical fraternity (Jones 1988).

Ironically, the most powerless actors in this field of defining suffering were the survivors themselves. With the overwhelming majority of those exposed being both poor and illiterate, they were deemed incapable of understanding and articulating their own suffering. Further, the very poverty which rendered survivors ‘disabled’ in these expert deliberations was also mobilised to contest the causality of their suffering: the corporation’s doctors and advocates argued that the survivors’ suffering could not be entirely attributed to the effects of the gas but rather stemmed from the endemic poor health that marked the lives of those living in shanty towns (see Jones 1988: 96; Rajan 1999: 263; Mathur 2006:21).

This brief account provides a clear sense of the contention implicating the suffering generated by the disaster and the inequalities that structured the contest. This contestation has only intensified in the 28 years following the
event. Differing narrations of the nature and degree of suffering, the liability for
causing it, and the form and quantum of recompense dominate the different
levels of remembrance. Identifying, comparing and relating these differing
negotiations of suffering is the connecting strand running through the thesis. I
focus first on the memory-work of state institutions within the juridical field,
which emerged as the primary and most prominent location for making
meaning of the disaster.

4.3 The Legal Trajectory of the Disaster’s ‘Settlement’: 1985-1991

In this section, I set out the basic legal trajectory of the disaster from 1985 to
1991. This was the period of the most intense legal negotiation over the
disaster; the ‘settlement’ negotiated in this period established the dominant
ways in which state actors came to frame the suffering caused by the event,
the issue of liability and the identity of the survivors. While this section lays
out key dates and rulings, the more detailed analysis of the meaning-work
over suffering will be examined in the sections to follow.

In 1985 the Indian parliament enacted the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster
(Processing of Claims) Act, which authorised the Union of India (UoI) to take
over the legal rights of the survivors and become the sole plaintiff in the suit
against UCC for compensation. UoI then proceeded to file suit in the
American court, which pronounced a forum non conveniens judgement and
submitted UCC to the jurisdiction of Indian courts. UoI then proceeded to file
suit in the Bhopal District Court. In 1987, the district judge ordered UCC to pay

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4 There has been a recent reopening of the judicial cases in Indian courts (2011). This
recent re-opening however does not have any bearing on the argument tracking the
state’s primary settlement of the disaster, the framework for which was continually upheld
by the Indian courts till 2007.

5 Latin for a forum which is not convenient. This doctrine is employed when the court
chosen by the plaintiff (the party suing) is inconvenient for witnesses or poses an undue
hardship on the defendants, who must petition the court for an order transferring the case
to a more convenient court.
an interim compensation of Rs. 350 crores to the victims. In 1988, UCC challenged this judgement in the Madhya Pradesh High Court, which upheld the decision to award interim compensation but reduced the award to Rs. 250 crores. UCC further challenged this in the Supreme Court of India (SC), the highest legal forum in the country. In February 1989, the SC announced a settlement between UCC and UoI for $470 million. This was to be the full and final payment for all civil claims and criminal proceedings were to be quashed (Muralidhar 2004/5). The settlement process had not included the representatives of the survivors in the consultations. Further, the amount agreed upon was significantly less than what had been initially demanded; the ruling failed to establish any liability for the disaster, and closed off any possibility of future claims. In May 1989, following widespread condemnation of the settlement, the SC issued a detailed justification of its ruling arguing that the ‘basic consideration motivating the conclusion of the settlement was the compelling need for urgent relief’ (UCC vs. Uol, 4 May 1989). Under sustained criticism from survivors and the national press, the court admitted the possibility of a review.

In December 1989, the SC heard and dismissed a petition challenging the constitutional validity of the Claims Act applying the doctrine of *parens patriae*. The Claims Act of 1985 had formed the basis of the settlement and the court used this occasion to further elaborate on the justness and adequacy of the February 1989 settlement. In October 1991, after examining a review petition filed by the survivors’ representatives and supported by a newly elected central government, the SC declined any annulment of the settlement. It did however rule that in case the settlement fund was found inadequate the Union of India ‘as a Welfare State...should not be found wanting in making good the deficiency’ (UCC vs. UoI October 1991). It also revived the criminal proceedings in the case. This 1991 judgement was seen as marking the corporation’s successful avoidance of being implicated for the disaster.

6 A doctrine that grants the inherent power and authority of the state to protect persons who are legally unable to act on their own behalf.
In the following section, I examine how state actors negotiated meaning making possibilities offered up by the disaster through a discursive analysis of the court rulings from the May 1989 (ruling justifying the February settlement), December 1989 and October 1991 rulings. I will illustrate how the evolving legal trajectory and narrations exhibit tensions deriving from two irreconcilable conceptualisations of the nation: the first, a sovereign plaintiff pursuing absolute liability against an errant multinational; the second, a pragmatic state with limited sovereignty keen to demonstrate compliance with an international neo-liberal regime. The suffering of the victims gets implicated in the state’s and courts’ negotiation of these two identities. I will demonstrate how, while the first offered possibilities of a historical affirmation of the survivors suffering within a transnational context, it was the eventual performance of the second ‘pragmatic’ identity that resulted in both a discursive and material negation of the value and meaning of suffering for the victims. The dynamics of the juridical remembrance have to be placed within the context of a wider transformation in state discourses as India underwent a profound economic, social and political transition.

4.3.1 1984-1991: A vulnerable state- a turbulent post-socialist transition

A situated understanding of nation-state formation must also engage with questions of transformation: whether, how, and why new ideas of India emerge outside the particular historical moment of the Nehruvian project to enable and constrain the field of politics in different ways (Roy 2007:162).

Even by the standards of Indian politics, 1984 was an especially turbulent year (Guha 2007:575).

The juridical negotiations over the Bhopal disaster took place during a time of extreme political and economic instability in India. Barely a month earlier, on October 31, 1984, the country had been shocked by the assassination of
Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguard. This was followed by over four days of retaliatory anti-Sikh rioting mainly across North India in which thousands of Sikhs were killed. The killings were seen to be a part of a state-sponsored pogrom with leaders of the ruling political party coordinating the violence. Uncertainty loomed with general elections scheduled for the end of December. Economically, the country was struggling with low growth rates, a rising fiscal deficit and high levels of inflation. Beginning with the early 1980s, India was making a slow and painful shift from a primarily agrarian and state-socialist model towards a neo-liberal market-driven economy open to foreign capital and enterprise; 1991 was seen as the ‘annus mirabilis of Indian liberalisation’ with a spate of policy changes accompanying an emergency IMF loan required to tide over a liquidity crisis and near default on foreign debt (EIU 1996:15).

The state thus faced both internal and external crises. The occurrence of the disaster and the suffering it unleashed on the most vulnerable sections of the population was another blow to its legitimacy. The state was required to make the disaster meaningful in a manner which affirmed its continuing existence. The process of securing ‘justice’ for Bhopal and assigning the disaster a historical meaning became implicated in a reconfiguring of the internal and external identity of the nation-state. The ‘settlement’ rendered absolute in 1991 primarily achieved two objectives: firstly, it removed UCC, a prominent transnational corporation from the circuits of liability and rendered irrelevant the causality of the suffering; and secondly, it made state institutions responsible for the continuing care of the victims. Securing the first objective allowed the state to address the concerns of transnational financial institutions, corporations and other nation states, demonstrating its firm commitment to responsible behaviour towards transnational enterprise, even in the face of domestic opposition. This was in line with the conditions imposed by the IMF’s financial bailout, which required the Indian state to introduce economic reforms, most prominently, opening up more sectors of the industry for private capital and encouraging foreign direct investment (EUI 1996).
The second achievement of the settlement allowed the state to expand and extend its institutional structures towards the care of the gas victims. This institutional expansion became an opportunity for the affirmation of a more historically continuous identity of the scientifically capable problem-solving state taking care of a deficient citizenry. This discussion demonstrates how the state’s memory-work within the judicial domain has to be understood within the larger transnational and national political meaning systems characterizing that particular historical conjuncture. It also demonstrates the play of agency and constraint that marked this memory-work. In the next section, I examine how this institutional memory-work, productive in terms of facilitating change and continuity in the identity relations of the state, involved a significant negation and devaluing of the survivors’ suffering and a limiting of the justice that needed to be performed.

4.4. Making Meaning of Suffering

4.4.1 Suffering Caused by Multinational Enterprise; Survivors as Historical Victims

In its first articulations, when the state pursued UCC in the US courts, the meaning it assigned the disaster was one marked with radical potentiality. Uol formulated the principle of ‘absolute multinational enterprise liability’ to challenge the impunity derived by multinational corporations by virtue of their complex organisational structures. Within this narrative, the emphasis was on clearly establishing UCC’s breach of its ‘primary, absolute and non-delegable duty’ to ensure that ‘that all ultra-hazardous or inherently dangerous activities are conducted with the highest standards of safety and to provide all necessary information and warnings regarding the activity involved’ (Uol 1985 cited in Baxi 2010:37). The principle of ‘absolute multinational enterprise liability’ was a juridical innovation that sought to tear away the ‘corporate veil’ through which parent corporations were able to dissociate themselves from
damages caused by their subsidiaries in third world locations.

In this conceptualization, not only was the suffering of the survivors seen as being caused by the deliberate actions of UCC but it was also placed within a framework of transnational historical significance: the suffering of the Bhopal victims was an example of injustices deriving from historical inequalities in power relations between multinational corporations and the poor citizenry of third world nations. Remedying the suffering of the victims of Bhopal would establish a historical precedent effectively regulating the power of multinationals to cause harm through their activities; a power, which till that point, was ‘neither restricted by national boundaries nor effectively controlled by international law’ (UoI cited in Baxi 2010:37). Within this formulation, the state’s adoption of the legal rights of its citizens to pursue justice through the ‘parens patriae’ doctrine could legitimately be seen as a ‘pioneering innovation for Third World jurisprudence…as a juristic concept of great potency to inhibit future Bhopals, inside or outside India’ (Baxi 1990:v)\(^7\).

The subsequent dismissal of the claims by the US court in acceptance of UCC’s plea of *forum non conveniens* was a definite setback. It was however not seen as a negation of the narrative formulated by the UoI. In fact, in submitting UCC to the jurisdiction of the Indian courts, the US court ruling appeared to affirm India as a mature sovereign state:

> The Union of India is a world power in 1986, and its courts have the proven capacity to mete out fair and equal justice. To deprive the Indian judiciary of this opportunity to stand tall before the world and to pass judgment on behalf of its people would be to revive a history of subservience and subjugation from which India has emerged (Keenan cited in Baxi 1990:ii).

Administering justice in the Bhopal case thus presented the Indian state with the opportunity for a performance of global historical significance. The Indian

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\(^7\) The adversarial position that the state took against the corporation was also demonstrated in its refusal to accept offers of relief from UCC in the initial aftermath of the disaster and in the arrest of Warren Anderson (Browning 1993).
judiciary clearly began its deliberations over UCC’s liability in full recognition of the historical responsibility that it carried.

The first set of judgments delivered by the Indian courts affirmed this historical responsibility. In December 1987, the Bhopal district court ordered the UCC to pay an ‘interim compensation’ of Rs. 350 crores. The decision demonstrated the court’s recognition of the inherent inequality between the two claimants: the survivors who in their suffering and poverty were incapable of supporting themselves through the course of a long drawn out litigation, and the multinational corporation which had abundant resources to pursue a strategy of legal delay (see Muralidharan 2004). The Madhya Pradesh High Court also affirmed this requirement for the payment of interim damages and turned down UCC’s appeal against the decision. The awarding of the ‘interim relief/damages’ by the two lower courts clearly established that justice for the survivors had to incorporate both the alleviation of their immediate suffering and the clear establishment of the civil and criminal liability for their suffering.

UCC appealed this decision before the Supreme Court (SC). It was in the SC’s February 1989 announcement of a ‘full and final’ settlement that the survivors’ suffering first became detached from the issue of liability. In effecting this detachment, the 1989 settlement became the site of a ‘second catastrophe’ where the UoI and the SC explicitly turned away from both the historical opportunity and the historical responsibility that the disaster had presented. In the next section, I will illustrate how the February 1989 settlement and the follow-up rulings till 1991, discursively dissociated suffering from the issue of liability.

4.4.2 February 1989 settlement- Emptying suffering of historical meaning

This settlement shall finally dispose of all past, present and future claims… (UCC vs. UoI & Others on 14 February 1989)
From the standpoint of the victims, the Bhopal case in India, so far, represents the Second Bhopal Catastrophe. The first produced actual and toxic impacts on their docile bodies; the second, for full five years, aggravated and accentuated their agony and (and in the February settlement) erased them out of history. In a curious sense, the MIC has entered the soul of Indian jurisprudence as well (Baxi 1990:i).

What did Carbide do? It killed thousands!
What did the Government do? It sided with the killers!
What did the Supreme Court do? It let the killers go free!
(Slogans used in protests against the settlement, cited in Deshpande 2012:46)

The February 1989 settlement by the SC came as a complete shock to the survivors and the general public. This was because the court had not been hearing the suit for the compensation but only UCC’s appeal against the lower courts’ awarding of interim compensation. The lawyers representing the survivors’ groups had not been involved in the consultations about the settlement amount. The court’s brief order provided no explanation for how it had arrived at the amount of 470 million $ as constituting ‘just, equitable and reasonable’ recompense for all ‘past, present and future claims’ including criminal liability. The amount was only a fraction of the damages that had been initially sought and was easily covered by the corporation’s insurance cover. Most significantly, the order did not establish the culpability of the corporation for the suffering caused. In fact, the absence of such culpability was prominently emphasised: the payment was simply for the ‘benefit of all victims…and not as fines, penalties or punitive damages’. The settlement was so clearly in favour of the corporation that its stock prices surged up immediately following the announcement.

Apart from the US press, which described the settlement and ‘avoidance of trial’ by UCC as a ‘reasonable conclusion’ (Labaton/ The New York Times, February 15, 1989), there was widespread public criticism of the settlement, especially in the Indian press (Muralidharan 2004). There was a clear sense that the settlement constituted a ‘capitulation by government’ to the UCC
Further, it was felt that the court had forsaken its own legitimacy by facilitating a ‘cover up’ for the blatant abdication of responsibility by the government:

Clearly, the government wanted to capitulate to the Union Carbide Company. But it could not do so publicly for obvious political reasons. And thus when the opportunity came to cloak the capitulations with the legitimacy of the Supreme Court’s order, it grasped it with both hands (Bhushan/The Indian Express, February 17, 1989, p.6).

The court became both the target and the site of protests, with large public demonstrations by the gas survivors as well as a sustained campaign by civil society groups in Delhi. In the face of this clear questioning of the justness of the settlement, the court engaged in a discursive performance, which prominently mobilised two distinct figurations of the suffering of the survivors, both of which were extremely disempowering.

4.5 Two imaginations of Suffering and Survivors: ‘Undeserved suffering of poor and helpless citizens’ and ‘the malingering claimant required to prove her suffering’

On 4 May 1989, the SC came out with an order agreeing to review the settlement. More significantly, the court took this opportunity to provide its ‘reasons for the overall settlement order’. The court clearly recognised that it had to address three key elements: the manner in which it had arrived at the amount of $470 million, why this amount met the criteria of being ‘just, equitable and reasonable’, and finally why it had repudiated the historical opportunity to ‘pronounce on important legal questions of far reaching importance’ concerning the liability of multinational corporations ‘operating with inherently dangerous technologies in the developing countries of the third world’ (UCC vs. UoI, 4 May 1989). Protests from the survivors and their supporters had forced the court into this acknowledgement of the negation of the responsibility to provide a forum for examining Bhopal as a historical injustice stemming from transnational inequalities. The May 1989, December
1989 and the October 1991 rulings could have been the sites of the recovery of this historical meaning. Instead, they became attempts at justifying the negation of historical meaning and remembrance by appropriating the suffering of the victims.

### 4.5.1 Undeserved suffering of ‘poor and helpless citizens’

The court mobilised two figurations of the suffering survivors. The first was a collective invocation, which emphasized the enormity and undeserved nature of the suffering, the incapacity of the sufferers and the immediate necessity of relief:

> The basic consideration motivating the conclusion of the settlement was the compelling need for urgent relief. The suffering of the victims has been intense and unrelieved. Thousands of persons who pursued their own occupations for a humble and honest living have been rendered destitute by this ghastly disaster. Even after four years of litigation, basic questions of the fundamentals of the law as to liability of the Union Carbide Corporation and the quantum of damages are yet being debated. These, of course, are important issues, which need to be decided. But, when thousands of innocent citizens were in near destitute conditions, without adequate subsistential needs of food and medicine and with every coming morrow haunted by the spectre of death and continued agony, it would be heartless abstention, if the possibilities of immediate sources of relief were not explored. Considerations of excellence and niceties of legal principles were greatly overshadowed by the pressing problems of very survival for a large number of victims. The Law's delays are, indeed, proverbial (UCC vs. UoI, 4 May 1989, emphasis mine).

This extract captures the key features of this first figuration. The survivors are pictured as helpless, destitute citizens experiencing intense and unrelieved agony. The causality of suffering is abstracted. The suffering is a result of a ‘ghastly disaster’; this disaster is however not placed in any wider structural or historical context, which would indicate the liability of the corporation. Association with other mass disasters is in negative terms, emphasizing the
legal complexity of the case and the inevitability of a long drawn out and uncertain litigation. This legal temporality of ‘delays’ is opposed to the urgency of victims’ suffering: the ‘spectre’ of impending death, where ‘tomorrow might be too late’. The law, it is argued, could have produced an ‘excellent’ and ‘beautiful’ justice, engaging with broader questions about the historical processes that produced the disaster if it had not been for the urgency of the suffering of the survivors.

What the judgment fails to make clear is why, almost five years after the disaster, state institutions had been unable to alleviate the immediate suffering of the survivors or how the provision of monetary compensation would immediately relieve such suffering. It also failed to explain why the survivors’ immediate suffering could not be relieved by the provision of interim relief, provided by the corporation or the state, allowing the courts to pursue a ‘fuller’ justice seeking to establish culpability and pronounce on issues of ‘vital significance’. This was precisely what the lower courts had attempted to do, when ordering UCC to pay interim relief.

This first figuration of suffering, present in the May 1989 ‘justification’ by the court, thus limited its meaning to the need for ‘immediate relief’. Suffering here was mobilized to avoid a tacit acceptance of the articulation that India as a ‘third world’ country had limited sovereignty. The court could not ensure the enforcement of any judgments demanding absolute liability from UCC. Extended further, this narrative indicated the limits of the state and the courts in protecting the rights and interest of its citizens against harm caused by multinational corporations. This negative narrative was partly conceded in the December 1989 and October 1991 rulings, upholding the settlement, with the court labelling its approach as ‘pragmatic’:

We have to remain cognizant of the fact that the Indian assets of UCC through UCIL are around Rs.100 crores ($ 25 million approx.) or so. For any decree in excess of that amount, execution has to be taken in the United States...If the compensation is determined on the basis of strict liability- a foundation different from the accepted basis in the United States- the decree would be open to attack and may not be executable (UCC vs. UoI, October 1991).
However, invoking the need to ‘protect the victims’ diffused the potential for delegitimization inherent in this tacit acceptance of the limits of sovereignty. All parties to the settlement, the state, the court and the corporation, claimed to be ‘unbiased’ and ‘humane’ in recognizing and responding to the suffering of the victims. Criticism of the settlement and the court by civil society organizations, on the other hand, was labelled as being ‘uninformed’, ‘irresponsible’ and ‘motivated’:

It may be right that some people challenging the settlement who have come before the Court are the real victims. I assume that they are innocent and unaware of the rigmarole of the legal process. They have been led into a situation without appreciating their own interest. This would not be the first instance where people with nothing at stake have traded in the misery of others (UCC vs. UoI, October 1991, emphasis mine).

This characterization of the SMOs and other civil society organizations as misleading the ‘poor and unaware’ victims persists in the state’s negotiations. What is of analytical interest is that this figuration of suffering, detaching the question of liability and linking it to relief, aligned the corporation with the state and the court, and casts the SMOs as the adversarial and symbolic ‘other’. The state is recast as the welfare state and the natural representative and guardian of its citizens’ rights. SMOs on the other hand have had to constantly establish their legitimacy when claiming to speak for the survivors (see discussion in Chapter 5).

4.5.2 The ‘malingering claimant’ required to ‘prove her suffering’

The second figuration of the suffering survivor in the court’s rulings individualizes the survivors, in the figure of the individual claimant. Within this figuration, suffering becomes a knowable quantity, open to quantification and categorization. The survivor as a claimant has no entitlements; each ‘claim’
will be adjudged by the ‘authorities under the Act’:

No individual claimant shall be entitled to claim a particular quantum of compensation even if his case is found to fall within any of the broad categories indicated above. The determination of the actual quantum of compensation payable to the claimants has to be done by the authorities under the Act, on the basis of the facts of each case and without reference to the hypothetical quantifications made only for purposes of an overall view of the adequacy of the amount (UCC vs. UoI, May 1989).

In effect, the burden of proof had been shifted onto the individual survivor. She had to submit herself to the medical, legal and bureaucratic apparatus, which would determine if she was suffering, whether her suffering could be linked to the disaster, the quantum of her suffering and the compensation she should receive for it. Further, this evaluation of suffering was to take place within a system of medical categorization, which was demonstrably ill conceived and faulty (see Sathyamala et al. 1989; BGIA 1992). As I will demonstrate in a brief evaluation below, the medical categorization process was structured to be a deeply negative experience for most survivors: it did not recognize their incapacities in providing ‘proof’ of suffering, it did not ease their physical suffering, and it did not provide them any meaningful understanding of their medical condition (this negative experience is strongly captured in the individual memory narratives examined in Chapter 6).

The medical categorization system was evolved by the state-level Directorate of Claims. The system was based on a ‘Personal Injury Evaluation’ (PIE) where each claimant was assigned two sets of scores for her suffering: the first for the suffering in the post-gas-leak period and the second for the suffering on the date of examination. Based on the comparison between the

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8 In my examination of the individual memory narratives, the survivors struggle to invest their experience of suffering with meaning both from the emptying of historical causality as well as a lack of credible medical narratives. They do not know what ails them, only that they suffer. Most encounters with the state’s medical regime are sites of negativity; positive remembrances recount some instance of recovery of control and knowledge over one’s medical condition (exampled and details provided in Chapter 6 examining individual narratives).
two scores the claimant was assigned to one of six categories indicating various degrees of injury and disablement. The determination of the post-exposure health status was completely dependent upon the ‘facts available in the records’ produced by the claimant (Directorate of Claims cited in Sathyamala et al. 1989). Survivors unable to provide satisfactory documentary proof of post-exposure suffering (relevant hospital records) were automatically considered as having ‘no injury’, regardless of their medical condition at the time of examination.

The scoring for the health status at the time of examination was also based on an incomplete set of standardized symptoms, which excluded key complaints including women’s reproductive health problems as well as psychiatric illness (Sathyamala et al. 1989:35). Arbitrary weightage was given to different organ systems, with the respiratory system assigned the highest significance. This meant that survivors suffering from severe damage to systems other than the respiratory scored low marks. Further, the set of investigative tests was very limited and simply excluded a wide range of damage from the accounting of suffering.

The fallacious design extended to the process of categorization of injury and disablement. Only if the survivor’s health was determined to be worse at the time of examination than in the immediate post-exposure period would she be categorized as having been permanently disabled. In all other instances, despite the presence of continuing illness five years after the disaster, the survivors were categorized as having been only ‘temporarily injured’ (see Sathyamala et al. 1989; Sathyamala 1996). This system of categorization resulted in over 90% of all claims filed being categorized as having ‘no injury’ or ‘temporary injury’. The vast majority of these received only a sum of Rs. 25,000 (500 $) as compensation. The arbitrary and unjust nature of the categorization is evident from the fact that the municipal wards classified as being ‘severely affected’ by the gas exposure received an average

9 A (no injury), B (temporary injury), C (permanent injury), D (temporary partial disablement), E (permanent partial disablement), F (permanent total disablement) (Sathyamala et al. 1989).
compensation less than that received by wards categorized as ‘mildly affected’ (Amnesty International 2004). Anger against this process of medical categorization is prominently present in the memory narratives of survivors residing in these ‘severely affected’ wards, in close proximity to the factory site (examined extensively in Chapter 6).

The court which had invoked the survivors’ poverty, illiteracy and lack of capacity to deal with complex legal process in a disabled medical condition as being key determinants in justifying the out of court settlement, now subjected them to a blatantly unfair system based on documentary evidence:

Bhopal has become a city of paper. Faded, watermarked forms are tickets to any possibility of compensation. Gas victims carry these papers with them, laced together with string, clutched to their chests as they board crowded buses, moving between the Collectorate, the hospitals, the claims courts, their homes. Traffic in hope. Most cannot read the papers they protect (Fortun 2001:167).

The individual memory narratives reveal that both in the immediate aftermath of the disaster and in the following years, the demand to obtain and preserve documentary proof of suffering at the very moment when suffering and loss disabled agency, was a monstrous burden (see Chapter 6 examining personal memory narratives). For the court however, the inability to secure documentation proving post-disaster exposure was simply an indication of the spuriousness of the claim. To illustrate this, the court invoked examples of malingering claimants submitting ‘speculative and spurious’ claims, engaging in ‘impersonation’, faking medical documents and substituting urine samples in their attempts to secure ‘unjust gains’ (UCC vs. UoI October 1991:68). On the other hand, all criticism of the system of medical categorization was dismissed by the invocation of the scientific objectivity and comprehensiveness of the program. Further, the court indicated the ‘absurdity’ of the argument that state institutions could be deliberately harming the interest of the claimants or in any way trying to help the UCC (UCC vs. UoI October 1991:68).
Being subjected to an unfair bureaucratic system, which does not recognize their suffering and refuses them dignity has been the dominant post-disaster experience for all gas survivors. The long drawn-out process of monetary compensation, with two sets of disbursals, the first in 1996 and the second in 2004 ensured a perpetuation of this feeling of injustice. A ‘general suspicion’ has pervaded all examination of claims by the compensation bureaucracy, resulting in the minimum possible amounts of compensation being paid out for claims across all categories (see Muralidhar 2004/5:9).

4.6 Suffering in State Commemoration (1984-2012)

As indicated in the analysis above, the courts were the primary forum for state engagement and pronouncements on the disaster. With the October 1991 decision, both civil and criminal judicial proceedings returned to the city of Bhopal. While the process of dispensing claims began in specially set up claims courts, the criminal trial was taken up in court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM), Bhopal. The disaster was not commemorated in any manner at the national level. No day of mourning or memorial was instituted by the national government. All commemorative activity was limited to the state of Madhya Pradesh (GoMP), more specifically the Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Department (BGTRRD). The BGTRRD is a department of the GoMP set up in early 1985 to oversee all aspects of the relief and rehabilitation in the gas affected areas of Bhopal (BGTRRD 2012).

The range of commemorative activities undertaken by the GoMP was very limited. In terms of annually recurring commemoration, the state confined itself to the ponderous routine of a multi-faith prayer meeting in a state library building, away from the factory site and the severely affected areas. The prominent actors and speakers at this meeting were state-level politicians and bureaucrats, in particular the chief-minister and the minister in charge of the
BGTRRD\textsuperscript{10}. In the following sections, I examine the anniversary publication issued and distributed by the state at these meetings. These publications form the most complete archive for tracing the narrative, visual representation and memorial performances mobilized by the state.

Broadly I will demonstrate how, in line with the court’s performance, the commemoratory discourse of the state carried on the containment of the historical meaning and connections of the disaster. The disaster is stripped of all specificity and becomes just another occasion for making the state ‘visible’ (Roy 2007). The narrative emphasizes the completeness of the state’s capacity to alleviate the suffering of survivors. In fact, the suffering of survivors is effectively displaced by the visualization of an omnipotent state. The survivors are reduced to a set of problems to be remedied by the interventionist state. They have no speaking parts and are only represented as passive recipients of medical and economic relief\textsuperscript{11}.

### 4.6.1 Examining Narrative Containment of Suffering in Anniversary Report

The anniversary report of the BGTRRD has been continuously published since 1985. The report is disseminated to the media and the public attending the state commemoration. The report provides both a general narrative of the disaster and an account of the department’s activities since its institution. The remarkable aspect of the narrative of the disaster in this publication is its

\textsuperscript{10} The limited nature of the state’s commemoration becomes all the more remarkable when compared to the extensive activities undertaken by the social movement organisations representing the survivors. For the SMOs the anniversary of the disaster provided an occasion for the intensification of protest actions. It was in the anniversary commemorations that the SMOs would also effect strategic shifts in the framing of the protests (see chapter 5).

\textsuperscript{11} While the courts invoked the need to alleviate the immediate physical and material suffering of the survivors as being the primary justification for not pursuing an exemplary justice establishing clear corporate liability, the commemorative discourse provides a clear sense of how, at the local level, the suffering of the survivors had been normalized as early as 1985. We see an iteration of the figure of survivor as the needy and deficient citizen invoked in court’s discourse.
unchanging character despite the shifting legal trajectory and changes in local and national governments. The narrative follows a clear linear trajectory involving the ‘event’ of the gas leak, the suffering generated in the aftermath and the recovery facilitated by the state. Over the years, the first two episodes have become token invocations and the publication dominated by the description of the state coordinated relief and recovery. I will take up each of these episodes in the narrative and illustrate how the displacement of the suffering of the survivors by the state is achieved.

The Disaster- A ‘inevitable’ physical event with no history

As established in the earlier discussion, one of the main deficiencies of the court’s memorial performance was its failure to establish liability for the suffering caused. The state’s commemorative discourse could have been the site for redressing this deficiency. Unlike the court, which claimed inability to engage in a symbolic castigation of the corporation due to limits imposed by legal process, the state commemoration could have mobilized a clear narrative of corporate liability. In fact, both GoMP and the GoI had instituted inquiries whose findings held the corporation liable for design and operational flaws in the plant that contributed to the disaster. The description of the disaster in the commemorative publication of the BGTRRD however did not include any of this information. Instead, the gas leak was presented as an ‘inevitable’ physical process:

…vain efforts were on at the Union carbide facility to abort a run-away chemical catastrophe. The attempt failed as it was bound to! (BGTRRD 1986:2, emphasis mine)

12 The section headings used in the second anniversary report (1986) clearly indicate this linear categorization: ‘the disaster’, ‘the aftermath’, ‘the state takes over’. These categories have remained virtually unchanged for almost twenty-five years (see BGTRRD 2012).
On that fateful night an exothermic chemical reaction ensued in the MIC tank (....) a handful of operatives struggled vainly to avert the catastrophe which, in the very nature of the situation, could not have been averted (BGTRRD 1986:2, emphasis mine).

On the cold night of 2\textsuperscript{nd} December 1984, a leak of MIC and other poisonous gases from the pesticide factory operated by the American multinational company Union Carbide (India) Limited caused the world’s worst chemical disaster grievously affecting about 600,000 residents and causing the death of over 3000 people (BGTRRD 2009: 1).

In this narrative, the disaster is assigned a causality that does not extend beyond the events of the night of the leak. This limiting of the event to the night of 2\textsuperscript{nd} December erases in a single stroke the series of decisions made by UCC, GoI and GoMP that lead to the occurrence of the disaster\textsuperscript{13}. Contesting this fallacious limiting of the temporal origin of the disaster is a key aspect of the memorial work of the social movement organizations\textsuperscript{14}.

Further, the limiting of the disaster to a description of its ‘technical cause’ ensured that the state commemoration did not become the site of any public deliberation on the need for legal and policy reforms to regulate risks posed by transnational corporations operating hazardous technologies (see also ‘Varadarajan Report: Cheating the Public’ 1986: 379-380)\textsuperscript{15}. This is precisely

\textsuperscript{13} This temporal limiting is also present in the SC rulings. In fact, the court explicitly defines the disaster as only relating to the events of 2nd-3rd December, when responding to the argument by forwarded by the survivors’ representatives that the GoI should be considered as a joint tortfeasor as it contributed to the conditions that enabled the disaster. ‘It was further contended that Union of India was a joint tort-feasor along with UCC and UCIL. It had negligently permitted the establishment of such a factory without proper safeguards exposing the victims and citizens to great danger’. For deliberations on this issue see Sahu vs. UoI December 1989: 44-57.

\textsuperscript{14} This will be examined in Chapter 4, which looks at the memorialisation undertaken by the social movement organisations.

\textsuperscript{15} The article examines the state government’s decision to close an inquiry which had been set up to explicitly examine the liability of state-level and city-level officials for the occurrence of the disaster and for the failure to cope with the immediate aftermath ‘Varadarajan Report: Cheating the Public’ 1986: 379-380). While it could be argued that
the kind of public engagement which the social movement organizations seek to provoke with their commemoration of the event (see Chapter 5 examining SMO memory-work).

The Aftermath-Establishing suffering as a ‘challenge’ to be overcome by statist intervention

The scale of the suffering caused by the disaster received due emphasis in the first set of commemorative reports. The disaster was seen as a ‘disruption’ of the lives of the ‘innocent poor’. There was a generalised invocation of the illness being experienced by hundreds of thousands and how this illness had robbed the poor of their ability to earn their daily livelihood16.

30 out of 56 municipal wards of Bhopal were affected by the gas leakage (…) Most of the people in these wards belong to the economically weaker sections of the society. Many people lost their capacity to pursue vocations involving hard physical labour. They have all to be helped to pick afresh the threads of their lives and rebuild their lives anew (BGTRRD 1985:6)

The acknowledgement of the impairment caused by the exposure to the gas was a significant moment of recognition by the state. The ‘multidimensional’

the decision to not pursue such an inquiry was linked to issue of protecting the interests of state-level politicians and officials, the long term neglect of examining government liability is connected to the broader problems evident in the SC’s deliberations in Sahu vs. UoI December 1989:44-57.

16 This recognition of the loss of the capacity to work was significant. The state having acknowledged this deficiency had to take steps to remediate it. This economic rehabilitation schemes which were put in place, provided many of the survivors their first experience of organized collective work. The training and working spaces become spaces for the development of a political identity through the formation of workers’ unions. Some of these unions developed into survivors’ organizations campaigning for the rights of the survivors. They continue to make use of the ‘needs discourse’ and special deficiency status granted to the survivors to counter the removal of state benefits prompted by neo-liberal reforms. This mobilization of a ‘biological citizenship’ (Petryna 2003) will be examined in Chapter 4, which examines the work of social movement organizations in Bhopal.
relief conceptualized in the early reports formulated a program of long-term medical and economic care:

In the long run people can be relieved of their agony and misery only by putting them back on their feet and truly rehabilitating them in profitable economic activities. The persons who continue to be ill also need to be looked after till they recover (BGTRRD 1985:6).

This imagination of long-term multidimensional relief was however not backed up by the required ‘conceptual expertise’ (see Rajan 2002). The economic and medical rehabilitation programs were poorly designed and implemented; the absence of an accurate diagnosis of the ‘nature of the problem’ was compounded by the ‘inability…to troubleshoot the failure of the programs’ (Rajan 2002:245). In the lived experience of survivors, the rehabilitation programs failed to address any dimension of their suffering (see Chapter 5 examining the individual memory narratives). The commemorative discourse however did not admit to any inadequacies. A narrative of recovery and resurgence was being put forward as early as the third anniversary signalled in the very title of the commemorative report, ‘Bhopal finding its feet’ (BGTRRD 1987):

Nevertheless life is reasserting itself and the helping hand extended by the Government has raised many a victim to his feet and given him the confidence to step out to try and for himself a meaningful place under the sun (BGTRRD 1987:3).

The state’s strident assertion of the success of its interventions left no space for the acknowledgement of the continuing suffering of survivors. The absolute disconnection between the claims of the state and experience of the survivors renders the state’s commemoration a site of alienation for the survivors. This disconnection only intensified with the passage of time. In the anniversary reports of the 1990s and 2000s, sections dealing with the event of the disaster and suffering caused in the aftermath are reduced to token invocations; the descriptions are extremely truncated, limited to a length of just a couple of
Suffering Alleviated: State Institutions Displace Survivors’ Suffering

It is through the habitual experiences of ‘encountering’ the nation state that the identification of the state and its idioms of nationhood takes place. The sights and sounds of the nation-state ‘clutter public space,’ and it is their familiarity or pervasiveness rather than their persuasiveness that engenders public recognition (Roy 2007:18).

The account in the following pages recounts briefly the contribution of the Government of Madhya Pradesh in alleviating the sufferings of the poison-gas affected people and in restoring normalcy (BGTRRD 1986:2).

The commemorative publication is dominated by the account of the state’s alleviation of the suffering of survivors through the development of an extensive ‘relief and rehabilitation’ bureaucracy. In the first few reports, there was some acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the existing medical infrastructure in coping with the disaster. The reports also admitted that the initial medical response was limited to ‘symptomatic treatment’ and the fact that many survivors did not ‘respond well’ to such treatment (BGTRRD 1985,1986, 1987)17. However, this inadequacy in medical treatment was framed as a transient challenge, successfully overcome by an intensification and expansion of the state’s scientific intervention.

Reports from the 1990s and 2000s put forward extensive details on the expansion and modernisation of medical infrastructure. Banal accounts of the building of ‘gas relief’ hospitals, acquisition of sophisticated diagnostic and treatment equipment and establishment of computerised documentation centres displaced the suffering of the survivors. Further, suffering was

17 The early reports rightly apportion the blame for this to the Union Carbide Corporation, which refused to disclose accurate information on the nature of the gases released and or on antidotes and lines of treatment.
stripped of all specificity in the statistical data that became the dominant mode of representing the community of survivors. Annual reports of the numbers of patients processed in different hospitals provided no sense of the efficacy of the treatment. The data was mobilised not as evidence of chronic and continuing suffering but rather of its successful containment within a routinized medical framework.\textsuperscript{18}

Roy (2007), in her analysis of nation-state formation in India, identifies a ‘discourse of needs’ as having been central to the imagination of a homogenized national community (114). More specifically, it was a ‘need for science’ that emerged as the dominant national discourse in postcolonial India. Within this imagination state agency was linked to scientific rationality: the state as the ‘authoritative problem solver of the needy nation’ depended upon the mobilization of scientific expertise (ibid: 117). The analysis above clearly demonstrates the mobilization of this discourse in the state’s commemoration: the suffering of the survivors was normalized as simply another ‘need’ successfully addressed by the state’s scientific expertise, in this case, the medical establishment and the rehabilitation bureaucracy.

\textbf{4.6.2 Examining Visual Representations in State Commemoration}

The narrative of an untroubled movement towards recovery facilitated by the state’s scientific intervention was supplemented by visual representations employed in the anniversary publications. As with the narrative, the visual

\textsuperscript{18} This effacement assumes a perverse character when placed in relation to the fact that the medical research undertaken by the state was inadequate and incomplete and never succeeded in evolving treatment addressing the specificity of the harm caused by toxic exposure. Both expert reviews (Sadgopal & Das 1988; Eckerman 2005) and survivors’ accounts have indicated this failure. A deep lack of faith in the medical care provided by the state is a dominant theme in the survivors’ memory narratives (see Chapter 6). Survivors’ characterize \textit{encounters} with the state’s medical establishment as not allowing for any articulation of the precise nature of their suffering. The treatment is characterized as both uncaring and ineffective; the survivors are not accorded any dignity or accountability (see Chapter 6).
representations demonstrate a remarkable degree of stability over nearly three decades of commemoration. Analysing a selection of representative images from 1985-2010, I will demonstrate how the suffering of the survivors was quite literally displaced in visual representations. Within the state’s representation the only meaning allowed to the survivor’s suffering body was one that justified the state’s identity as the omnipotent and authoritative problem solver. All other meanings were excluded and all images upon which this meaning could not be imposed were excluded.

**Bodies under treatment: Survivors as passive recipients of state expertise**

All representations of the survivors’ suffering are in the context of undergoing diagnosis or treatment in the state’s medical facilities. Corresponding to the statistical transformation of survivors from a community defined by a shared, collective experience into a bureaucratic collection of identical units, visual tableaus transform the survivor into an isolated and anonymous ailing body. The ‘body’ is accorded no identification and no history. The survivor’s body simply provides an occasion for the making visible of the state, as constituted by modern technology and scientific expertise.

![Modern equipment to assess victims (BGTRRD 1986)](image)

**Fig. 4.1 Modern equipment to assess victims (BGTRRD 1986)**

The insignificance of the survivors’ bodies is evident from the framing of the images, which put emphasis on the monumentality and materiality of the
medical equipment. The picture captions indicate the superfluous nature of the survivor’s body: in the reports from the 1990s and 2000s, the captions simply name the ‘ultra-modern facilities’, the equipment or medical procedure available at the hospitals. The commemorative report becomes a catalogue of the capacities of the scientific and modern state.

Fig. 4.2 Provision of ultra-modern treatment facilities in gas-relief hospitals (BGTRRD 2006; BGTRRD 2009)

**Hospitals as monuments: Reifying recovery and progress**

The “techno-scientific ‘fetish’” (Roy 2007:122) evident in these images finds its fullest expression in another category of images from which the body of the survivor disappears altogether. These are images of hospital buildings emphasising their monumental aspect. In many cases, these images are not even of functioning facilities but of buildings under construction or nearing completion.
The captions indicate the status of the building as a hospital and its capacity in terms of number of patients’ it can house. Within state iconography these images are inscrutable signifiers of modernity: they admit no uncertainty or ambiguity about the capabilities of state science in alleviating the suffering of the victims. The 2010 image (above left) spells out the only meaning allowed to these representations: ‘Sorrows of the Past become happiness of Today through Gas Relief Hospitals’ [sic]. Hospitals are material representations through which the state reifies its narrative of an uncomplicated transition from past suffering to present day happiness.

**Inaugurations: Performing the ‘science-state-nation’**

Beyond generating monumental icons, medical facilities also provide locations for special ritual performances involving state actors. The inauguration of medical facilities emerges as the dominant state ritual, pictured much more extensively than the anniversary prayer meeting. Unlike the prayer meeting, which as a memorial genre only permitted a passive performance of shared grief, inaugurations allowed state actors’ active and exemplary participation.
Further as a well-established state ritual the inauguration of scientific facilities allowed for the iteration of the ‘science-state-nation’ triad: ‘each new scientific venture was invariably heralded as a sign of national progress towards a modern and prosperous future’ (Roy 2007:128-129). In this manner, the specificity of the disaster was subsumed under the general state narrative of an inevitable linear movement away towards achieved modernity. The survivors were not allowed any role in these performances.

Fig. 4.4 Inauguration of hospitals and research centres by gas relief minister (BGTRRD 2005; BTRRD 2010)

Performing the paternal state: Survivors as orphans

The only category of survivors directly included in the state’s commemorative performance was a group of 28 children orphaned in the disaster. The children were made a part of the anniversary function with gifts being handed
to them by the chief minister (Amnesty International 2004:70). They were also pictured prominently in the anniversary publications.

Fig. 4.5 ‘Rani born on that fateful night lost her parents but not her future’ (BGTRRD 1987, above left); ‘Chief Minister with orphan children on tenth anniversary of tragedy’ (BGTRRD 1995, above right)

Including the children orphaned by the disaster in the commemoration allowed a direct enactment of the generic paternal relationship between the omnipotent state and the needy deficient citizens. Within this imagination there could be no conflict of interest between state and citizens. Nor could there be any valid representative of the survivors other than the state.

This relationship was also performed in other encounters where survivors were ‘visited’ by ministers and high-ranking officials. The survivors suffering body becomes visible in these images but only to animate the tableau of the caring state, embodied invariably by a male representative. One of the few
archival images from the immediate aftermath of the disaster included in the anniversary reports, provides an early exemplar: a picture of the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visiting survivors in the hospital.

Fig. 4.6 Rajiv Gandhi visiting survivors in hospital, December 1984, Bhopal (BGTRRD 1998)

The final set of images employed in these publications moves away from the domain of medical rehabilitation to the domain of economic rehabilitation. This much smaller set of images situates itself entirely within the domain of recovery. Suffering within these images has already been successfully overcome. The state has reconstituted the survivors into ‘healthy’ citizens receiving occupational training, which would render them capable of securing their own livelihood.

Excluding memories of abjection and protest: Archival containment

Apart from the images, which were included in the report, it is also necessary to point out important categories of images that were excluded. One of the
primary strategies for the exclusion of suffering was the non-inclusion of images from the immediate aftermath of the disaster. A multitude of such images exist and had been widely circulated in both the national and international press in the days and weeks following the disaster. The reason for exclusion was not that these images made evident the immense scale and gruesome character of the death and suffering but that they clearly indicated the complete absence of any state infrastructure providing effective relief. What the images clearly depict is an extremely deprived population brutalised by a disaster against which they had no defence; a disaster against which they had no informational and material resources. The abjection communicated by each image becomes a damning indictment of the state’s clear abandonment of its stated role as the protector of its citizens.

Fig. 4.7 Survivors in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, Bhopal (Rai 1984)

Another set of archival images, which find no space in the state’s commemoration, are those of mass protests against the state, which took
place in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Both sets of archival images find a prominent place in the commemoration of the social movement organisations (see discussions in Chapter 5).

4.7 Conclusion: Suffering, Representation and Justice

The *construction of meta-narratives*, through the agency of the state, the community, or professional discourse, often ends up appropriating *the sufferings which they seek to represent*....to my mind the destruction of meta-narratives has a relation of consubstantiation with *the truth of the victim*. This is neither because it corresponds more closely to the structure of the pre-existing world, nor because it is more compelling in its power to persuade, but rather because it provides us with *new possibilities of justice* (Das 1995 205-207, emphasis mine).

In this chapter, I have examined the state’s negotiation of the suffering of gas survivors within the judicial and commemorative fields. In line with Das’s observation above, I demonstrated how the state’s memory-work appropriated, devalued and displaced the survivors’ suffering. Within the judicial domain, I identified two specific figurations of suffering that were mobilised and institutionalised by the court’s deliberations. The first was an abstract collective invocation putting its emphasis on the incapacity of the sufferers and the immediate necessity of relief. This figuration detached suffering from the issue of establishing liability. Invoking a deficient citizenry requiring immediate alleviation of their suffering, the court justified the limiting of justice to the issue of providing monetary relief. In doing so, it rendered invisible the transnational causality of the suffering which implicated both the state and transnational corporations. The suffering of the victims was thus robbed of all historical specificity. The second figuration of suffering in the court’s rulings individualized the survivors, in the figure of the individual claimant. Within this figuration, suffering becomes a knowable quantity, open to quantification and categorization by the scientific and bureaucratic
apparatus of the state. The burden of proving the suffering falls on the survivor. To be recognized as a victim, the survivor has to submit herself to the medical and legal frameworks established by the state. I demonstrated that this system of medical categorization was extremely flawed in how it determined the quantum of injury and in not making any allowances for the vulnerabilities and deficiencies of the survivor’s in furnishing documentary proof. I demonstrated how by treating all survivors with suspicion, challenging and in many cases rejecting their narrations and claims of suffering, the state claims disbursal bureaucracy became the site of deep injustice and disrespect.

In examining the commemorative remembering of the state, I demonstrated how there was a prominent mobilization of the narrative of an untroubled transition from suffering to recovery. I examined how this triumphalist narrative perpetuated the erasure of the historical meaning of the survivors’ suffering by not providing any space for the examination of the causality of the event. Further, I established how the state’s commemorative performances and representations did not provide any space for the acknowledgement of the continuing physical, economic and social suffering of the victims. The emphasis of the commemoration was to foreground the scientific capacities of the state institutions and did not allow for any articulations by the survivors or their representatives that challenged this imaginary.

The discussion situated this deeply problematic memory-work of the state within the wider political meaning systems characterizing the historical conjunctures of its performance. I demonstrated how the limiting of the meaning of the suffering of the victims and the scope of justice was tied into the state’s tortuous negotiation of a transformation in its external identity and maintenance and strengthening of its internal identity. At the transnational level, the state was reconfiguring its identity and interests within the domain of economic policy and transnational relations. In terms of its relationship to the citizens, older narratives of a problem-solving, scientific, developmentalist state taking care a deficient citizenry continued to enjoy legitimacy and guide
practice at national, sub-national and local scales (as witnessed in the domain of the bureaucratic medical framework and the commemorative domain).

This historical approach to the examination of remembrance will be carried on into the next chapter, which engages with the memory-work undertaken by the social movement organisations that have waged a struggle for justice for the survivors. The state, in limiting the suffering produced by the disaster to the routinized bodily misery of the needy deficient citizen, had rendered invisible the multidimensional and multi-scalar nature of the injustice that had been perpetrated. The difficult task that confronted the social movement organisations representing the survivors was to un-settle the scaling imposed by the state and mobilise a remembrance that restored meaning to the suffering of the victims and could be utilised in pursuing a multi-scalar and multidimensional justice.
Chapter 5- Social Movement Organizations and Memory: Recasting suffering and justice

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I undertake a comparative examination of the memory-work of the two most prominent social movement organizations (SMOs) working in Bhopal to secure justice for the survivors. I demonstrate how the Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan (Bhopal Gas Affected Women Workers’ Union, hereafter BGPMUS) and the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (hereafter ICJB) seek to expand the meaning of the suffering of the survivors, restoring national and transnational connections that had been erased by the memory-work of the state. I will trace the differences in meaning-making of the two organizations and explain them in relation to their different historical trajectories.

To structure the discussion of the reframing of the suffering and the claim-making around it, I will be employing a framework derived from the work of Jeffrey Alexander. Alexander (2004:12-15) outlines four ‘critical representations’ as essential for the forging of new narratives and identities in relation to instances of collective suffering. The first element is ‘the nature of the pain’: making clear ‘what actually happened’. The second element is ‘the nature of the victim’: defining the subject affected by the event and consequently defining the boundaries of the affected group. The third element is the relation of the affected group to the wider society: making clear the similarities and distinctions. The fourth and final element is the ‘attribution of responsibility’: specifying the perpetrator, who is responsible for causing the injury, who bears the burden for punishment and redress.

Employing these four categories, I will be tracking how BGPMUS has chosen to develop a class-based conceptualization of injury which remains focused on the harm caused by the event of the leak, attributes responsibility to the state, and conceptualizes justice primarily in terms of significantly enhanced
financial compensation. The ICJB, on the other hand, has developed an expanded framework of injury; focusing on the issue of groundwater contamination, they articulate a narrative of a continuing ‘second disaster,’ adding new sets of injuries to those caused by the original leak. I will outline how the ICJB uses this expansion of injury to re-implicate the corporation into the circuits of accountability and formulate a multidimensional justice. This focus on the SMO’s symbolic and discursive work will be further supplemented by a keen awareness of their response to shifting political opportunities and their capacities for resource mobilization.

Theoretically, this multidimensional approach seeks to address some problems within the existing memory studies literature examining group-level memory-work. Firstly, in existing literature within memory studies there has been an emphasis on either examining inter-group memory contestations or the success of non-state group level actors as memory choreographers. Not enough attention has been paid to intra-group memory-work: how do actors forge new collectivities? How are such collectivities transformed and maintained over time? How are such identities mobilized for collective action?

Secondly, there has been a recent tendency within memory studies to see group-level memory through a utopian lens, positing it as the basis of a new connective politics. There has however been little empirical examination of the elements determining which groups/collectivities can engage in such connective politics.

This discussion has been designed to address these deficiencies through a multidimensional examination in relation to both in-group and out-group memory-work. Carrying out this examination in relation to material from both formal commemorations and the more mundane everyday remembrance reveals a far more complex dynamics at play than that suggested by existing models of group-level memory-work.

I begin first with a discussion situating the two organizations within the historical trajectory of protest in Bhopal.
5.2 BGPMUS and the ICJB in the trajectory of protest in Bhopal

The development of the social movement for justice in Bhopal can be broadly divided into three phases. The first phase is seen as having been initiated by the ‘spontaneous outbreak of angry, unfocused protest’ by survivors in the days immediately following the event (Bhopal Survivors’ Movement Study 2009:31 hereafter BSMS 2009). These spontaneous protests were consolidated into two organisations largely led by middle-class activists from out of town or from the non-affected and affluent ‘New Bhopal’ area (Sarangi 1994; BSMS 2009). These two organisations, the Nagarik Rahat Aur Punarvas Committee (NRPC) and the Zahreeli Gas Kand Sangharsh Morcha (hereafter ZGKSM) had differing agendas, the first focusing on the issue of relief and rehabilitation and the latter on a more explicitly political agenda, seeking to intervene in the domains of scientific information, medical care and legal proceedings on behalf of the survivors (Sarangi 1994; BSMS 2009). By 1986, these organisations dissolved or lost prominence under a combination of government repression, the exodus of middle-class leaders and the splitting away of groups which re-organised under the leadership of gas survivors19 (Singh 2009).

The second phase of the movement’s development is seen as being marked by the emergence of survivor-led organisations. Many of these were initiated

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19 The ZGKSM continues to function at the local level. It has in fact assumed a political position where it seeks to work with the local government to implement rehabilitation programmes for the BGTRRD. Its leader Alok Pratap Singh is a member of various government appointed committees as a representative of the civil society. The organisation has close ties with traditional political parties and often assumes a jingoistic nationalist frame in its commemorative discourse, raising questions about the ‘foreign funding’ being used by groups part of the ICJB. It was not selected for inclusion in the larger thesis because it does not have any significant public or political engagement at the local, national or international level. Its political trajectory of having begun as an oppositional group and now assuming a non-contentious position of being a service deliverer on behalf of the state serves as an important reminder of the integrity of both the BGPMUS and ICJB who have fiercely protected an independent position in relation to the state. An interview was conducted with the long-term leader of the ZGKSM and archival material from their commemorative activities was collected.
as independent trade unions constituted by women survivors getting their first experience of collective small-scale work in government ‘work-sheds’ set up as part of economic rehabilitation programmes. These unions initially mobilised around the issues of ensuring secure work, adequate wages, and fair terms and conditions of employment. The scope of contention was however soon expanded onto the wider issues affecting the entire survivor community, including medical rehabilitation, financial compensation and securing criminal convictions against the guilty corporations.

The BGPMUS emerged as the largest of these unions and one that has been able to engage in a sustained campaign of justice based on mass mobilisation from the survivor community. The organisation was initially set up by a small group of women survivors’ working in sewing sheds operated by NGOs as part of the government’s relief schemes. The women were seeking to improve their conditions of work and secure government jobs by demanding state takeover of the sewing centres. Soon the leadership of the organisation was taken over by Abdul Jabbar Khan, a gas survivor and a local activist, who had been active within the ZGKSM organisation. He sought to expand the agenda of the organisation, bringing in demands of employment for gas survivors and long-term economic relief. With this widened focus, membership of the group increased dramatically, peaking in 1989, with weekly attendances of almost 10,000-12000 individuals (Khan 2009, Rehana Begum 2009).

Two other organisations, which were to be of continuing significance in the campaign for justice, also emerged during this period. The first was another union-based group, the Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationary Karamchari Sangh (Bhopal Gas Survivors Women Stationary Workers’ Union, hereafter BGPMSKS). The group included women survivors working as stationary workers in a government shed. Similar to the trajectory of the BGPMUS, they began as a small group with a limited set of work-related concerns. The expansion of the agenda in their case came in 1999-2000 as they came together with the ‘Bhopal Group for Information and Action’ (BGIA) and some other smaller groups to form the ICJB. The BGIA is the third significant group
which emerged during this period and which would go on to become one of the core constituents of the ICJB coalition.

The BGIA was different from other organisations that emerged during this period in not being a survivors’ organisation. It was made up of an extremely small group of educated, English-speaking, left-leaning activists from Bhopal and outside the city, who sought to work as a support group for survivors’ organisations such as the BGPMUS and the BGPMSKS. Employing their technical expertise and communications skills, and collaborating with other advocacy groups within the country and internationally, they sought to both generate and mobilise information that could help survivors’ groups in their campaign. The most important of these international collaborations was with Greenpeace international and began in 1999. This marked, what I would label, the third phase in the development of the campaign of justice in Bhopal. The BGIA transformed itself from being a support organisation to a more prominent advocacy position setting up the ICJB coalition with survivors’ organisations like the BGPMSKS (Sarangi 2009). The third phase, which is still on going, has been a phase of rapid re-internationalisation of the disaster, primarily driven by the ICJB under a distinct frame of environmental justice. The BGPMUS also continues to operate in the third phase. While sometimes coming together with the ICJB for strategic actions, they have consciously maintained a distinct identity and politics.

There have been very few comparative examinations of the BGPMUS and the ICJB. The work of Scandrett and Mukherjee (2011) is a vital contribution articulating a difference in terms of the ‘militant particularism’ orienting the praxes of the two groups. BGPMUS is seen as operating with a ‘class struggle’ orientation and the ICJB adopting an ‘environmental justice’ abstraction. The identification of these abstractions, primarily derived from a discursive analysis of interviews with group leaders, reveals little of the contestations over power to which these framings are responding and the strategic advantage they afford in terms of demanding justice. Further, little attention is paid to the discursive, material and performative work that is required to operationalize and stabilise these abstractions. The main problem
with such an analysis is that it ends up presenting these abstractions as *stable categories*, which explain the actions of the groups, rather than viewing them as *evolving constructions* attempting to seek solutions for problems, in this case, the problem of achieving justice for Bhopal. The limits of their account are evident from an inability to address the fundamental political tension foregrounded by the concept of ‘militant particularism’ in both Williams’ and Harvey’s work: ‘the shift from one conceptual world, from one level of abstraction to another, can threaten the common purpose and values that ground the militant particularism achieved in particular places’ (Harvey 1996:33).

The tension that Harvey is referring to emerges from the problems of negotiating between personal identities forged out of place-specific experience and the imagination of wider communities necessary for the mobilisation of an efficacious politics transcending the local. Examining this tension requires engaging with the mobilisations of personal and collective identity. My discussion will be comparing the two groups and analysing their cultural activities to illustrate how memory studies and in particular a multi-level model of memory can help foreground the dynamics of these processes. In doing so the discussion seeks to contribute to the development of an interdisciplinary approach for studying social movements\(^\text{20}\).

Both organizations attempt to redress the injustices caused by the state’s settlement of the disaster (outlined in the preceding chapter). They differ however in their scalar practices and politics (praxis), with the BGPMUS situating its politics within the national scale-frame imposed by the state and the ICJB seeking to fundamentally challenge it\(^\text{21}\). This analysis will be undertaken in relation to memory-work. The discussion will include both the day-to-day practices, examined through an analysis of the groups’ weekly meetings and the more carefully considered mnemonic rituals of the

\(^{20}\) See the final section of the *Handbook of Social Movement Research* Introduction: Comparison, Globalisation- Diffusion, Identity, Group Dynamics (Roggeband and Klandermans 2007).

\(^{21}\) On scalar political praxis, see Herod and Wright (2008).
anniversary commemorations. The material is derived from a six-month period of ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in Bhopal from November 2010 to April 2011.

I will now take up the discussion of the recasting of injury and justice in relation to the memory-work of the BGPMUS. I will be drawing on all elements of the group’s memory-work, including the mundane remembrances of the weekly meeting as well as the formal commemoration on the anniversary of the gas leak.

5.3 Examining the discourse of the BGPMUS

5.3.1 Defining the Injury- Inadequate financial compensation for harm caused by the 1984 gas leak

In both the formal commemoration and the mundane remembrance of the BGPMUS, the injury is clearly centred on the immediate and long-term physical harm, and the consequent socio-economic deprivation caused by the event of the gas leak. The injury is seen as a continuing one, linked to the argument that the gas survivors are suffering from a continuing injustice: they have not been paid the adequate quantum of monetary compensation. Other dimensions of injury such as the lack of punishment for the Indian and US officials of Union Carbide do surface from time to time. However, it is the issue of inadequate financial compensation that dominates the discourse.

Framing the injury primarily in relation to the issue of inadequate financial compensation has meant that the memory narratives most often shared in the weekly meetings are not the ones recounting the immediate suffering caused by the disaster but rather that of the 1989 SC judgment which first established the unjust and inadequate financial settlement. The narrative establishes the series of betrayals by the state beginning with the 1989 settlement and the long-standing struggle of the BGPMUS to overturn these betrayals and secure justice for the survivors. This memory narrative emphasizes both the longevity
of the organization and its capacity to secure economic justice for the gas survivors primarily through repeated interventions at local, state-level and national judicial forums. Invoking the memory of past successes within the field of securing increased financial compensation through the forum of the courts validates the organisation’s present-day agenda of seeking fivefold compensation from the state through appeals to the Supreme Court. Recounting past successes seeks to assuage the feelings of impatience or lack of belief that movement participants might have in the continuing relevance of the organization.

More broadly, the BGPMUS maintain an explicit focus of the event of the gas leak. In the commemorative discourse, the imagery mobilized in the formal commemoration and in the choice of spokespersons, the organisation foregrounds the suffering unleashed by the leak as the original collective experience which defines the collectivity.

Viewed historically, the BGPMUS's definition of injury can be seen as having first undergone a significant expansion and a later period of narrowing down. Having begun as a workers’ union with a narrow grievance linked to the demand for permanent employment for a small group of women survivors, it had expanded to include a wider range of injuries affecting all survivors. It had mobilized on a diverse set of demands including adequate economic compensation, long-term medical and economic rehabilitation, and punishment for the perpetrators. This expansion had led to a period of widening movement participation. The narrowing of the focus on the issue of economic compensation for the survivors from the state has resulted in a narrowing of the definition of the victim group as well as a limiting of the opportunities for expansion of the movement.
5.3.2 Defining the Victim: The poor gas survivor committed to the struggle for justice

We shall fight, we shall win!  
We shall fight, we shall win!  
Those who toil shall prosper!  
Those who toil shall prosper!  
Those who exploit shall be brought low!  
A new society shall come!  
(Slogans ritually chanted by BGPMUS members at the end of the weekly meetings)

I tell you that opposing injustice, engaging in protest, it is the poor who engage in these the most. Those who have the least means. As soon as people are able to put on spotless clothes, acquire professional education, they weaken in their ability to protest, they lose the potency to oppose. (Abdul Jabbar, 8/4/2011, Interview)

In keeping with the definition of injury as being linked to the issue of inadequate compensation for immediate and long-term harm caused by the event of the gas leak, the BGPMUS in its contemporary commemorative discourse broadly identifies all gas survivors as constituting the victim group. When demanding the payment of increased compensation, for instance, claims are mobilized on behalf of all gas survivors. There is however a much narrower membership category of the ‘ideal’ victim-protestor, which strongly and consistently emerges from an analysis of the discourse mobilized in the mundane remembrance of the weekly meetings and the anniversary commemoration.

This narrower membership category is constituted by poor working-class survivors, uneducated and unable to negotiate successfully with the machinery of the state for their entitlements, both as gas victims and as citizens. It is the interests of this specific category of gas victims that the
BGPMUS claims to be defending. This class-based narrowing derives from a sense of injustice experienced by the vast majority of survivors belonging to the poor working class as they witnessed the more successful negotiation of the state-instituted claims process by the small group of survivors belonging to educated and professional middle class. This splitting of the community of victims was a direct consequence of the State’s success in institutionalizing its flawed framework of injury categorization and individuated claims disbursement process (discussed in Chapter 4).

The BGPMUS, along with other survivors’ organization, had strongly attempted to overturn the state’s categorization framework, fearing precisely such a splitting of the survivors’ community and the reinforcement of existing vulnerabilities. The demand to treat all survivors, resident in the 36 residential wards identified as gas-affected, equally in terms of economic compensation and without requiring their subjection to any process of providing proof of injury, was a prominent part of the group’s agenda right until the early 1990s. Resistance to the framework became ineffectual with the courts’ upholding the government’s categorization framework in 1991. It was the group’s tacit acceptance of the state’s framework of differential categorization and the eventual reproduction of those categories in its own discourse, which began the process of narrowing the victim category. In its contemporary discourse the group reproduces the state’s categories, identifying the victims’ groups according the quantum of injury and compensation awarded by the state. Its demand for the awarding of an additional fivefold compensation accepts the state’s categorization, only seeking to increase its quantum. With the majority of survivors being placed in the category of ‘no injury’ there is still a large structurally bounded community of the disaffected. The complex and individuated framework of claims classification, however, hinders the formation of a collectivity, as survivors continue to perceive themselves as individual claimants competing against each other (see discussion in Chapter 6).

BGPMUS’s dominant class framing for its membership is an attempt to re-establish a coherent collective identity based upon a shared class identity and
consequently a shared disaffection with the state in terms of entitlements as gas victims and as citizens. This class identity and the associated experience of disenfranchisement is indeed recognizable to many movement members and possesses efficacy in terms of linking individual social identities and the collective group identity. However, in not fundamentally challenging the individuated framework imposed by the state, this group framing remains fragile, needing constant re-enforcement especially in the weekly meetings. More significantly, as demonstrated by the examination of individual interviews in Chapter 6, the linkage is mobilized within a narrow competitive frame, which tends to devalue the suffering of other survivors.

There is a further othering of survivors based on two moral failings seen as being inimical to the interests of the group and its members. These are the qualities of base selfishness or self-interest and an attitude of apathy, passively undervaluing or actively undermining the groups’ activities. These categories of immoral others may be mobilised independent of the class based othering but are also often combined. Middle-class survivors may be seen as being selfish and cowardly, only seeking engagement with the group’s activities when it suits their interests:

Will such people (middle class) ever be of help to the movement? Never. In 1989, 20-21 years ago, we went to Shyamla Hills and asked for Union Carbide’s research centre to be shut down. The police rained blows on us, 141 people were injured. Out of the almost 5000 protestors, a few ran away. When I met them later, I asked them never to return to my organisation because a few cowards can make others cowardly too. Ultimately what happened? The centre was shut down, the government apologized to us (applause from the audience). But were those people of any help, the ones who were running away? (Abdul Jabbar, Saturday Meeting, 11 December 2010)

The opposing positive qualities of sustained commitment to the group and the courage to engage in militant protest are assigned to the poor working class survivors who are positioned as movement insiders. Memory narratives such as the one above are used to establish not only the historical continuity and
relevance of the group’s collective identity but also its salience for actions in the present. A large part of the discourse in the weekly meetings is directed towards reinforcing this militant class identity of the movements’ membership and demanding its performance in terms of continued support for the activities of the group. This commitment to the group, however, is often required to be performed in terms of mundane rituals such as regular attendance at the weekly meetings, the filling up of forms in support of the groups’ legal petitions and the paying of a small membership fee. Unlike the state, which is able to maintain its identity simply through its structural pervasiveness, requiring the participation of citizens in its mundane rituals but not necessarily with any belief or affective identification, small groups such as the BGPMUS are dependent on affective investment by members. The identification with the group’s identity needs to be affirmed through mundane performative rituals. At the same time, movement participants are required to invest this performance with affect and belief. Performing the rituals, such as paying the membership fee or filling up the forms supporting the group’s legal petition, without actively believing in the efficacy of the actions and the relevance of the organisation is seen as being ultimately damaging:

Till such time that people do not consider the organisation as their own, do not lend their help, do not have belief, do not learn to protest with belief, till such time we will not achieve our goals. The press of the whole world, America, Japan, Australia, trusts me more than the state to tell them about the situation in Bhopal. The Supreme Court has faith in me. The people of Bhopal do not have faith in me, what a strange state of things! This is a matter of great shame! What manner of people are these? They are fooling themselves. (Jabbar 22.1.2011 Saturday Speech)

Saanth de saktey ho tabhi form do.

Nahin de sakte to form mat do.

If you are committed to supporting the struggle, then submit the form (in support of the organisation’s legal petition for fivefold compensation). If you are not willing to support, do not submit the form. (Jabbar 11.12.2010 Saturday Speech)
The demand for this kind of ideal membership often also takes the form of explicit chastisement of particular categories of survivors and praise and recognition for exemplary members.

5.3.3 Relation between victims and wider community- Shift away from connective politics

There has been a clear historical shift in the direction of the communication and identity-work of the BGPMUS. In the commemorative communication till 1999, there is a clear and strong strand of messages directed to individuals and groups outside the survivor community, located at both national and transnational levels, seeking their support and solidarity for the activities of the organisation. In a 1990 communication, for instance, the BGPMUS links its advocacy on behalf of the survivors to a broader struggle against the ‘mismanagement’ of ‘development’ goals which prioritize industrialization and foreign investment’ (BGPMUS: The Cries of Bhopal 1990). In doing so, it links the injustice inflicted on the survivors to the suffering of other ‘marginalized sectors of society’ who have to bear the risks of hazardous operations designed to serve ‘elite interests’. In drawing out these similarities between victims of Bhopal and similarly disadvantaged communities the BGPMUS was able to gain solidarity for its actions from national and transnational actors. Support was sought explicitly in terms of funds and volunteers and framed as the most valid form of remembrance for the disaster: ‘We need funds to continue with our struggle. We need volunteers to work with us. We need you to remember ‘Bhopal” (BGMUS 1990). This national and transnational remembrance and solidarity was viewed as being directly significant in maintaining the pressure on the courts and the state of India to provide justice for the gas survivors: ‘the only defence of the victims is strong and widespread public protest…. there is an urgent need to inform and mobilize opinion around the country’ (BGPMUS 1990).
In the contemporary discourse of the BGPMUS the relation between the victims/survivors and the wider community has lost prominence. There are almost few references made to the transnational community. References to the wider community at the national level are also rare. With most of the outward communication dominated by the expression of opposition towards the state, the solidarity-seeking element has dramatically attenuated. References to the wider community are expressed within the exclusionary class framing indicated in the section above. Most such references are directed towards the wider community of middle-class non-survivors at the local level who are seen as being completely apathetic to the injuries of the gas victims. There is also a clear sense of anger against their utilization of resources allocated specifically for the use of gas victims. This is particularly so in the case of gas-relief hospitals, which have been set up especially for the use of gas victims: a commonly articulated complaint is that doctors and staff at these facilities treat survivors with disdain and apathy while bestowing care and concern on non-survivors who are able to pay for medical services:

I see that in BMHRC (main super specialty gas relief hospital) in the mornings, poor and haggard looking patients arrive. But after three in the afternoon, patients arrive in cars, wearing expensive perfumes, speaking fluent English, and the doctors are taking great care of them, I am amazed! I told someone, maybe I am too narrow-minded and small hearted that when I see these people, I feel hatred towards them. They have come here to profit from this facility but they would never even have written a letter to the newspapers on behalf of the survivors (Jabbar, Interview, 08/04/2011).

On the other hand, there is an articulation of a relation of care and tolerance for other poor citizens who might not have been affected by the event but are seeking to claim some state care under the gas-survivor category. This sentiment clearly relates to the class framing of the membership of the organisation, which draws linkages between the diverse identities of being a gas-survivor, working-class subject and disenfranchised citizen excluded from the state’s neo-liberal development project. This class framing could indeed
have been the basis of a connective politics with other disenfranchised groups. This connective mobilization, however, requires active communication work, which makes such connections explicitly, and ensures resources to institutionalize such linkages. In the BGPMUS’s discourse, however, the class framing is not being mobilized in a connective manner; it is only being used to maintain a distinctive group identity at the local level. Connections have to be actively made. The simple presence of a potentially connective frame does not ensure recognition and support by wider publics. The lack of connective work also has to be linked to a clear lack of resources for effective out-group communication and a general decline in salience and institutional support for working-class politics at national and international levels:

Firstly, we do not have the knowledge about what needs to be done (referring to maintaining online presence, website etc.). And the second thing is that we do not have English language expertise. This has been a very big setback for us. The other group might know more about things happening at the international level but things at the local level, state government, central government, Supreme Court, they know that even without consulting documents, I possess authentic knowledge’ (Jabbar, Interview, 08/04/2011)

The broad shift from communication work directed outwards to communication work being directed inwards also needs to be understood in terms of the structural shifts in the functional trajectory of the organisation. In the period of its expansion from 1985 to the mid-1990s, the BGPMUS was the largest and the most active representative of the survivors. From this position it could confidently take on the role of seeking support from actors at other scales. The efficacy of its interventions at the national and local scales was apparent to its gas survivor membership and did not need emphasizing in everyday interaction or commemorative discourse. In the period since the late 1990s, with the withering away of the groups’ legal challenge to the 1989 settlement, the routinisation of the compensation and rehabilitation mechanisms, the sale of local Union Carbide assets, its eventual merger with Dow Chemicals, and the emergence of other advocacy groups like the ICJB emphasizing an
environmental framing, the BGPMUS experienced a period of declining relevance. The contemporary communication and memory-work have to be understood in this context of an organisation seeking to refashion its core identity and attempting to maintain belief and identification amongst its local membership.

The emergence of other SMOs like the ICJB is a key factor in the shifts in identity, communication and memory-work of the BGPMUS. The need for a distinctive group identity is a key contributor to the hardening of the group’s class-based identity. Although the group avoids any direct undermining of the activities of other SMOs campaigning on behalf of the survivors, the need to articulate a clear difference in terms of group identity emerges strongly in interviews conducted with the BGPMUS leadership and members. This distinctive identity is located in the class framing and the related narratives of longevity and self-sufficiency:

The fundamental difference that I see, and this is the reason I am proud of our rag-tag organisation, is that the people who come to us, the ones who work for us, they bring their own food, and they contribute their own money. Those who work for them (ICJB) do so because they are paid wages. This is the fundamental difference (Jabbar, Interview, 08/04/2011).

This need to have a distinctive group identity also contributes to the need for evolving a distinctive political praxis. With the ICJB’s praxis being based on a strongly connective multi-scalar transnational politics, the BGPMUS has limited its activities to the juridical forums at the national scale. This coupled with its resource deficiencies has resulted in a sharp attenuation of connective communication work.
5.3.4 Attributing Responsibility: ‘The State Owes Responsibility’

The state with great cleverness tell us, ‘we agree that the compensation was inadequate; we too are telling Union Carbide that the money was too low. Union Carbide needs to pay more money. And we have issued a notice to Union Carbide’. Well, you (the state) can go on contesting this with Union Carbide for 50 more years. What do we (survivors) have to do with it? You were the ones who agreed to the settlement! Therefore you (the state) have to pay out the gas survivors from your pocket. You can go on fighting with Union Carbide for 50 years, 100 years, we don’t care about that. The state owes responsibility! (Abdul Jabbar, BGPMUS. Saturday Speech, 5/3/2011)

The money does not belong to them (the state)! Did we (the survivors) ask you to settle for such a low amount? The settlement was insufficient! You (the court/state) had indicated that if the compensation fell short then the state would make up the shortfall- today, where has that state disappeared? How can a state engaged in betrayal help the poor? The only one to lend help is the BGPMUS. (Hamida Bi, BGPMUS, 3/12/2010)

As with the other three elements, a historical narrowing is evident in the narrative concerning the attribution of responsibility mobilized by the BGPMUS: a shift away from holding both the corporation and the Indian state accountable to an almost exclusive focus on state accountability. In commemorative discourse till 1999, responsibility for the disaster is clearly distributed between Union Carbide and the Indian state. In a 1989 call for action issued for the fifth anniversary of the disaster, for instance, ‘killer Carbide’ is held responsible for deaths and the continuing illnesses of survivors; recompense is sought in terms of punishment for the officials operating the factory and payment of adequate financial compensation. Union Carbide is clearly framed as the primary antagonist with a programme of action titled ‘Union Carbide Quit India’, demanding the confiscation of all Carbide properties in the country, banning of its products and closure of its research centre in Bhopal. A second line of responsibility is articulated against
the state, which is seen as being responsible for ensuring proper medical and economic rehabilitation, and the provision of support payments till the award of the compensation. There is also a clear recognition of collusion between the state and the corporation, which resulted in the unjust settlement agreed to in February 1989.

This narrative of shared responsibility and the framing of Union Carbide as the primary antagonist remains in evidence till 1999. In fact there is a broadening of the responsibility born by the corporation as the issue of cleaning up the contaminated soil and groundwater is added to the demands of compensation and punishment (1999:35). The responsibility of the state is distributed between the central and Madhya Pradesh governments with the former being tasked with pursuing justice against the UCC and the latter with effective monitoring of the local rehabilitation machinery. This multi-scalar distribution of responsibility was made credible by a complex memory narrative of the disaster, which indicated that a series of events both before and after the event of the gas leak, involving criminal behaviour on part of the corporation, and inefficiency, neglect and collusion on part of the state, contributed to the injuries of the survivors.

Since 2001 however, following Union Carbide’s acquisition by Dow Chemicals, there was a progressive shift in the BGPMUS’s attribution of responsibility, moving away from targeting the corporation as having the primary liability towards an almost exclusive focus on state liability. By 2004, the twentieth anniversary of the disaster, the demand for fivefold monetary compensation from the state, had emerged to dominate the organisation’s agenda. In the group’s everyday discourse, it is the state, which is positioned as the dominant other, bearing the primary responsibility of alleviating the suffering of the victims. The memory narrative that is most often recounted is the one linked to the legal trajectory, emphasizing that it was the state which had agreed to make good any shortfall in the compensation following the 1989 settlement and the subsequent judicial proceedings (outlined in Chapter 4):
Our argument is that you were a party to the settlement. You accepted the payment of 715 crore rupees. If that money had fallen short now, then you have to make good the deficit. You have to give it to the people. The state cannot save its skin by saying that they will pay out additional money when Carbide makes additional payments. Because you assumed responsibility. By making the Bhopal Act, the Indian state has taken over all the rights and responsibilities (Jabbar 19.03.2011, Saturday Meeting, BGPMUS).

This limited legal narrative, while effective in making evident the validity of the group’s demands, is however unable to remedy the corporation’s strategy of removing itself from the circuits of liability and the narrative of responsibility. It is also a much-limited narrative in terms of offering possibilities for the drawing of connections and similarities by other groups. At the same time however, the moral opposition between an uncaring state and a caring organisation is borne out by the everyday experience of the largely working class membership. The strong affective resonance of this opposition is indicated in the analogy of familial care frequently invoked by BGPMUS members in everyday discourse. The state is presented as a guardian that has abdicated its role and stands opposed to the organisation framed as a caring parent, providing guidance and familial care:

    The state is like the head of a family. The citizens are like children. The state should have fought against the corporation on our behalf. It should have sought punishment. Instead they went begging to America and made an unfair settlement. It did not protect our interests. This duplicitous state, this ineffective state, what kind of state is this? We reject this state! We the poor have to fight for ourselves. For us the gas survivors, for us the poor, the one who represents our issues, works on our behalf is the real state. For us the leadership of this organisation (Abdul Jabbar) is the real state (Anisa Bi, 26.03. 2011, BGPMUS, Saturday Meeting).
This strong sense of affective identification and commitment exhibited by the BGPMUS membership is something that other SMOs in Bhopal are struggling to achieve.

5.4 Examining the discourse of the ICJB: Forging a new narrative for connective politics

Unlike the BGPMUS, ICJB is not a single organisation but rather a coalition of survivors’ organisations such as the *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationery Karmachari Sangh* (Bhopal Gas Affected Women Stationery Workers’ Union, BGPMSKS) and *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Purush Sangharsh Morcha* (Bhopal Gas Affected Men and Women Struggle Front, BGPMPSM) and support groups such as the *Bhopal Group for Information and Action* (BGIA) and the *Bhopal Medical Appeal* (BMA). As indicated in the earlier history of the social movement in Bhopal, ICJB emerged in the period between 1999 and 2003, in response to structural shifts such as Dow’s acquisition of UCC, and the powerful emergence of a new set of injuries linked to groundwater and soil contamination, opening up a new set of challenges and opportunities.

The key player coordinating the formation of the ICJB was the BGIA. In 1996, the BGIA had expanded its historical role of providing informational support and communication expertise to survivors’ organisations such as the BGPMUS and the BGPMSKS, through the setting up of a medical clinic and documentation centre seeking to provide an alternative model of care for the survivors. The setting up of the clinic was made possible through donations from international charities and individuals in the UK and the US responding to newspaper appeals. The long-term operation of the clinic was secured through the setting up of a UK based charity called the Bhopal Medical Appeal (BMA), tasked with generating funds for the Sambhavna Trust, which operates the clinic. Aided by these transnational institutionalisations, the BGIA led the process of re-internationalisation of the campaign for justice in Bhopal. While the survivors groups’ attempted to vigorously oppose Dow Chemicals’
acquisition of Union Carbide fearing additional legal hurdles in pursuing liability claims against the corporation, the merger also opened up a slew of opportunities for transnational linkages with anti-toxics organisations targeting Dow Chemicals. The most prominent of the transnational collaborators offering support was Greenpeace International, which took up Bhopal as one of its prominent anti-toxics campaign between 1999 and 2005. This collaboration saw the setting up of the campaign for justice in Bhopal at the national and international levels. The ICJB formally emerged in 2003. Since 2003, the ICJB has carried on operations in Bhopal, at other national locations and transnationally. In the following sections, I would be examining both their in-group and their out-group communication and memory-work. I would be tracking the four representational elements outlined in the cultural trauma model and charting the differences in relation to BGPMUS.

5.4.1 Framing a ‘continuing disaster’- Linking the gas leak to the issue of a contamination driven ‘second disaster’

The ICJB frames Bhopal as a ‘continuing disaster’ linking the injuries caused by the original gas leak to a new set of injuries stemming from groundwater and soil contamination, caused by pre-leak routine operations of the UC plant and post-disaster abandonment of chemical waste at the site. This new set of injuries has been labelled as the ‘second disaster’ or the ‘second poisoning’: illnesses deriving from long-term exposure to pesticides, chlorinated organic compounds and heavy metals present in the drinking water of populations inhabiting the areas around the factory site (BMA 2013). The population affected by this ‘second disaster’, estimated to be in excess of 30,000, includes both gas survivors, (those affected by the event of the gas leak, the gas pidit) as well as non-survivors. This mixed population of extremely poor working-class people had moved into the unoccupied and cheaply available land close to the factory site after the disaster. A 1999 Greenpeace report, ‘The Bhopal Legacy’, confirmed heavy chemical contamination in and around the factory site (Greenpeace 1999). Beginning in 2000, the Sambhavna Clinic
started an awareness campaign in the water-affected communities making linkages between the illnesses being experienced by the residents and the chemicals present in their drinking water (BGIA & BMA 2012:92-93). This marked the start of the struggle for justice for this new category of victims affected by water poisoning with ICJB according them a new identity label of ‘pani pidit’ (literally, the water-affected). The ICJB is unique amongst the SMOs operating in Bhopal in terms of clearly and strongly focusing on seeking justice for this new category of injuries and victims.

Another significant category of injuries that the ICJB has brought into prominence are the health problems exhibited by the second generation of the population exposed to the gas leak. Using the institutional resources allowed by the expansion and development Sambhavna Clinic, systematic research was conducted on the growth patterns and illnesses demonstrated by the second generation of the gas victims. These studies confirmed demonstrable growth retardation in the second generation of gas victims (Ranjan et al 2003). This coupled with the fact that the most severely affected group amongst water victims is made up of young children with physical and mental congenital disorders, allows the ICJB to claim an expanded agenda seeking redress for toxic injuries to an entirely new generation. This new generation of injuries, in particular those related to water contamination, lie outside the framework of the 1989 legal settlement and allow the ICJB to re-insert UCC and its new owners Dow Chemicals back into the circuits of accountability. Linking the two sets of continuing toxic injuries allow the ICJB to frame Bhopal as continuing medical disaster caused by corporate toxic poisoning and abetted by a collusive state.

The third major category of injury that the ICJB has foregrounded is the injury done to living environment of the gas- and water-affected survivors. Redressing this injury through the effective decontamination of the factory site and surrounding soil and groundwater is a key demand. There is also a rigorous emphasis on ensuring that this clean-up is done in a manner which does not harm other communities and that the costs of this clean-up are borne by UCC and Dow Chemicals.
In terms of memory-work, linking the three sets of injuries required an expansion of the narrative of the disaster beyond the event of the gas leak and its immediate aftermath. The state, corporation and other SMOs like the BGPMUS end up limiting the disaster to the event of the gas leak in their remembrance. The ICJB produced a much more expanded and complex chronology of events, which indicated the UCC’s pre- and post-disaster awareness of the problem of water disposal and water contamination and the failure of state institutions in detecting it and protecting the affected populations (BGIA & BMA 2012). The ICJB was able to make this narrative credible through its institutional capacities in terms of being able to carry out medical and toxicological research, which could challenge the claims of the state and the corporation. It was also aided by its ability to engage in transnational legal action against the UCC, starting proceedings in the US courts to secure damages for injuries caused by the contamination. These court proceedings while not yielding a direct victory in terms of award of damages did allow the ICJB to secure confidential corporate communication, clearly indicating the corporation’s awareness of the contamination as early as 1982 (see BGIA & BMA 2012: 60-67). These ‘secret papers’, which the UCC was forced to hand over during litigation in 2002, were prominently mobilized by the ICJB to make credible its narrative of the second disaster.

Being able to formulate an expanded set of injuries related to on-going contamination and locatable in an iconic physical site allowed the ICJB to re-frame Bhopal as a global toxic disaster. Supported by transnational partners like Greenpeace, it was able to mobilize this expanded narrative at multiple transnational forums, gaining their recognition (see Mac Sheoin 2012). Stabilizing this expanded narrative in in-group memory-work and making it

22 While these documents have not been effective yet in securing redress within the judicial forums, they do function effectively as evidence of corporate criminality within other forums possessing symbolic and structural power such as transnational environmental justice forums or state legislatures. These other forums are key constituents of the public sphere. The Carbide ‘secret papers’ have been forwarded onto elected representatives in different national polities and entered into political debate within national legislatures. The status of evidence varies with the nature of the forum. Forums are interconnected.
credible to the population included in the new category was however not an easy task. This will be examined in the following sections.

5.4.2 Expanding the victim category: Mobilizing victims of corporate toxicity

The expanded spectrum of injuries also entailed an expansion of the category of victims beyond the community of the gas-affected, institutionally recognized within the state’s framework. As indicated in the section above, ICJB sought to add two new categories of victims: the water-affected and the second generation of the gas-affected population. Stabilising and mobilizing these categories required intensive in-group and out-group communication work. The collective identity of the gas-affected had a basis both in the shared experience of the suffering unleashed by the leak and the institutional encounters of legal claim-making and state-sponsored medical care. The community of the water-affected on the other hand, was a much looser collectivity, lacking institutional recognition and only sharing a variable experience of chronic contamination. The variability of the experience resulted from a combination of factors. The first factor was the varying level of water contamination in the different localities. The second was variations in length and degree of exposure. The health impacts also varied depending on other compounding factors such as the ability to secure clean drinking water, access to good nutrition and healthcare resources. These capacities, while generally deficient across the population, did vary from household to household.

A further obstacle to the creation of an inter-subjectively recognized collectivity was that the water-affected population also included a significant percentage of the gas-affected. This group possessing a strong pre-existing collective identity and memory, and distinguished by institutional recognitions, further differentiated/split the water-affected population. The organizational structure of the ICJB also presented a problem. It had begun as a coalition of pre-existing groups (BGPMPSM, BGPMSKS & BGIA), which had been
historically representing the gas-affected: their membership was made up of the gas affected and their group identities derived from the specific history of protest for the gas affected. To legitimately claim the right to represent the grievances of the water affected, the ICJB needed to create a new community and group membership, which recognized firstly, the injury being caused by the contamination, secondly its collective/shared nature, and thirdly, the ICJB as being committed to seeking justice for them. A further, vitally important, task was to indicate linkages between the injuries of the water-affected and the gas-affected. This was necessary to ensure that the creation of the new community of the injured strengthened the on-going struggle rather than being perceived as a competitor for public attention and state resources. This forging of a new collectivity and its alignment with old collective identities was not an easy task. The complex task required the organisation of a series of actions at the local level in which the ICJB sought to clearly establish the new victim community of the water-affected and link it with the older community of the gas-affected. The ultimate objective was the achievement of an expanded victim/protestor community made up of people affected by corporate contamination: ‘People poisoned by Union Carbide/Dow Chemical’ (ICJB 2006-Padyatra Booklet Text).

Fig. 5.1. Identity card worn by ICJB member participating in the 2010 anniversary commemoration, bearing the inscription ‘Activist active in the struggle of people affected by the poisons of Union Carbide’
This new overarching identity is forged in the name of the new organisation formed within the ICJB coalition in 2008, its members including children and young adults from both the water and gas affected communities: *Children against Dow-Carbide* (ICJB 2008 Press Release). This identity is also in evidence on the press releases and identity cards issued to ICJB members (see Fig 5.1 on the previous page).

At the level of everyday interaction, the Sambhavna Clinic launched an awareness campaign in the water-affected colonies helping people make connections between their illnesses and the poisoned groundwater they were drinking. This awareness campaign was also tied into a political campaign targeted at the local state administration seeking the provision of clean drinking water (BMA 2012:92-93). At the level of commemoration, the ICJB began to modify the anniversary commemorations of the gas disaster, which had tended to be exclusively focused on the event of the gas leak to include the issue of on-going contamination. In 2002, ICJB launched the ‘Jhadoo Maro Dow Ko’ campaign (Take the Broom to Dow!), with the primary demand that Dow accept responsibility for the decontamination of the factory site and the surroundings (ICJB/Bhopal.net, December 2002). The *jhadoo* (broom) was an effective cultural symbol as it combined the idea of cleaning up with the force of a militant show of anger: in the local culture hitting someone with a *jhadoo*, an unclean object, was viewed as the ultimate form of public shaming. It is also an object symbolizing domestic chores traditionally carried out by women. With the social movement in Bhopal being historically dominated by women participants, the *jhadoo* became an effective symbol: easily wielded by both gas-affected and water-affected women, it linked their personal social identities as domestic workers and their collective political identity as anti-contamination activists. A slew of local, national and transnational actions were undertaken as part of the campaign, all targeting Dow Chemicals facilities. As part of the campaign, two important protest actions were planned at the local level, around the 18th anniversary of the gas leak. About a week before the anniversary, ICJB activists, gas-affected and water-affected residents, supported by toxics experts from Greenpeace,
attempted a ‘partial clean-up’ of the factory site. The action was not successful in terms removing any waste from the site, as the police violently interrupted the proceedings, beating up and arresting many of the activists and charging them with criminal trespass (ICJB/Bhopal.net 2002; BMA & BGIA 2012:110-113). The action was, however, effective in dramatically illustrating the contaminated nature of the site to the local residents.

Fig. 5.2 ICJB and Greenpeace activists initiating the clean-up action by putting up a sign identifying the abandoned factory as a toxic site (November 2002, Photo: Greenpeace)

On the eve of the anniversary itself, Bhopali gas- and water-affected people travelled to Dow’s Indian headquarters in Mumbai to present samples of contaminated soil and water and jhadoos to Dow executives (IBJB/Bhopal.net: 2002). Similar presentations were also made to Dow executives across the globe between 2002 and 2003 (BMA and BGIA 2012: 108-109). Contaminated toxic water and waste was mobilized prominently in local anniversary actions as well as transnational actions across the globe at Dow facilities.
The commemoration performance was also made inclusive of the new category of victims in terms of including references to the *paani peedit* (water-affected) community directly in the slogans shouted out and messages on placards. The design of the annual commemoration activities was, in fact, one of the key sites where the ICJB established communicated its expanded agenda and membership to both the in-group and out-group audiences. Some of these changes will be discussed in the sections to come. Beyond evolving an expanded commemoration, the ICJB also engaged in other exemplary actions at the national level, focusing directly on the demands of the water-victims. Most significantly, it organised two *padyatras*, protest marches, one in 2006 and the other in 2008, in which a group of people from the water affected and gas-affected communities walked all the way from Bhopal to Delhi. On both occasions the march was followed by several months of sustained camping and protests on the streets of the capital. The provision of clean drinking water through permanent pipelines was one of the most prominent demands of these *padyatras* (ICJB 2006, 2008). The achievement of this objective with the central government releasing over $ 3 million for the
laying of the water pipeline is one of the key victories for the ICJB, the memory of which is most often recounted in the weekly meetings of the ICJB.

Fig. 5.4 Members of the ICJB setting off from Bhopal on the 2008 march for justice (Photo: Biju)

Members from the water-affected community who participated in the 2006 and the 2008 marches were felicitated for their contribution to the struggle in public functions organized around the December anniversary commemorations. This recognition was also institutionalized in terms of choosing spokespeople from the water-affected community. Sarita, a young girl from the water-affected community, was trained by the organisation to take up a leadership position within the youth organisation ‘Children Against Dow Carbide’ and presented as a prominent ICJB spokesperson at local, national and transnational forums. More prominence was also given to individuals who could claim both identities, gas-affected individuals living in the water-affected colonies, also impacted by water contamination.

This communication work for the creation of the new community was complemented by institutional stabilizations in terms of access to free
healthcare at the two clinics run by organisations and individuals linked to the ICJB: the Sambhavna clinic run by the Sambhavna Trust and the Chingari Trust Clinic. These are the only facilities in Bhopal where individuals’ injuries caused by the water contamination are recognized and treated free of cost. The ICJB has also been periodically strengthening the body of scientific evidence supporting the claims of contamination and the link to observable illnesses. The release of major research studies was timed to coincide with key anniversaries of the December leak to benefit from the national and global media attention, which is lacking otherwise. The 25th anniversary in particular saw the release of a comprehensive new study by the CSE, which fundamentally challenged the state claims about the degree of contamination and requirements for decontamination (CSE 2009). This report had a major impact on the framing of the disaster coverage, with an emphasis on the ‘continuing disaster’ in both national and transnational media. This recognition granted by the media to the narrative of the continuing contamination also strengthened the belief of the water-affected in the validity of their claims.

Similar symbolic and institutional interventions have been made on behalf of the second generation of the gas-affected. This category has been afforded special attention by the formation of the Chingari Trust Rehabilitation Centre, which began operations in 2006 (BMA &BGIA 2012:142). This centre provides specialised treatment and education to over 120 children with special needs belonging to gas- and water-affected families. The centre is run by Rashida Bi and Champa Devi Shukla, leaders of the BGPMSKS and the ICJB. Since the formation of the trust and the rehabilitation centre, the children receiving treatment in Chingari and their parents have been key participants of the gas leak anniversary actions organised by the ICJB. Representations of this group of child victims in particular have dominated the out-group communication and transnational memory-work of the ICJB. Examples of these will be examined in the sections to come.
5.4.3 Linking the victim groups- Tensions deriving from the work of other actors

Beyond the establishment and stabilisation of the new categories of victims, the ICJB’s intent has been to link these with the older category of the gas-affected. The objective is to secure an expanded unified collectivity of ‘people poisoned by Dow/Carbide’, which can be mobilized politically across the whole range of demands advocated by the ICJB. In the sections above, I’ve already highlighted some of the cultural and institutional interventions through which this amalgamation was sought to be achieved. This analytical focus will continue to be maintained in the following sections examining the relations drawn to the wider community and the narrative of responsibility. In the rest of this section, I will briefly touch upon some of the in-group memory-work being done in the weekly meetings which can be seen to respond to the tensions in achieving this linkage between gas-affected and water-affected identities.

There are clear differences in institutional recognition between the two categories, particularly in terms of state conferred entitlements. This renders equivalences drawn by the ICJB perilous; any moment the state or other actors choose to re-initiate processes/performances that only include the gas-affected and allow no point of entry for the water-affected. One such process, occurring twice (in 2006 and in 2010) since the beginning of the mobilization of water affected in 2000, has been the disbursal of monetary compensation by the state for the gas-affected. Each time this process is initiated, the state conferred gas-affected identity assumes dominance, and the water-affected can experience feelings of exclusion. At periods like these, both the gas-affected and water-affected membership of the ICJB can develop feelings of disaffection towards the organisation. The gas-affected members might tend to gravitate towards other organisations like the BGPMUS, which maintain an exclusive focus on the issues of the gas affected; the ICJB might be perceived in comparison as an organisation that directs its energy primarily towards the issue of water contamination. On the other hand, the water-affected members may feel a loss of salience in their victim category as the state and local
media discourse shift focus onto the event of the gas leak. Excluded by the state’s frameworks of recognition, the potential benefits promised by the ICJB’s continuing struggle in transnational legal forums might begin to lose appeal and relevance.

This situation was in evidence, following the announcement of additional compensation for certain categories of gas victims by the state in June 2010. The state had announced this payment of additional compensation to rein in the media outrage following the completion of the criminal proceedings in the gas leak case. The accused had been found guilty but let off with very short sentences and puny fines. To assuage the wave of public outrage, which followed the court’s decision, the state had decided to reinitiate legal proceedings in both the civil and criminal proceedings and offered immediate payment of additional compensation to a small fraction of the gas-affected population. The vast majority of gas-affected left out of the additional compensation offered by the state were re-energized into engaging with the demand of compensation for all gas-affected. The water-affected community however was left out entirely from this framework of political contention. The ethnographic data collection from the weekly meetings of the ICJB took place in this context between November 2010 and April 2011.

The ICJB’s anniversary demonstrations saw less than expected turnout. There was particularly low turnout from some of the water-affected colonies. This lack of participation was seen to proceed directly from a feeling among the water affected that the agenda for the anniversary protests was dominated by the demand of additional compensation for the gas-affected and therefore of little relevance to them. In the weekly meetings, following the poor turnout the ICJB activists sought to re-establish the specificity of the ICJB’s continuing struggle on behalf of the water victims:

Again and again the water-affected complain, ‘We are not getting any benefits; you are fighting for the gas-affected.’ (…) We (the ICJB) are fighting a court case against Union Carbide to seek monetary compensation for the water affected. We have told you repeatedly about this. Many people know about it. Yet you (the water affected)
continue to complain, ‘Look, nothing is being done for us, we have nothing in our hands!’ (Nawab Khan, ICJB, Weekly Meeting, 08/12/2010)

There is a clear effort to signal the distinction of this struggle from that of the other groups who are campaigning for monetary compensation for the gas-affected from the state:

The gas-affected are now seeking compensation from the state. We, the water-affected, are not seeking compensation from the state. We want the state to help us secure compensation from the corporation. We go for protests in Delhi to create this pressure on the state. And how will the state help us secure the compensation? Only when it declares in the American courts that Union Carbide contaminated our land. Our government should pressurize the US government to force Dow Chemical, which is the new owner of Union Carbide, to pay up. This is the on-going struggle of the water-affected, do you understand now? (Nawab Khan, ICJB, Weekly Meeting, 08/12/2010)

Both the above instances are clear example of what Gongaware (2003) calls collective memory creation: ‘collective memory creation develops collective memories of recent activities by bringing people up to speed and providing them with details of the memory’s object of reference’ (495). This process is often combined with ‘collective memory maintenance’: making sure that ‘recollections from the distant past are carried forward to the present’ (Gongaware 2003: 504). In the case of the ICJB, the memory most frequently brought up is that of the successful protest action of the padyatras, which resulted in the provision of piped drinking water:

The water connections, which have been provided to your houses, the demand for water, which has been fulfilled, how was that achieved? Through your struggle, through your strength. We secured clean water from the central government in Delhi and our struggle for water was complete. It took us a long time but we were victorious. But from whom do we have to take compensation? From whom do we have to get this land decontaminated? That is the Dow company! (Hajra Bi, ICJB Weekly Meeting, 09/03/2011)
At the same time there is also a constant attempt to discursively connect the two struggles and counteract the tendency of the two communities to see their interests as being disparate:

We’ve told you this many times that the gas-affected are being supported by the water-affected. And, if the struggle is for the water-affected then we are also taking support from the gas-affected (Nawab Khan, 08/12/2010).

Victories achieved in terms of successful protest actions are also discursively attributed as victories for both groups. Sharing the memory of a recent successful action against Dow Chemicals in Mumbai (February-March 2011), ICJB activists seek to frame it as a victory for both sets of victims:

This is a big victory for us. Not only for the gas-affected of Bhopal. If it is a victory, it is also for the water-affected. The residents of the 14 to 18 colonies suffering from water contamination. The gas-affected also live in the these colonies, but this is a victory for the water-affected (Hajra Bi, ICJB Weekly Meeting, 09/03/2011)

Another strategy being used by the ICJB to stabilize participation among both the gas-affected and the water-affected is to seek the development of a political consciousness in its membership. The attempt is to frame protest as a form of moral social practice, which goes beyond categories deriving from instrumental goals. Active members are framed as having developed a positive affective attachment to political struggle, experiencing it as a pleasurable, heady and habit-forming engagement. The investment of positive affect in protest renders it vital for maintaining a healthy individual social identity and the threat of participation being discontinued after the fulfillment of instrumental goals (the provision of clean drinking water, compensation etc.) is allayed:

Some people are fond of drinking alcohol, others are fond of gambling. So we are fond of doing good for others, benefitting others, this too is a
manner of fondness, a kind of headiness. Abida Bi has been taken over by this headiness, so the day she misses a meeting of the group she will feel bad. If she hadn’t, participated in the protest action in Mumbai, she would have felt bad. We (the ICJB activists/community coordinators) feel bad if stay at home and are unable to work amongst you. (Nawab Khan, ICJB Weekly Meeting, 09/03/2011)

To aid this investment of affect in political struggle, memories of protest actions from the past, which generated positive affect, are recalled in the present. There is a re-experiencing of positive affect among members who were a part of the remembered experience and a sharing of it with those who were not. As the remembered experience becomes a part of the collective memory of the whole group, new members make affective attachments with the past and the present identity of the group. The weekly meetings provide an important site for this kind of narrative interaction. Over the past 13 years of its operations the ICJB has been successful in developing a small group of core members who share a collective memory of protest charged with positive affect. The size of this group, however, remains very small. Participation in the weekly meetings has not been increasing over the years. About half of those attending each meeting are simply there for seeking address of short-term instrumentalist concerns. Further, even the small collectivity of the politically committed needs to be sustained through effective performances and memory-work.

5.4.4 Connecting with other ‘Bhopals’- Seeking and providing solidarity for ensuring ‘No More Bhopals’

…the ideal memorial to Bhopal would be to show that it is not a historically geographically isolated event but that it continues and that there are slow and silent Bhopals occurring everywhere as we speak (Sarangi, ICJB, 03/02/2011).
Within the ICJB’s discourse, Bhopal is seen as being firmly connected to other instances of toxic harm caused to disenfranchised populations by profit-seeking corporations, in collusion with nation states. In Chapter 3, examining state memory-work, I had set out how the state contained the transnational significance of the disaster through the process of legal settlement and bureaucratic and commemorative routinisation. Recognising the need to challenge the national scale frame imposed by the state, BGIA, the primary force behind the formation of the ICJB, had initiated the process of placing Bhopal back in a transnational framework as early as 1999, the 15th anniversary of the disaster. This year saw the clear emergence of the narrative of groundwater contamination, supported by the evidence provided by the Greenpeace report (1999). The expansion of injuries to include harm caused by water contamination allowed the re-insertion of Union Carbide, and its subsequent owner Dow Chemical, into the circuits of legal and moral accountability.

There was a clear shift in the remembrance of the disaster away from a primarily local (national) orientation towards a global–local dynamics concretely captured in the two campaign slogans used for the 15th anniversary: ‘We all live in Bhopal’ and ‘No More Bhopals’. The injuries of the gas- and water-affected in Bhopal were placed not simply in relation to a national policy of neoliberalisation and appeasing TNCs but rather as symptomatic of changes all across the world. More specifically, this framing was made within the ‘environmental justice’ and ‘anti-toxics’ framework. Bhopal was connected to the memory of past chemical disasters including Minamata, Three Mile Island, Love Canal, Seveso, Chernobyl, etc. Further, more specific connections were drawn with UC’s ‘long history of causing death and injury’ in their operations in the United States and in India (Bhopal Group for Information and Action, 1994: 18). With the take-over by Dow Chemical, these connections were extended to similar events from Dow Chemical’s past, most prominently its involvement in the production of Napalm and Agent Orange used in Vietnam (Jabbar et al., 1999: 5). Since 1999, this cosmopolitan remembrance has been strengthened and forcefully
deployed across a multiplicity of political forums in an attempt to push Dow Chemical into accepting liability for Bhopal.

Fig. 5.5 Tableau depicting US air force helicopters dropping Napalm manufactured by Dow Chemicals in Vietnam. Explicit connection made with Dow-Carbide’s continuing poisoning in Bhopal. ICJB’s 2005 Bhopal Disaster Anniversary Demonstration. (Photo: Biju)

The ability of the ICJB to affect this cosmopolitan remembrance would have been impossible without shifts in communication technologies, most importantly the arrival of the internet and affordable mobile communication. The establishment of the Bhopal.net website in 1998 allowed for the first time quick and direct sharing of information by the activists in Bhopal with supporters in other locations across the world. This helped stabilize the solidarity networks, which had been hard to sustain in the past (see Zavestoski, 2009). It also gave ICJB the ability to maintain some degree of discursive control over campaign activities at the international level. This was
done through the development of a set of shared media resources including press releases, information sheets, images, logos, slogans and a repertoire of protest actions, which could be accessed by those planning solidarity actions across the world.

5.4.5 Translating Cosmopolitan Memory-work to Local Membership

Linking the victims of Bhopal to other national and transnational populations and issues is also a dominant element of the everyday narrative commemoration, taking place in ICJB’s local weekly meetings. As indicated in the section above, the connective linkages made by ICJB are not simply discursive associations but stabilized by institutional linkages, protests and communicative actions at local, national and transnational scales (see Bisht 2013 for a description of a recent transnational campaign against Dow Chemical’s sponsorship of the 2012 London Olympics). The memory-work done in the weekly meetings is seeking to inform the local membership about these actions taking place at different scales: the work of interpreting the actions, making clear the linkages to the situation in Bhopal, and integrating these connections into the collective memory of the group. This memory-work is significant for many reasons. In the first instance, the local membership might very often lack the full information required to understand linkages being communicated by the ICJB in protest actions. This might happen even if some of the local membership is participating in the protest actions. Interpreting the action, providing the full information and confirming the linkage allows all members to understand the full significance and relevance of their own actions. Claims about symbolic and material victories against the target of the protests cannot acquire force and validity for the local membership till these linkages are made clear. A good example was the Fukushima nuclear reactor crisis, which dominated the local, national and transnational news media in March and April 2011. The ICJB carried out a small press action in Bhopal on March 21, 2011, paying homage to the victims of the earthquake and the tsunami, expressing concern over the subsequent crisis linked to the safety of the nuclear reactor, and demanding an independent safety review of existing
and proposed nuclear reactors in India. A small group of about 30 women, mainly from the water-affected colonies, participated in the action holding banners stating ‘No More Bhopal, No More Fukushima’ and observed two minutes’ silence for the Japanese victims. The action had been organised at a short notice and it was only in the weekly Wednesday meeting that occurred on the following day that the news of the action and its import was communicated to local membership:

The people of Bhopal have been demanding that a disaster like Bhopal should not occur anywhere else. Look, they did not listen to the people of Bhopal and it happened again in Japan. At least in Japan, the state might be able to limit the damage; they have better technology, better manpower. If something like that happens in India, then politicians like Arjun Singh, will seek to first save their own lives. Will they not? (Murmurs of assent from audience) Therefore it is our demand that for better safety in nuclear facilities we need a new committee, which can make recommendations for improvement. And, new nuclear power plants, 4 or 5 of them, which have been planned should not be built. So today, we have been fighting on this issue continuously for the past 26 years, people do not know of this. And, now that this disaster has happened in Japan, the news of our struggle has reached the world and we have been proven right: the people of Bhopal were saying the right thing; there needs to be a stop on such facilities! (Nawab Khan, ICJB Weekly Meeting, 22/03/2011, emphasis mine)

As is evident from the quote above, the work of interpreting and linking is not simply engaged in the task of creating a new memory narrative but also re-emphasizing older memories (the behaviour of politicians in aftermath of the 1984 gas leak). The process of collective memory maintenance therefore often involves and supplements the process of collective memory creation.

Further, the new memory being created is not assigned to any particular constituency: both the gas-affected and the water-affected are amalgamated into the higher category of the ‘people of Bhopal’. Out-group memory-work assigns a coherent collective identity to the victims of Bhopal; the recognition of this memory-work by the wider community in turn affirms this unified identity. Communicating the national and transnational recognition granted to
this higher identity is an effective strategy of making local membership move beyond the categorical differences of being water affected or gas affected:

    Today the whole world is singing your praises. Despite the fact that the whole colony did not participate, the whole of Bhopal did not participate. The twenty women who participated, the twenty-five or thirty women who participated were not recognized individually, they were recognized as the women of Bhopal. We will not call them by name, we will say the ‘women of Bhopal’ have come to the meeting (Nawab Khan, ICJB Weekly Meeting, 22/03/2011).

The affirmation and support lent to the ICJB by individuals and groups from outside Bhopal is often invoked directly as providing an example of the politics of solidarity which should be followed by the often fragmented local membership:

    It shouldn’t be the case that if you are one of the water-affected then you do not support the struggle of the gas-affected and do not participate in their protest actions. And if you are gas-affected to say that you wouldn’t support the struggle of the water-affected. Look, what stake does he have in our struggle (referring to the researcher present at the meeting)? Why do people from outside come and support us? Look, no matter who the struggle is for, if our participation in it benefits others, we too shall derive happiness from it (Nawab Khan, ICJB, Weekly Meeting, 09/03/2011).

Further, the ability of the ICJB to carry out actions at multiple scales and secure support from non-survivors in national and transnational locations, is put forward as an integral part of the group’s collective identity and praxis:

    The nature of our struggle is that we the people of Bhopal are not alone in our struggle. Be it Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai or Bangalore- people ready to fight for you are present in all cities. Everyone is ready to fight for Bhopal, yet the people of Bhopal are silent! (Hajra Bi, ICJB, Weekly Meeting, 09/03/2011)

There is a celebration of the multi-scalar solidarity enjoyed by the group which ensures that relevant information about the actions of the adversaries
(corporation and the state) reaches the people of Bhopal. However, the leadership also seeks to emphasize that the networks of information and solidarity will only be effective if the local membership is active and committed:

To what degree do we communicate this to you: the information reaches us and we ensure it reaches you. Just like we act on that information, you too should act on the information we provide you! Only then will we move forward! Otherwise, these meetings will continue to happen, you people would continue to attend, we would keep blabbering on, you would return home and promptly forget everything! (Hajra Bi, ICJB Weekly Meeting, 09/03/2011)

A final point needs to be made about the significance of media representations as providing a validation of the memory-work happening at different scales and as resources ensuring effective individual and collective remembering. Active members (‘sakriya karyakarta’), who are also often assigned leadership positions, often tend to be the ones with some degree of literacy and access to local and national media representations. Their memories of participation in exemplary actions are reinforced and supplemented by the maintenance of detailed records of the past, consisting of press clippings and other documentary evidence like personal photographs. ICJB encourages its membership to develop this practice of remembering through the maintenance of records. The group also often confers objects of recognition, such as certificates and mementoes, on its members, which function as objects of memory aiding linkage between individual and group identity:

You are all informed when we are organizing a protest action. So, on the following day, more of the members should try to get hold of a newspaper. You should keep the news articles with you. When you read about it in the newspaper, it will stay in your memory. (Nawab Khan, ICJB Weekly Meeting, 09/03/2011)
Newspaper clippings and pictures of protest actions are often brought for sharing amongst the members attending the meeting by the ICJB community coordinators.

**Distributing responsibility across scales: The challenges of mobilizing a relational account**

...governments, elected governments, this is what we find in Bhopal, irrespective of the political party they belong to, have always colluded with corporations in committing these crimes and this is not exclusive to India (…) historically and geographically all over the world, what we find is that governments collude with corporations and continue with the hegemony, the dislocation and the disempowerment of ordinary people (Sarangi, ICJB, 03/02/2011).

The ICJB is mobilizing a more complex narrative of the disaster than other SMOs. It is trying to link the event of the gas leak to the second disaster of the contamination. These interrelated but distinct categories of injuries also produce a multi-scalar narrative of responsibility. The challenge is to make the demands from different actors distinct and clear, while at the same time not losing sight of the collusion between these actors and scales which made the injustice possible. Only by maintaining an awareness of the relationships between actors at different scales could the collective memory and group identity being mobilized by the ICJB acquire its full connective potentiality.

The primary task was the expansion of responsibility beyond the state and re-insert Union Carbide and its subsequent owners Dow Carbide into the circuits of accountability. As indicated in the earlier sections, the primary move, which allowed this re-assertion of transnational corporate accountability, was the establishment of the narrative of the second disaster of water contamination. The narrative of the second disaster allowed ICJB to reframe the expanded set of injuries from both the first and second disasters, as constituting a continuing environmental disaster.
While the UCC had sought to erase itself completely from the circuits of accountability using the 1989 settlement and further through the sale and renaming of its Indian subsidiary, the ICJB successfully made re-visible the transnational connection through the new framing. More importantly the reinsertion of transnational accountability, was used not to circumvent the local and national scales but rather to clearly resituate the injustice caused by the disaster as having emerged from processes occurring at the ‘intersection of scales’ (Fraser 2010). The new frame of the ‘continuing poisoning’ is not used to seek accountability exclusively at any one particular scale. It instead directs attention to the intersection of scales, making specific but simultaneous, multiple and relational demands of actors located at each scale.

Each articulation of these demands is also a performance of memory-work, as the past is reinterpreted to draw connections between the first and the second disaster and the ‘continuing’ suffering from both. The maintenance of these connections and their affirmation in commemorative performances does entail tensions and constraints. The memory-work has not only to embody the relational scaling but also to communicate this scaling successfully to audiences located at different scale. This work is complicated by the inequalities in capacity within the ICJB and the varying contexts in which the memory-work is received.

**Rescaling accountability in commemorative performance**

The re-scaling of accountability across multiple scales is relatively simple when expressed in a press note. A ‘stock-taking report’ prepared for the 25th anniversary of the disaster, for instance, is able to systematically list three sets of demands directed respectively at the government of India (GoI), the government of Madhya Pradesh (GoMP) and the Dow Chemical Company (Dow Chemical). The demands maintain both the distinction and the connection between the first and second disasters. They seek to use different
regulatory powers located at different scales to remediate the same set of injuries. The justice conceptualized in the demands is both multidimensional and multi-scalar\textsuperscript{23}. While a similar attempt is made in the commemorative performances around the anniversary, it is much harder to maintain coherence and communicative ‘success’.

The anniversary of the disaster on December 2-3 sees the most concentrated commemorative activity. The ICJB being an international coalition, there are often a host of small events around the world coordinated by affiliated groups. It is however the performances that take place in Bhopal, organised by the Bhopal based constituents of the ICJB (BGIA, BGPMSKS & BGPMPSM) that are recognized as the key memorial texts and re-mediated extensively by the local, national and international media.

The primary problem faced by the ICJB in rescaling the anniversary performance are the limits posed by the memory of earlier local protests and commemorations which clearly defined the disaster in terms of the original gas leak and afforded little space for the inclusion of the ‘second disaster’ of the water contamination. The local memorial performance was focused on a retributive enactment of anger directed against the figure of Warren Anderson, the CEO of UCC at the time of the gas leak. The form of this performance derived from the memory of ‘spontaneous protests’, which had occurred in the immediate aftermath of the leak. Marches with mass participation culminating in the burning of the effigies of Anderson/UCC outside the space of the Bhopal factory gave expression to the anger and anguish of the local residents. Much of the anger was directed against the space of the factory, both as the source of the lethal gas and as the property of the guilty corporation. After the 1989 settlement and the subsequent failure of legal

\textsuperscript{23} Demands from the government of India included the setting up a special commission for monitoring and rehabilitation of survivors and holding Union Carbide and Dow Chemicals criminally liable for the original leak and for the remediation of the contaminated site. Demands from the government of Madhya Pradesh included the provision of safe drinking water, treatment of water victims in gas relief hospitals, and the call to build no memorial without proper clean up. Demands from Dow Chemicals included making the UCC appear in the criminal trial, paying for the clean up of the site and for the healthcare of the affected community.
attempts to overturn it, the effigy burning was viewed as a ‘negative’ gesture; a desperate performance of violence that expressed the dissatisfaction of the gas survivors with all representation and articulated their ‘desire not to be represented’ (Fortun 2001:170).

The ICJB negotiated a symbolic expansion by devising a commemorative performance which was based on the template of the original protests but updated elements to communicate its understanding of injustice occurring at the intersection of scales. The most powerful way in which it did this was by expanding the effigy beyond the simple personalization of Anderson or UCC to the representation of relationships of oppression. The effigy used in the 2010 protest (see Fig. 5.6) is a perfect example of this relational representation. The effigy pictures the GoI (represented by the figures of the Prime Minister and other ministers), the US government (represented by the figure of President Obama), Indian multinationals and judicial representatives trying to support the prone figure of DOW-UCC as the diverse community of gas survivors seeks to bring it down. This representation foregrounds the collusive relationship between the different levels of governance and the TNC, picturing the injustice as lying across scales. The BGPMUS effigy by contrast was a simple representation of a westernized corporate figure bearing no identity labels.
Beyond the making visible of actors and relationships responsible for the continuing injuries of Bhopal, the anniversary effigies also memorialize the successes of ICJB in exposing and hurting these relationships of injustice. The 2010 effigy demonstrating the almost prone figure of UCC/Dow Chemicals commemorated the wave of public anger against the corporation following the June 2010 verdict in the criminal case. The 2008 effigy, featured a two-headed corporate figure representing the UCC-Dow Chemical corporate entity, supported by the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition political party. The corporate figure is however pictured as bearing many wounds, each injury being labelled with the name of a successful protest action carried out by the ICJB. The protest actions commemorated include actions at both national and transnational forums: multi-scalar injustice countered through multi-scalar political praxis.
By directly making visible the transformed corporate identity of UCC and its transformation into Dow Chemicals in its memory-work, the ICJB seeks to counter the corporate memory-work which continuously sought to distance itself from the negative symbolic associations of the 1984 leak. Much of the memory-work done by the corporations is actually conducted in the domain of confidential communication between corporate executives, bureaucrats and state politicians. The ICJB’s attempt has been to delegitimise this memory-work by bringing this communication into the public domain. They have been able to do this through the use of new ‘Right to Information’ laws, which allow
citizens to access previously restricted official communication. The anniversary tableaus do the work of bringing these new narratives of collusion into the local public sphere while retaining the power and legitimacy deriving from the culturally accepted commemorative form of effigy burning.

**Communicating corporate responsibility in everyday narrative commemoration**

Despite the powerful visualization of multi-scalar accountability in the anniversary commemoration, ICJB struggles to maintain the focus on Dow Chemicals at the local level. This is primarily because of the corporation’s success in evading responsibility at institutional forums. The group’s most significant success in gaining institutional recognition for the ‘second disaster’ has been a Supreme Court order regarding the provision of piped drinking water to the affected colonies and the sanctioning of funds from the central government for this purpose. These provisions however did not implicate Dow Chemicals in any direct away. The state was perceived as the dominant adversary in that struggle; Dow Chemical could not be inserted into the everyday narratives of responsibility. The situation is of course compounded by the state’s pervasiveness as the end provider of most entitlements.

The narrow focus on state accountability is also strengthened by a complete lack of emphasis on corporate accountability by other SMOs, such as the BGPMUS. In this situation, the annual commemoration is insufficient in terms of establishing Dow Chemicals’ accountability in the individual and collective memory narratives of ICJB membership. The accountability of Dow has to be reiterated through a series of sustained protest actions and an almost pedagogical iteration of the anti-Dow focus in the weekly meetings:

> Wherever Dow company goes to in India, we will target them there. Till we are alive, we will not allow Dow company to do business in India. This is our promise. After us, it will be our next generation (Hajra Bi, ICJB, Weekly Meeting 09/03/2011).
5.5 Conclusion

The analysis broadly demonstrated how both groups seek to challenge the memory-work of the state in terms of articulating the continuing suffering of the survivors and asserting the state’s failure to provide justice. The analysis however revealed clear differences in their conceptualisation of the nature of the suffering, the categories of victims, attribution of responsibility and the character of justice.

The BGPMUS has chosen to develop a class based conceptualization of injury which remains focused on the harm caused by the event of the gas leak, attributes responsibility to the state, and conceptualizes justice primarily in terms of significantly seeking enhanced financial compensation from the state. The ICJB, on the other hand, has developed an expanded framework of injury; focusing on the issue of groundwater contamination, they articulate a narrative of a continuing ‘second disaster,’ adding new sets of injuries to those caused by the original leak. In doing so, they seek to create a new category of ‘water victims’. The ICJB uses this expansion of injury to re-implicate the corporation into the circuits of accountability and formulate a multidimensional justice. Unlike BGPMUS which focuses on state liability, ICJB’s attribution of blame is firmly relational emphasising the collusion between transnational corporate interests and state institutions.

The thesis tracked how these differences in meaning making have been shaped historically by the pre-existing identities and capacities of the core constituents of the two organisations and the diverse trajectories of their post-disaster resource development and institution building. These factors had a direct impact on their abilities to identify and respond to the political opportunities presented by the evolving trajectory of the disaster and structural shifts brought about by globalisation. I demonstrated how the ICJB built on the existing capacities of its constituents (the BGIA in particular) in the generation and mobilisation of scientific data through transnational collaborations, which became easier to sustain with shifts in communication
technology. This allowed it to effectively generate scientific evidence demonstrating the presence of groundwater contamination around the UCC factory site, the emergence of new sets of toxic injuries and link these to the pre and post-leak operational practices of UCC. It was further able to mobilise this information in persuasive formats in transnational forums and media representations. The effective transnational mobilisation of the narrative of the ‘second disaster’ saw Bhopal being firmly re-recognised as a continuing toxic disaster caused by corporate misconduct by prominent non-state transnational actors. The analysis demonstrates how on the other hand, BGPMUS lacking the capacities to engage in such transnational connective memory-work, has seen a historical narrowing of its symbolic meaning making in relation to the disaster.

The thesis tracked how the SMOs have to maintain these meanings and identities through continuous memory-work directed outwards towards national and transnational forums, non-survivor populations and the wider victim community as well as inwards towards their group membership. The examination revealed how the SMOs have to engage in rigorous memory-work directed at their membership in group meetings to ensure the maintenance of identification with the group identity. Here, the analysis revealed the much greater difficulties that the ICJB has to face in comparison to the BGPMUS. The examination revealed how the ICJB seeks to develop a larger identity of ‘people poisoned by Union Carbide/ Dow Chemical’, which can connect gas victims and water victims. ICJB seeks to stabilise this new identity by mobilising it in diverse group level performances including the anniversary commemoration of the disaster as well as by continuous narrative iterations in group-meetings. This attempt however is severely constrained by the state’s memory-work which only recognises the injuries caused by the gas leak. The inequality in state recognition of the two sets of injuries hampers the creation of a new collective identity connecting the event of the gas-leak and the water contamination. On the other hand, BGPMUS’s limited focus on the injuries caused by the gas leak and the articulation of justice within the framework of state liability tacitly accepts and reproduces the categorical
identities imposed by the state. Every time the state initiates the process of payment of additional compensation, the organisational narrative of BGPMUS finds affirmation. In this regard, the BGPMUS despite its oppositional stance is bound in a relationship of dependence with the processes of state memory-work.
Chapter-6 Survivors Remembering: Making Meaning of the Lived Experience of Suffering

6.1 Introduction

The two preceding chapters examined the contestation between state institutions and non-state small group actors to stabilise different framings of the suffering caused by the disaster. This chapter focuses on the survivors who were the direct subjects of that suffering; here, I examine individual memory narratives of survivors as they undertake meaning and identity work in relation to their lived experience of suffering. The chapter restores visibility to the multi-dimensional nature of suffering in lived experience which often gets lost from view in discussions examining political contestations. Broadly, the chapter demonstrates how the physical, emotional, familial and economic suffering of survivors has continued into the present. In keeping with the thesis’s overall objective of examining relations between different levels of memory-work, the discussion tracks if and how the memory-work of the state and the SMOs get mobilised in individual remembering.

I argue that the frameworks imposed by the state heavily impact individual remembrance in a negative manner. As established in the discussion of the state memory-work, survivors were transformed into individual claimants and assigned fixed category-based identities, which quantified their physical injury. My examination of the individual memory narratives reveals the dominance of the claimant identity despite its being deeply incommensurate with the survivors’ need to articulate the multi-dimensionality of their past and on-going suffering. I explain this dominance in relation to the state’s continual reassertion of claimant identity especially through the long drawn out and still on-going process of monetary compensation. I show how the individualised character of the claimant identity, transformed individual remembering into a domain of a competitive struggle, creating severe difficulties for survivors in sustaining positive relations between individual and collective identities. On
the other hand, I track the limited but largely positive contribution of the frameworks provided by the SMOs. I reveal how some survivors have been able to use the experiences, objects and networks provided by participation in SMO activity to step out of the claimant identity and develop alternative understandings of their experience of suffering. I track how these survivors have been able to transform their suffering into effective speech and action securing recognition from a variety of non-state forums. Employing the memory of these positive encounters, survivors are able to sustain activist identities characterised by the possession of speech and agency.

The chapter will be broadly split into three sections. In the first short section, I outline some characteristics of remembering at the individual level and furthermore explain the historical context in which the material was gathered and how that impacts the meaning-work evident in the narratives. The other two sections examine the dynamics of the meaning making relating it first to the memory-work of the state (examined in Chapter 4) and secondly to the memory-work of the SMOs (examined in Chapter 5).

6.2 Investigating Individual Remembering: Relating Experience, Remembering, Narrative

…what is at stake in studies of memory is the elaboration of the relationship between lived experience and the broader field of history, understood here as something more than the conglomeration of individual past experience, and including within its purview questions of broad social forces and power-relations that exceed those of relations between individuals. However, more and more the capacity of memory studies to contribute to the illumination of such questions –questions concerning the relationship between an inner world of memory and a wider world of historical forces – has become imperilled. This is due to many studies of memory consigning themselves to only one aspect of an enterprise that ought to encompass the relations between the inner and the wider worlds of memory and history (Radstone 2005:139).
The multi-level model of this thesis has attempted to keep in view ‘the relations between the inner and wider worlds of memory and history’ which Radstone (2005:139) rightfully set out as the key analytical objective of the field of memory studies. This chapter extends the examination onto the domain of individual level memory-work as accessed primarily in the narrative recollections of the Bhopali gas survivors. The model of individual remembering employed in this chapter views remembering as ‘an active process of on-going reconstruction and rearrangement … (that) gives meaning and significance to experience in the continuing and dynamic interrelationship of its lived and learned dimension’ (Pickering and Keightley 2012:25). In doing so, it moves away from a container model of memory propounded by cognitive psychology, also employed in some simplistic oral history approaches that view individual remembrance as providing an unmediated access to past experience. Memory, in this project, is conceived of as a process, performance or social action in the present where past experience is made meaningful as opposed to an inner thing or possession to be retrieved (Middleton and Brown 2005:85). The emphasis then is not on probing the veracity of what is recalled but rather on investigating the dynamics of the process of organising experience into meaningful narrative recollections within interactional settings.

Within this framework of memory, conversational remembering emerges as the most pervasive and dominant manifestation of individual level memory-work. In the present study this conversational remembering is investigated within the interactional context of individual and group (family units) interviews with gas and water victims undertaken in their homes. The interviews were structured as conversations about the subjects’ memories of the disaster and its aftermath. What was examined therefore was not the ‘routine forms of mundane remembering’ but the process of ‘actively concerted recollection’: narrative storytelling that built ‘creatively on the order of sequence inherent in memory, despite its lacunae and points of disjunction’ (Pickering and Keightley 2012:35). This narrativising or ordering of experience into stories is
viewed as a fundamental part of individual remembering and integrally linked to development of a self-identity: ‘memory implies identity, the self caught between its roles as subject and object of memory, the telling and the told’ (Antze and Lambeck 1996:xix). The remembering subject continually strives to render her past experiences into meaningful and coherent narratives that correlate to and/or contribute to the development and sustenance of an inhabitable self-identity.

In investigating individual remembering, as accessed in narrative recollection, the relations between experience, memory and narration, and the maintenance of selfhood emerge as dominant concerns. This project views experiencing, remembering and narrating as ‘simultaneous and interconnected’ processes:

experience and memory and narrativity are aspects of consciousness that unfold together, penetrating each other, nourishing each other and modifying each other, as human beings strive continuously to maintain and develop and articulate their working understandings of a changing world and their own changing place within it (Cubitt 2007:96).

The analysis always keeps in view the fact that all of these processes (experience, remembering, narration and the construction of selfhood) involve social interaction and take place within institutional frameworks. They are all marked by interplay between individual agency and elements beyond individual control, dialectical processes ‘moving between possibility and limit, aspiration and constraint’ (Pickering and Keightley 2012: 19). This rendering allows for the avoidance of both social determinism and psychological essentialism in the conceptualisation of individual remembering.

6.2.1 Individual remembering in context

All the interviews employed in the analysis were conducted during a six-month period of fieldwork running from November 2010 to April 2011. This had been a particularly turbulent period in the history of the disaster's long drawn out process of institutional justice. In June 2010, the criminal case against the
Indian accused, senior executives and managers of Union Carbide’s Indian subsidiary that operated the Bhopal plant, was finally brought to completion. The court declared the eight accused ‘guilty’ and awarded them the ‘maximum possible sentence’ under section 304 Part II, dealing with ‘death caused by negligence’; the same legal section under which road accidents are tried. After 26 years of investigation, deliberation and fixing of responsibility, eight employees of Union Carbide India Limited were awarded two years imprisonment and fines amounting to 1000 pounds each. Being a bailable offence, all the accused applied for and were granted immediate bail, subsequently announcing that they would challenge their conviction in the higher courts.

The ridiculously lenient nature of the penalties imposed upon the accused stirred up a wave of popular outrage both nationally and internationally. Indian state institutions came under heavy criticism from national and international media, which drew unfavourable comparisons between the extremely feeble response of the Indian state in the Bhopal disaster and the robust handling of the BP oil spill by the US administration. Reeling under the unprecedented media led campaign, the central government acknowledged that justice had not been served by the courts and set up an emergency group of ministers (GoM) committee to look into all dimensions of the disaster’s aftermath and propose remedial measures. The hurried set of decisions put forward by the GoM committee employed the same strategy of containment, which had been used in the first settlement. First, the GoM proposed the reopening of both the civil and criminal cases in the courts; in this way public discourse about the state’s non-provision of justice and broader issues of corporate liability was again shifted onto the much more constrained and restricted arena of specialised legal discourse. Secondly, and more importantly for the concerns of this chapter, additional financial compensation was announced for the gas victims. The additional compensation was to be awarded using the existing system of classification of injury. As discussed in Chapter 3, this system of injury classification had been marked by glaring design and implementation flaws, resulting in the majority of the gas victims (92%) being assessed as
having only sustained temporary injuries (Muralidhar 2004/5:26; Bhopal.net 2010, http://actions.bhopal.net/survivors-views/). Employing the existing classification meant that, in the GoM’s assessment, this group was seen as no longer suffering from the impact of the disaster and therefore did not require any additional compensation. Significantly increased compensation was provided to a tiny fraction of claims (about 8%) that fell in the categories of death, permanent or temporary disablement, cancer and renal failure. At the local level, this decision again revitalised the salience of the claimant identity for the survivors. For the majority of the survivors, excluded from the ambit of compensation, this renewed salience was experienced deeply negatively.

The individual interviews were conducted in the period when the process of the disbursal of additional compensation was going on. I will demonstrate how the survivors who were excluded from the ambit of compensation attempted to deal with this institutional denial of their continuing suffering and their identity as gas victims (peedits). Earlier examinations of individual remembering have tended to articulate a straightforward opposition between the un-storied forgetting engaged in by the bureaucratic processes of the state and the storied narratives of the survivors (Mooney 2001). My analysis indicates a more complex negotiation in which survivors while challenging the validity of the categorical identities imposed on them by the state cannot entirely step outside their state assigned identities. The constraints imposed by the state’s memory-work result (experience, opportunities for narration, objects and networks of stabilisation) in suffering being articulated within a competitive framework. This competitive framing results in a devaluing of the suffering of others as well as a deficient and passive conceptualisation of self. In the section below I illustrate this constrained memory-work through a series of exemplars.

24 The issue of water contamination and compensation for the water-affected population was completely excluded from the discussions.
6.3 Remembering as a claimant: The experience and narration of competitive struggle, failure and incapacity

Nevertheless life is reasserting itself and the helping hand extended by the Government has raised many a victim to his feet and given him the confidence to step out to try and for himself a meaningful place under the sun. (Anniversary Report, BGTRRD 1987:3)

Ever since we were exposed to the gas, we’ve not been well. Something or the other keeps ailing us. (MCW Interview 2010)

The suffering caused by the disaster was multi-dimensional. It affected the survivors physically and emotionally, causing impairment to the roles they performed in their occupational, familial and social domains. The individual memory narratives are in the first instance concerned with the articulation of this multi-dimensional suffering. All individual narratives articulate a continuing physical suffering following the disaster. This shared narrative of the gas leak initiating of a period of chronic physical suffering, fundamentally challenges the state’s memorial narrative of a limited period of suffering followed by a successful process of state facilitated recovery and rehabilitation. Further most of the narratives clearly present the injustice as deriving not simply from the event itself but rather from the processes of injury classification, claims adjudication and long-term medical care provided by the state. The structures and processes designed to remedy the suffering generated by the event are revealed as engendering continuing suffering.

In line, with the distinction traced in the introduction, I will illustrate how within the majority of individual remembrances, this narration of injustice was within a competitive and exclusionary framing that mobilised a discourse of suspicion and corruption against other survivors and viewed one’s own position as being marked by incapacity and deficiency. The dominant characteristics are well exhibited in the opening extract of Mathura Prasad, a 75-year-old male gas survivor:
I remember it like this. Like we are sitting here now, the disaster (kand) happened in front of me. We ran with our children towards the DIG bungalow. There was no gas in that area. We reached that place and washed our eyes and faces with water. Apart from this, the memory of the disaster comes back when one is suffering: if this gas had not leaked, we would not be suffering. This is the primary reason for remembering the disaster. The second reason is that the government did not provide any relief. They paid out only 25000 rupees to the people, (swears) you tell me, the prime minister is such a big man, there are other ministers too, how could these people be blind to our condition? They should see the real condition, shouldn’t they? Apart from this there are some dishonest people (chamach), ‘leaders’ (neta log). When the doctors came to this area for medical categorisation, they (dishonest leaders) ensured that their own people were made A, B, C (medical categories indicating greater injury- higher compensation amounts) and this area here was made third class (categorised as least injured). The areas where there was no gas, they have distributed money there! To us only 25000 rupees and there 80,000 rupees! Where there was no gas! This is the new policy of the government! The other thing is, they (the government) give us medicines, the medicines are of such bad quality! People do not get better even after consuming them for a month! When we spend 100 rupees on private medical care we get better. Everybody’s eyesight has been ruined, their lungs have been ruined, everybody has one affliction or the other. There are no healthy people in this colony. (KV Interview 2011)

Mathura Prasad directly relates suffering to the gas leak and goes on to frame its continuing nature as being the direct responsibility of the state. He clearly indicates that it is the on-going suffering, which motivates his remembrance. Prasad belongs to category of ‘pachees hazaar waaley’, translating literally as ‘those of the 25,000’, referring to the majority of the gas victims who were categorised as ‘temporarily injured’ in the medical classification and awarded a sum of 25,000 rupees as compensation. As a member of this state assigned category, Prasad had been excluded from the most recent round of compensation. Prasad, foregrounds his membership of this categorical identity prominently and places the ‘new policy of the government’ into a historical catalogue of injustice: the failure to provide immediate relief, the corruption characterising the medical categorisation process, the inadequate
and unfair nature of the financial compensation and the total inefficacy of the state’s specialised gas relief medical institutions. By relating it to a historical trajectory of injustice, Prasad is able to both understand the recent exclusion and challenge its legitimacy.

Further, Prasad’s critique of the state is articulated in a competitive frame where he places his suffering in comparison to that of other survivors who were placed in categories indicating greater harm. He sees this ability of others to secure greater compensation as deriving not from legitimate claims but rather through corrupt means involving local ‘leaders’ and the state’s medical professionals. Prasad mobilises these claims of corruption by drawing additionally on a place-based identity. He resides in JP Nagar, located in close proximity to the factory site, and an area, which was classified as ‘severely affected’ by gas exposure in the state’s own medical research. This classification carried out in the immediate aftermath of the event, however, had no bearing on the process of injury categorisation for claims adjudication purposes that was carried on an individual basis and at a much later stage.25

Similar place-based comparative assertions abound in other interviews. They are most strongly present in the narratives of those residing close to the factory site, who mobilise the historically continuous physical proximity to the factory site to assert their legitimacy as claimants while questioning that of others. Abida Bi, a female gas survivor in her 70s also residing in JP Nagar, provides another example:

We were the ones sitting on the mouth of death. And today we are getting nothing, we are not even gas victims! We are not even gas victims! Those who were sitting in the mouth of death right in front of the gas! If we had not run away would we not have died? It was our good fortune that we survived. Otherwise there were dead bodies heaped from here till Chola (a locality bordering JP Nagar). What shall we do with this Babu Lal Gaur (gas relief minister in the Madhya Pradesh government)? You are paying people from the wards which were not even affected! (Abida Bi Interview 2011)

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25 Mathura’s claims are an articulation of injustices
Abida, also excluded from the recent payment as ‘temporarily injured’, invokes physical location and the memory of the immediate aftermath of the event to question the validity of the institutional denial of victimhood. Like Prasad, she does so by engaging the discourse of political corruption and by questioning the legitimacy of other claimants. Such narrations do provide survivors some opportunity of recognising the suffering of the physically proximate community living around them even as they question the suffering of other groups of survivors. This limited invocation of a place-based collective victimhood however cannot be extended into the development of any positive or actionable group identity. Mathura and Abida do not have access to any experiences from the past where the colony as a collective political actor was able to address institutional non-recognition. In Abida’s narrative there is an active expression of regret at this inability of the colony to act together politically:

The people are not willing to come out on the streets. We are handicapped because of the lack of people. Even at the time of the anniversary when there is so much public participation, nobody from JP Nagar participates! (Abida Bi Interview 2011)

There is also a more general defeatism, which pervades the discourse of corruption that is employed to explain institutional injustice. While it allows survivors to link the injustices suffered as a gas victims with their wider everyday experience of disenfranchisement as poor citizens, it also makes them feel powerless to do anything about. In line with this, even while Mathura Prasad’s narrative of corruption found affirmation from other residents who joined the interview part way through it, the overall evaluation of the remembrance was in strongly negative terms:

The people from the whole world have come and taken away our narratives but nothing is achieved. (KV interview 2011)

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This place-based identity of the colony is salient because it is invoked in other domains of competition for state provisions such as water, sanitation, electricity etc.
Unlike the BGPMUS’s mobilisation of class-based disenfranchisement for the development of a militant activist identity, this category of survivors lacks the means to translate injustice into effective political action. In this section, I focused on the affordances and constraints of the claimant identity in relation to collective vulnerabilities. In the next section, I examine how even those survivors who were paid higher sums of compensation and whose continuing suffering should’ve been affirmed by the announcement of additional compensation also struggled to construct positive self-conceptualisations.

6.3.1 Resisting the devaluing of personal suffering

In the gas disaster, those who lost their wives got new wives. In addition they are also getting 10 lakh rupees. Those who lost husbands, they got new husbands, they’ve raised children. Clearly they have no more grief! (Mirza Interview 2011)

The questioning of the legitimacy of claimants recognized institutionally was not limited to those who were placed in higher categories of injury. It was also directed against those whose losses were undeniable: survivors who lost family members in the event. These survivors had been awarded significantly enhanced additional compensation in the 2010 decision. Survivors excluded from such recognition were forced into devaluing these losses as they emphasized their own lived suffering. This devaluing took varied forms. Some assertions, such as the one above, placed the losses in the past, emphasizing how the recovery of the family through remarriage negated the suffering. Others chose to the question the quantum of the damages being awarded emphasizing the deficient aspects of those who had died:

You are giving the dead 10 lakh! Will they come to make use of it? And if that member of the family had remained alive would he have earned so much? Would a poor illiterate man have earned so much? No! (Pyare Interview 2011)

Tell me at that time, somebody lost an unborn child, they received 100,000. Somebody lost a young child, they too received the same
amount. Somebody lost an older child they too received the same amount. Somebody lost an adult member, they got the same. Somebody lost an ailing old member, they too got the same. OK that was alright. Then you paid them again. Now we people are living today but we are not able to do anything. You have stopped out 25,000 also! You will not give us even that? (Rajjo Interview 2011)

What is glaringly missing from these evaluations is the articulation of the incommensurability between the loss of a human life and financial compensation. The people who had died were not recalled as unique individuals but only as assets of varying economic value. This demonstrates the devastating impact of the state’s memory-work on the survivors capacity for recognizing and articulating the suffering caused to other members of the community. Drawing on two exemplars, I will demonstrate how those survivors whose losses were devalued in this manner attempted to retain the ability to speak of their suffering. These individual remembrances, which might have been the site of mourning and attempts at forging a recovery, are now struggles to establish the continuing nature of suffering and the incommensurability of loss and compensation.

Mukesh is a 50-year-old gas survivor living in JP Nagar. Mukesh lost his wife and young son in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. He subsequently remarried and has a son and a daughter from his second marriage. Mukesh’s memory narrative is dominated by the need to recover a moral self-identity in the face of the current experience of the social devaluing of loss illustrated above. The emphasis in his story telling is on providing a moral explanation for his decision to remarry and on establishing the continuing sense of loss and suffering that characterises his present experience:

The story is being rewritten again after having been wiped out. I married for a second time. And the people, a lot of them feel, ‘he is getting the money and he also got a new wife’. But the marriage was only a form of relieving the grief and because of the compulsions of society. Otherwise you can ask Pammi (a neighbour present at the interview), all the other men in the mohalla (colony) who lost their wives re-married immediately, but I did not do so. And I might not have
married had there not been the compulsions of my brother and sister. My soul was suffering so badly and it suffers still when I remember the old story. (Mukesh Interview 2011)

Mukesh presents an extended account of the social compulsions, which forced him to remarry, primarily that by not marrying he would have impeded the marriages of his younger siblings. He presents richly detailed accounts of conversations with friends providing evidence of his reluctance to remarry and the arguments through which he was persuaded otherwise. He also distinguishes his behaviour explicitly from that of other male survivors associating it with a higher moral sense deriving from the caste based social standing of his family:

Now in the caste system of JP Nagar, we occupy the highest tier, and I have lived amongst people of high feeling and morals, my father in law spent his entire life looking after his one son; he did not remarry. His only child was so talented. Like in a recent maths competition in Malaysia, there were so many children who had participated. Children from 40-45 countries. But it was a child belonging to our caste society, a nephew of mine, who brought honour to the region and to India. So it might have been that my son could have also done so (Mukesh Interview 2011)

Mukesh has to draw on the resources offered by a family and caste-based identity to claim a moral personal identity and recover individual self-esteem. Further, Mukesh provides an example of positive recognition, in the story of the young nephew winning an international mathematics competition. He frames the loss of his son as the loss of the possibility of securing such recognition. In doing so, Mukesh sets out the extremely limited nature of financial compensation as a form of justice.

A similar negotiation of the value of loss is evident in the memory narratives of Ram and Lata, a couple in their sixties also residing In JP Nagar. Ram and Lata lost all three of their children as a consequence of the gas disaster. Two of their children died in the immediate aftermath and the third passed away after six years of continuous treatment for severely damaged lungs.
Subsequently, they had four other children who also continue to suffer from growth difficulties. Again Ram’s narrative demonstrates the deeply disabling impact the state’s memory-work has had on individual remembrance. Rather than being able to draw on the resources of the community to grieve and engage in a process of recovery, Ram has to struggle to articulate the nature of his loss. Ram emphasizes how monetary compensation cannot ever be an adequate form of justice for the loss of relationships invested with deep affect:

People say that we are getting money 10 lacs or 5 lacs, whatever, I do not care for that. We lost our children! What will we do with the money? How many days will I eat off that money, tell me? I still have my hands and feet; I can feed myself. But, if my son were alive, he would’ve taken care of us; I would have had four sons earning right now. I and my wife would have lived comfortably in our old age. Money is not everything. The greatest possession is children. You too are somebody’s child. They depend on you, your parents. If you are not there, what use is their money? Everyone is saying you’ve got the money, you’ve got the money. I am not interested in the money... (I) don’t care for it. I have lost my child! Even when I will go to collect the payment from the judge, my tears would be falling, ‘God, what days are showing to us?’ If he (the dead son) had brought us money that he had earned, we would have been filled with joy. Is there any joy in this money (compensation payment)? It is of no value! (Ram Interview 2011)

This section illustrates how the state’s negotiation of the disaster not only did not find ways of addressing the multi-dimensionality of the survivors’ loss, it has also created divisions within the community that threaten the process of grieving and recovery.

6.3.2 Performing Poorly as a Claimant: The Narrative of Personal Incapacity

In this section, I demonstrate the much more debilitating impact of the state’s memory-work as it intersected with multiple personal vulnerabilities. In this section, I examine how the state’s institutional negotiation of the disaster...
became particularly debilitating for survivors' whose identities had been impaired in others domains. In the context of a developing economy and traditional society like India, where the support structures of the state are limited and inaccessible for many, it is the collective resources of immediate and extended family to which individuals turn in times of material and emotional distress. The disaster caused a serious disruption to this traditional domain of support and identity with hundreds of families losing members and thousands of individuals becoming incapable of performing traditional family roles due to illness or injury.

This disruption of family structures was particularly damaging for women survivors. Occupying a secure position within the structures of the family was particularly important for women as they were denied access to occupational roles outside the family. Their positions within the family were also quite vulnerable in view of strongly patriarchal character of traditional Indian families. The death of the husband was a particularly debilitating occurrence for many women as it took away material security and social recognition that they might have achieved as matriarchs in their middle and old ages. In many cases widowed women became completely dependent on the support of the extended family, a position of extreme material and emotional vulnerability. Men who lost spouses in the disaster, in contrast, had much greater social sanction to remarry and were actively encouraged to start new families. In other cases, the adverse impact of the disaster on the reproductive health of young women survivors meant that they were either completely unable to take up traditional roles as wives and mothers or experienced rejection in such roles (see Sathyamala 1996 for an account of the disaster’s impact on women’s reproductive health). Overall, while both male and female gas survivors struggled to counteract institutional disrespect by employing the resources offered by the disrupted domain of the family, the gender-based vulnerabilities charted above meant that women survivors encountered much

27 See Ladusingh (2013) for an examination of the characteristics of the characteristics of the family support system and how it is transforming with the devolution of the extended family system.
greater constraints in such mobilisations. As the examples below will illustrate, for many women survivors the institutional denial of recognition in the legal and medical domains exacerbated the suffering deriving from already damaged family based identities. In such cases, the remembering subjects struggled to sustain any positive self-identity and the narratives became dominated by themes of individual incapacity and deficiency.

One dramatic exemplar of this abjection is the case of Shahida. A 50-year-old female gas survivor, Shahida resides in colony of Shahjahanabad, in one of the moderately affected wards, several kilometres away from the factory site. She, her husband and two children were exposed to the gas on the night of the leak. Her husband and both her children died after long periods of illness, which she views as being a direct consequence of the disaster. However as she was not able to pay for the legal aid to prove this linkage in the claims courts, the three deaths were not seen as being gas related and were only compensated with the 25000 rupees allocated for the ‘temporarily injured’:

We were left behind because of the money. When my husband died, people told me to make a fill a 04 form (make a claim for compensation for death). The lawyer demanded 10,000 rupees for filling up the form. Now we do not even have enough to eat, where would we have paid 10,000 rupees from? (Shahida Interview 2011)

She has raised her three daughters who were born after the gas disaster on her own and lives completely dependent upon the charity of her brothers. The social support offered by her brothers comes with a set of strict conditions, which prohibit her participation in wider networks such as those offered by the social movement organisations:

I do not have the permission to do so from my brothers. I am completely reliant on my brothers, if they tell me tomorrow to go away, what will I do then? (Shahida Interview 2011)

The narratives examined in the first part of this chapter have demonstrated the limited and negative nature of the experiences that most survivors have to
construct their remembrances. The long-drawn out individualized claims process was experienced by survivors as a site of unequal capacities between collectivities and individuals. Also for most survivors, the process involved multiple encounters where their narrations of suffering were challenged and their incapacity to provide adequate evidence was foregrounded. The apathy of the claims bureaucracy was both structurally and experientially similar to other encounters with the state’s welfare bureaucracy. In line with these experiences, the dominant frameworks employed for explaining and understanding of continuing suffering are those of state corruption, the greater capacities and dishonest behaviour of other claimants, and one’s own personal incapacity as a claimant. The past and the present are viewed as a site of a competitive struggle and there is a tendency to devalue the suffering and claims of other survivors. This competitive framework creates a strong antipathy between the projects of organizing past experience to claim both individual self-esteem and social self-esteem.

6.4 Remembering as an activist: The experience and narration of a collective struggle, success and agency

Broadly, the discussion in this section will demonstrate how participation in the activities of the SMOs provided individual survivors alternative experiences, resources and institutionalisations to step outside the category-based identity and engage in ‘activist’ remembrances. Unlike the tragic narrations of personal incapacity examined in the first part of the chapter, ‘activist’ remembrances are marked by narrative emplotments conveying successful resistance and recovery in the post-disaster period. I will further demonstrate how these emplotments also present a more harmonious relationship between individual and collective dimensions of suffering and resistance.

A prominent aspect of these remembrances is the narration of encounters where personal suffering was transformed into the impetus for successful
political action. What the SMOs provided is an opportunity for the stabilisation and frequent performance of this transformation. I illustrate these dynamics employing some exemplars.

6.4.1 From personal suffering to collective struggle

In the first part of the chapter, I traced how survivors organised diverse post-disaster experiences of non-recognition of suffering to convey a tragic narrative of injustice and powerlessness. As opposed to that, individual remembrances where the activist/communitarian identity is more salient are marked by a sequence of positive encounters recounting a narrative of the discovery of voice and agency. Humra Bi, a 60-year-old gas survivors residing in JP Nagar, has been active in the ICJB for the past 8 years and was a part of working class union-based politics before then. Similar to the narratives examined in the first part of this chapter, Humra characterizes the experience of the leak and of the post-disaster process of medical categorization as being marked by passive suffering and powerlessness deriving from ignorance about the events befalling her:

Some people started to come here to gather information. They told us ‘claims will be made. Claims will be made.’ What were these claims? We could not understand. We stood in long lines and ‘claims were made’. (…) What was MIC? What is Union Carbide? Is this a foreign company? Who is Anderson? What is the fault of the government? We did not know anything about these things. (Humra Interview 2011)

However, unlike narrations in the first part, which indicated an inability to transcend this state of ignorance and passivity, Humra invokes this state of ignorance only to place it firmly in the past and to clearly demarcate the present as a site of knowledge and agency. She structures her narrative as a process of political awakening and personal growth. She presents a series of encounters where she was able to secure recognition from both state and non-state actors through articulating her grievances with courage and
confidence. The first of these included successfully securing a place in a government-run skills training programme for gas-affected women. Humra who had been initially considered ineligible for participation in the scheme managed to secure entry by following her own initiative and petitioning a senior government official. Humra characterizes this as a moment of great emotional significance and learning:

I was happy beyond all limits. I felt very happy with myself. I felt, ‘Humra, by speaking out you can achieve a lot. (Humra Interview 2011)

Humra frames this event as marking the beginning of her political awakening and connects it to other such events, for instance, being able to challenge the compensation awarded to her son in the claims court and secure an increase in the compensation amount. The dominant aspect of the events she recounts is a linkage between personal suffering and effective speech. Recounting the event in the court, for instance, she makes a link between grief and the ability to articulate a challenge:

I refused the judgment. I did not care who the judge was, or about his status. I experience great grief and I spoke with great force. (Humra Interview 2011)

These encounters progress from being about the securing of personal goals towards the mobilization of suffering at collective political forums. For instance, she presents an account of being invited to speak at a large political rally organized by the communist party and finding voice by drawing on her personal suffering:

When I reached the stage, my legs were shaking as I climbed the stage. I was so scared, worried about what I'll say. And, then when I began speaking, I could not stop. The allocated time was up but my voice did not stop and the tears from my eyed did not stop. I cried so much, remembering that night, remembering my troubles and I kept on speaking. And after I spoke there was such applause, such appreciation! My morale was strengthened beyond words! (Humra Bi 18/03/2011)
The affirmation received from the audience of the wider political relevance of her personal suffering is framed as another moment of knowledge and growth. Similar encounters are observable in the other narratives. Shamma Bi, a gas survivor from JP Nagar, who lost her child in the disaster, recounts how her grief and anger at the loss of her child gave her the courage to issue a direct challenge to the then Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi when he visited Bhopal in the immediate aftermath of the disaster:

“When Rajeev Gandhi visited, do you know what I said to him? I said, ‘Rajeev Ji, how could you have given permission for such a poisonous factory? My son died because of it. My mother in law died because of it. How could you have issued permission to such a factory?’ I shouted at him in this manner. They could only stare at me, Sonia Gandhi and Rajeev Gandhi. And I said, ‘You should see what the state of this JP Nagar is!’ And he was moved by my shouting, he removed the barriers and entered the colony. For this action, my name appeared in the newspaper, ‘With great spirit and morale Shamma Bi gave her testimony’. Because of my testimony, Rajiv Gandhi visited the colony and met the gas victims. (Shamma Bi 21/03/2011)"

Shamma again emphasizes how her testimony was motivated and made effective by her personal suffering. This personal suffering is framed as securing a symbolic recognition of the collective suffering of the entire colony as the Prime Minister moved by her outburst decides to visit the locality. Both Shamma and Humra go on to narrate life stories where they were able to extend their discovery of the power of effective speech to combat both personal and group suffering. They are able to construct these narratives by linking these early revelatory encounters to a long set of political activities subsequently undertaken as part of the SMOs. By routinizing political action, the SMOs provided Humra and Shamma the means to stabilise their transformation of personal suffering into speech and agency. Both Humra and Shamma, have been provided multiple opportunities to narrate their life stories. Survivors frequently draw on their individual life-stories when called upon to speak at anniversary commemorations, protest actions and the
weekly meetings organized by the SMOs. Further, as prominent members of the SMOs they were also frequently interviewed by the local, national and international media. These narrations made outside the domains of the state’s claims bureaucracy were positive experiences as survivors found their suffering being recognized, accepted and represented:

I have given interviews in many places, but the whole context for the current struggle—concerning water, the gas victims, or the Dow Company or Anderson or the inefficacy of the government—this story I narrated for the first time in 2005 in Bangalore. That marked the beginning of my telling the whole story (poori kahani). Otherwise, as the length of my struggle increased, and I moved ahead in my struggle, accordingly my story also kept developing. (Humra Bi 18/03/2011)

The quotation above illustrates how these multiple opportunities for affirmative narrations allowed the survivors to stabilize their self-conceptualisation as activists engaged in a political struggle. It also indicates how the narrations became the site of the integration of the wider frameworks of meaning mobilized by the SMOs into personal life stories. As the quote reveals, for Humra, her ‘whole story’ has grown to include the issue of water contamination and the liability of the Dow Company. This expansion of the narration of injury and the struggle is in direct opposition to the impact of the state’s claims framework which had kept survivors focused on their own individual physical suffering. The specific connections that were made, do demonstrate divergences based upon the organizations that the survivors belonged to. Humra’s inclusion of the issue of the water contamination derives from her membership of the ICJB. Razia Bi, a gas survivor, active for over 20 years with the BGPMUS, frames her struggle as going beyond the issue of monetary compensation to include employment and the functioning of the gas relief hospitals. Survivors belonging to both SMOs were able to thus connect their personal suffering and struggle to wider collective struggles. In the next section, I examine how these activist narrations were also able to draw on a much wider range of objects of memory and how this made their remembering, a more confident and positive performance of the self.
6.4.2 Objects stabilizing an activist remembering

…the whole story, all the papers, I will take them out and tell you. I have such special photographs, such special papers, I have all the newspapers, there are photos in them too. (Shamma Bi Interview 21/03/2011)

Objects serve as the mediational means by which we may establish a particular relationship to some aspect of our past. They, in effect, lend something of their apparent stability to the fluidity of our unfolding duration. (Middleton and Brown 2005:142).

The quote above by Middleton and Brown (2005) indicates the centrality of objects in being able to stabilize meanings imposed upon the past. In this section, I will illustrate how the survivors mobilizing activist narrations made use of a much wider range of memory objects than those available to survivors working with the claimant identity. The claimant memories examined in the first part of the chapter were marked by a distinctive lack of objects of memory. The only objects that were employed in some of the narrations were medical and legal documents related to the claim-making process. These documents were poor resources in enabling effective meaning making in relation to the past. In the first instance, the survivors, due to illiteracy and poor education, were unable to comprehend the technical information presented in these documents. This lack of comprehension also meant that in many cases the documents did not support the claims of the survivors but rather challenged or negated them. For instance, medical documentation in many cases refuted the connection to the gas disaster which survivors as claimants were seeking to maintain. Official legal documents indicating the medical category of the survivors were similarly limiting as they communicated fixed assessments of injury and removed all specificity from individual suffering (Figure 6.1). Further, engaging with these documents directly recalled all the negative experiences where survivors’ accounts of the past had been challenged and negated by state institutions.
For all these reasons, the documents if used in individual remembrance, only reinforced and perpetuated the feeling of personal incapacity.

The narrations, which were able to frame the suffering generated by the disaster, within life-stories foregrounding activist identities demonstrated the use of a much more expanded set of memory objects. These included photographs, newspaper clippings, magazines, certificates, commemorative trophies and literature and used by the SMOs. Most of these objects were acquired by the survivors through their participation in the activities of the SMOs. I will chart the different kinds of objects employed in the narrations illustrating how they facilitated the narration of personal achievement within a communitarian framework of suffering and struggle.

Fig. 6.1 Court order detailing the quantum of injury addresses the survivors as anonymous but individuated ‘daawedaar’ (claimant)
Newspaper Clippings: Public Recognition of Collective Struggle and Individual Contribution

Newspaper and magazine clippings containing photographs or reports of the SMOs activities were a prominent set of memory objects. These media representations confirmed the public status of the survivors as activists and the legitimacy of the SMO discourses seeking to expand the framework of injury. Further, survivors presented these clippings as objective evidence of the longevity of the collective struggle and their personal contribution to it. Shamma Bi, for instance had painstakingly arranged, these clippings into a photo-album (Fig 5.1). The photographs selected featured Shamma Bi participating prominently in collective protests. Her positioning at the forefront of the protests was a clear indicator of her central role in the SMOs activities. Employing the newspaper representations, Shamma re-enacted elements of the protest, shouting some of the slogans used as part of the protests. The photographs thereby provided a means for a re-experiencing the positive emotion of associated with successful protests. The use of these newspaper clippings demonstrates the importance of recognition afforded in media representations for individual memory-work and the performance of an emotionally uplifting remembrance.

Fig. 6.2 Shamma Bi’s photo-album with press clippings
Photographs: Archiving Personal Recovery

While the newspaper clippings provided evidence of the public (out-group) recognition of collective and individual struggle, other objects allowed for a closer integration of personal familial narratives and the historical trajectory of the collective struggle. The objects enabling this included photographs of protests and anniversary actions produced directly by the SMOs or by the survivors. These images differed from the newspaper clippings in capturing activities that occurred as part of the SMO activities but were not meant for out-group communication. These images include ‘behind-the-scenes’ activities capturing the survivors performing identities or role relationships other than those of being activists. For instance, Razia Bi, an active member of the BGPMUS for over twenty years, used a small store of personal images taken at anniversary actions featuring her children participating in the protest (Figure 6.2). These images allowed Razia Bi to integrate remembrances focusing on her role as a mother with the activities she undertook as an activist. The photographs enabled a collective family based remembering with her daughter as they recalled how the children had enjoyed participating in the anniversary rallies, shouting slogans and posing with the effigies. For Razia, who had lost her husband and a daughter in the disaster, the picture allowed for the stabilization of a narrative of joyful struggle and recovery. From the vantage point of the present where the children have grown up to be self-sufficient adults, the photograph permits a fond remembrance of childhood that unfolded within the framework of a wider and still continuing political struggle. Razia’s remembrance is an example of how SMO memory-work transcended the domain of political meaning making by also providing survivors’ memorable occasions for the recording and archiving of personal recovery. In the conclusion, I will consider how the lack of this kind of integration of the personal and the collective for the vast majority of the survivors informs their evaluation of the relevance of the SMO memory-work.
SMO Recognition: Remembering new communities

The third and final set of objects employed in personal narratives, employing communitarian activist framings, includes commemorative certificates, trophies and other memorabilia awarded by the SMOs to selected individual participants. These objects were awarded by the SMOs to their members as recognition of their individual contribution to the collective struggle. The SMOs employed these objects to explicitly stabilize the transformation of individual survivors into activists. The inclusion of these objects in personal narrations demonstrates the value of such recognition for individual survivors. The collections of newspaper clippings and photographs differed according to the activities and the archiving capacity of individual remembering subjects. The collections had been individually forged and drew attention to the individual life story within the collective struggle. The memorabilia awarded by the SMOs
were used for the opposite movement, to frame an evolving personal struggle as being part of new and emergent collectivities. Distributed by SMOs to groups of survivors, the possession of the same memory object helped stabilize membership of new collectivities. A good example to illustrate this is a commemorative poster awarded by the ICJB to a group of individuals from the gas-affected and water-affected communities who participated in the 2006 protest march from Bhopal to New Delhi (Fig. 6.4). The poster commemorates the 2006 protest march, which brought together the demands of the gas victims and the water victims. It features the names and photographs of all those who participated in the protest march. These included gas survivors unaffected by water contamination, gas survivors also affected by water contamination, water-affected unexposed to the gas leak, and national and international activists. This object featured in the remembrance of several survivors who were a part of the ICJB and participated in the march. The poster was evidence of their participation in the event. It also became a point of recalling the other participants who had participated in the march and re-rehearsing the connections, which justified the forging of the group.

Fig. 6.4 2006 Protest-march poster featuring the names and images of the participants
For instance, memories of the protest-march featured prominently in the narrations of Jabbar and Nafisa Khan, a gas-survivor couple in their mid-forties. Jabbar and Nafisa, also live in one of the water-affected colonies. Narrating their experience of participation in the march allowed them to articulate their membership of a new community of sufferers who have been affected by both the first disaster of the gas-leak and the second disaster of the water contamination. The poster not only helps them imagine the new expanded community of the victims of the disaster, it also helps them retain a concrete sense of the transnational relevance of their struggle. It does so by including transnational activists who supported the survivors by participating in the march.

6.4.3 Ambiguities in the reception of SMO memory-work

In the sections above, I have charted two broad tendencies in the individual remembrances of the survivors and explained them in relation to the memory-work of the state and the social movement organisations. The oppositional framework used to order the analysis while foregrounding the clear and dramatic differences in the emplotment of life-trajectories might make the reception of the SMO memory-work at the individual level appear completely unproblematic. In this section, I wish to briefly signal some of the ambiguities in reception at the individual level.

Firstly, the limited membership of the two groups needs to be emphasized. In the chapter on SMO memory-work, I have indicated how the groups are struggling to maintain and expand a committed membership. The activist narrations that I have charted above tend to be limited to those survivors whose membership of the SMOs is stabilized by multiple institutionalizations. These might be occupational networks or circuits of kinship. These help maintain the salience of the activist identity. The SMOs are seeking to expand extra-symbolic institutionalizations by expanding their organizational
capacities such as the building of the Sambhavna and Chingari clinics. To survivors who are outside the organizations and who do not interact with the SMOs on a routine basis, SMO memory-work may lack meaning and value. Firstly, survivors outside the SMOs see SMO memory-work as being limited to the anniversary performances:

The ‘leaders’ arrive here. The gas disaster unions arrive here. They come here with some effigies and gather outside the factory. They burn the effigy and return to their homes. That’s all. They arrive in the morning and leave in the afternoon. (Mathura Prasad Interview 19/01/2011)

As this quotation demonstrates, perceiving the performance from the outside, survivors can see it as an empty ritual. The lack of identification with the performance can derive from several reasons. First, there can be a lack of belief in the efficacy of the performance as an instrument of political action. Gas survivors who are primarily concerned with the recognition of their claim for additional monetary compensation evaluate the SMOs anniversary performances as having been historically ineffective. For instance, Abida Bi, while acknowledging the effort that goes into the anniversary commemorations bemoans the lack of ‘results’:

This is all a show. There is no good in doing this. It will only have meaning if they (the state) agree to your demands. You put in so much effort. You took out such a big protest. But the result is zero. You have been doing this for 26 years, what have you achieved? (Abida Bi Interview 17/03/2011)

At the same time, there can also be a detachment deriving from the political form taken by the protest. Mukesh, who lost family members in the leak, perceives the SMO memory-work as being too discordant in its form, reopening the injury, but providing little space for the sharing of individual grief:

On the day of the anniversary, these people raise a big fuss. They reopen the wound. They are not here to show compassion. They do not come here to share the grief. (Mukesh Interview)
6.5 Questioning Absences: The Issue of Causality and Corporate Liability

The final point, I wish to raise is about the lack of knowledge about the understanding and causality of the event. As I've demonstrated in the examination of the memory-work of the two main SMOs (see chapter 4), the responsibility for causing the disaster is clearly attributed to the institutions of the state and the corporation. This narrative of responsibility is also prominently mobilised in the commemorative activities of both the SMOs. In general, the investigation revealed the striking absence of a clear narrative of the causality of the disaster from the majority of the individual memory narratives. Not only is there absence of this narrative of responsibility, in some cases there was an active questioning of the SMOs continued blaming of the corporation:

The owner of Union Carbide has paid out the money that was due. What is the meaning of burning his effigy? He has paid out the money that was due. *He has paid out a lot of money to the people, but it has all been gobbled up by the government.* Why are you burning his effigy? Like this gas leaked, by an act of nature. If he had decided not to pay anything, what could India have done about it? What could they have done? It was at his own discretion and kindness when he saw the suffering of the people that he felt compelled to provide some relief.

He paid out a lot of money. Millions of rupees. And this government ate it all and the gas survivors did not get anything. *The government ate it up!* (Mathura Prasad Interview 19/01/2011)

This perception about the lack of responsibility of the corporation and the adequacy of the compensation it paid out derives from technically complex causality of the disaster and the state’s acceptance of the liability of the corporation. The framework of corporate crime lacks salience as a way of understanding past suffering. Firstly, survivors could not draw on any event from their past experience to make sense of it. Further, the shutting down of
the plant immediately after the disaster meant that the corporation and the
issue of toxic threat could not take on a concrete form for many of the
survivors. The narrative of Bhopal being a toxic disaster caused by corporate
disregard for the health of poor citizens is more salient in locations where
such threat is present at an everyday level. On the other hand, the discourse
of state corruption is much closer to the past and present experience of the
gas survivors. Most survivors do not frame their physical suffering as being of
a special toxic nature. The lack of relief is simply seen as deriving from the
general inefficiency and lack of care in state health systems. The survivors
contrast effective private medical care with inefficient state medical care and
the continuing physical suffering gets limited to the issue of state corruption
and inefficiency.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has engaged with the individual memory narratives of the gas
survivors. It demonstrated the intimate link between lived-experience and
meaning-making in relation to the past. The chapter tracked the patterns
revealed in the survivors’ attempt to understand their past suffering. The
analysis revealed that individual meaning making in relation to suffering is not
entirely determined by the meaning making undertaken in institutional and
group-level remembrances. The memory narratives of the gas survivors in
Bhopal do not directly conform to the meanings mobilised either by the state

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28 The narrative of toxic poisoning and water contamination does however have a clear
salience for those residing in the water-affected areas. These frameworks are harder to
sustain because they are not familiar to the residents but there is clear evidence of an
incorporation of these frameworks into personal memory narratives. The incorporation of
these discourses into personal narratives requires both the experiential assimilation of
knowledge and its stabilization in objects and material structures. ICJB has been using
the contaminated soil and water as a key evidentiary object in their mobilisations and
survivors too have begun to incorporate such evidence into their narrations. While these
narrations are not as yet completely coherent, they do begin the process of the
recognition and articulation of a new set of injuries at the level of the water victims.
or the SMO. In fact, survivors demonstrate considerable agency and creativity in fashioning narratives that offer explicit critiques of the state’s claims about the successful containment of suffering. At the same time however, the study revealed how the identities and meanings mobilised by the state can heavily constrain individual interpretation of past and ongoing suffering. This is so because of the state’s unmatched capacity to stabilise meanings and identity-relations by institutionalising them in material structures and processes. These material institutionalisations in turn have a direct impact on the individual experience of suffering and consequently on its remembering. In the case of Bhopal, the survivors have experienced their post-disaster suffering within the context of negotiating an uncaring and antagonistic state bureaucracy while performing the state imposed identity as individualised claimants. The study demonstrates how this limiting of the scope of the individual experience of suffering limits the meanings that individuals can assign to it in remembrance: interpretations linked to unequal inter-personal competition, personal incapacity, state corruption, apathy and neglect of poor citizens get foregrounded while issues of toxic injury, collective harm, corporate liability and the continuing contamination get obscured. Disaster gets limited to the routine complaints of the state-citizen relationship. Alternative interpretations require access to alternative experiences and institutionalisations such as those facilitated by the SMOs.
Chapter 7- Conclusion

7.1 Bhopal: An Ongoing Mnemonic Contestation

To ‘remember Bhopal’ today means not just collecting and understanding information about the disaster and its aftermath, but also critiquing it, teaching it, and using it in creative ways. (Memorial Factsheet, ICJB 2005)

The mnemonic contestation over Bhopal is by no means a finished story. SMOs in Bhopal are already planning their campaign activities seeking to take advantage of the national and international media attention, which should be directed at the 30th anniversary of the disaster in December 2014. Judicial processes around the issues of increased financial compensation, criminal punishment and corporate liability for environmental clean-up of the factory site are slowly unfolding in different courtrooms. The research questions pursued by this thesis do not allow us to predict the outcome of this contestation. What they do allow us however is an appreciation of the complex multi-level dynamics of the mnemonic contest and the inequalities characterising the relations between the different remembrances implicated.

The thesis set out to empirically examine and answer the following questions: how have state institutions, SMOs and individual survivors remembered the disaster? What factors have impacted the meaning-making and identity work undertaken by these collective and individual actors? What has been the interrelationship between these different remembrances of the event? What kind of historical change is observable in this relationship? I have pursued these questions systematically, employing a multi-level model of memory-work and a multimodal qualitative methodology involving extensive ethnographic interviews, participant observation and archival research. The rich data generated has been presented and analysed in the three empirical chapters sequentially focussing on the memory-work of state institutions, SMOs and individual survivors; each chapter provides detailed accounts of
the dynamics of the remembering undertaken by these actors. In this conclusion, I will summarise and synthesise the key findings of the study. I will focus especially on the patterns observable in the evolving interrelationship between the different remembrances. Following this summation, the discussion will move on to outline the wider disciplinary contributions of the study.

7.2 Interpreting Disaster and Suffering

Memory-work, the unifying concept employed in the thesis, conceptualised remembering as an active process of meaning making in relation to the past. A multi-level conceptualisation of memory-work further recognised the multi-layered nature of remembrance, simultaneously engaged in by individual and collective actors, following a cataclysmic mass disaster like Bhopal. Consequently, the thesis examined the memory-work performed by state institutions, SMOs and individual survivors in the aftermath of the Bhopal disaster as an active process of interpreting and articulating the past, seeking to restore meaning and identity at individual and collective levels. This restorative meaning-making and identity work at collective levels (institutional and social) was seen to be principally engaged with the creation and stabilisation of narratives about collective suffering; these narratives addressed the nature of the collective suffering, the identity of the victims, the causality of the suffering, and consequentially, the nature and responsibility for reparations. The examination of the memory of state institutions and the SMOs revealed clear differences and incompatibilities in the meanings and identities being pursued in the aftermath of the event. Both the state and SMOs require the participation/affirmation of the individual survivors in order to stabilise their meaning making. Their capacities to achieve this stabilisation and the modes through which they have chosen to do so differ. This institutional and group-level memory-work had also had a direct impact on the survivors’ remembrance in terms of shaping their post disaster experience of
suffering and providing or obscuring frameworks of meaning required to make sense of experience. The memory-work of the individual survivors, on the other hand, revealed the more differentiated quest of individuals trying to make sense of their personal suffering and life-trajectories in the aftermath of the event. Individual memory-work as accessed in narrative remembering revealed the ongoing struggle to confer meaning and order upon personal experiences contingently shaped by external accident and actions, personal agency and social affiliations. In particular, the categorical claimant identity institutionalised by the state and the experiences it engendered have proved debilitating in the pursuit of positive self-identities. Overall, each set of remembrance was revealed as a site of dynamic meaning struggle and identity construction, marked by agency and constraint. In the following section, I will recapture the key dynamics of each set of memory-work and the nature of their inter-modulation.

7.2.1 The Memory-work of State Institutions: Containing and Appropriating Suffering

As illustrated in Chapter 4, the memory-work undertaken by state institutions has been primarily performed within the judicial and commemorative domains. Within the judicial domain the analysis focussed on the trajectory of the negotiations from 1985 to 1991, the period in which the primary settlement of injuries arising from the disaster was arbitrated between the Union of India and Union Carbide Corporation (UCC). The examination tracked significant shifts in the narratives mobilised by state institutions during this period. It illustrated how within the initial legal formulations there was a clear and prominent focus on corporate liability; the injuries were framed as being a direct result of the corporation’s pursuit of a hazardous and inherently dangerous activity without maintaining the required standards of safety (Muralidhar 2004/5:12). Further, the injuries were assigned clear transnational and historical significance: holding UCC responsible for injuries in Bhopal was seen as being vital for establishing a historical precedent for regulating the
unchecked power of multinationals to cause harm through their activities; injuries in Bhopal were thereby directly linked to the historical suffering of vulnerable third-world populations harmed by multinational corporations. The discussion tracked how this focus on transnational corporate liability was completely obscured in the eventual $470 million settlement of the disaster between the Union of India and UCC, negotiated and finalised by the Supreme Court of India between 1989 and 1991. The settlement allowed the corporation to detach itself from the circuits of accountability and saw the state taking over the long-term liabilities.

The analysis demonstrated how the settlement was popularly challenged as being deeply inadequate both in terms of the quantum of compensation and in failing to pronounce on the culpability of the corporation. It further identified how this failure to pursue an exemplary and historically significant process of justice was justified by the court through a dramatic devaluing of both the symbolic and material significance of the suffering of the survivors. Two key figurations of the suffering of the victims were identified as enabling this devaluation. The first was a collective invocation emphasising the vulnerable status of the victims as ‘poor and helpless’ citizens whose suffering demanded urgent relief. This rendering completely de-historicized the suffering of the victims, obscured its specific transnational corporate causality and toxic character, and naturalised it as an extension of the victims’ status as deficient citizens. Justice within this rendering could be reduced to the issue of easing the physical and material suffering of the victims by simply paying them monetary compensation.

The second figuration rendered suffering into a knowable quantity, which could be accurately quantified and subjected to a bureaucratic process of financial compensation. This was achieved by transforming survivors into individual ‘claimants’ who had to prove their suffering by submitting to a process of injury-categorization undertaken by the medical and bureaucratic apparatus of the state. I demonstrated how this system of injury-categorization was deeply flawed resulting in the non-recognition or under-valuation of the harm caused by the disaster. Most significantly, this second
rendering, institutionalized through the claims bureaucracy, stabilized the transformation of survivors from national victims into potential malingerers seeking to exaggerate their injuries in a bid to defraud the state. The claims process emerged as the main site of the encounter between the survivors’ narrations of their lived suffering and official registers of recognition. As I’ve demonstrated in the analysis of the survivors’ remembrance, this encounter invariably led to an undermining of the value of personal experience and the narration of suffering. Survivors’ claims and narrations of harm were treated with suspicion and in most cases, rejected or undervalued. As claimants they were assigned categories of injury, which did not resonate with their experience. Moreover, the categorical identities thus assigned were fixed and could not be challenged. The state has continued to reiterate its memory-work through the repeated mobilization of these categorical identities in the long drawn out process of compensation disbursal.

The examination of the state’s memory-work within the commemorative domain traced a similar negation of the historical meaning of the disaster. The scaling down of the disaster from a national injury with transnational significance to the routinized suffering of a locally contained deficient citizenry is mirrored in the lack of any state instituted national level commemoration. The low-key commemoration that is undertaken remains limited to the level of the state government, performed locally in Bhopal. Examination of commemorative discourse and performances revealed the repeated mobilization of an unchanging narrative of an untroubled post-disaster recovery. There is no acknowledgement of the continuing physical, economic and social suffering of the victims. The emphasis is on foregrounding the scientific capacities of the state institutions and does not permit any admission of inadequacy.

This deeply problematic memory-work of the state has to be understood within the wider political meaning systems characterizing the historical conjunctures of its performance. I demonstrated how the limiting of the meaning of the suffering of the victims and the scope of justice was tied into the state’s tortuous negotiation of a transformation in its external identity and
the maintenance and strengthening of its internal identity. At the transnational level, the state was reconfiguring its identity and interests within the domain of economic policy and transnational relations. In terms of its relationship to the citizens, older narratives of a problem-solving, scientific, developmentalist state taking care a deficient citizenry continued to enjoy legitimacy and guide practice at national, sub-national and local scales.

Overall, state memory-work de-historicized the suffering caused by the disaster by removing from view the issue of the causality of the disaster and the culpability of the corporation. It routinized the suffering of the victims through the institutionalisation of fixed categorical identities. Being a gas victim simply became an extension of categorical status as a deficient citizen, facilitating a limited dependency based relation to the welfare state. The state’s capacity to engage in the institutional reiteration of this categorical claimant identity has deeply constrained the memory-work of both SMOs and individual survivors.

### 7.2.2 SMO Memory-Work: Restoring Meaning to Suffering, Forging New Identities

At the group-level, the thesis examined the memory-work of the two most prominent SMOs working in Bhopal to secure justice for the survivors, the BGPMUS and the ICJB (Chapter 5). The analysis broadly demonstrated how both groups seek to challenge the memory-work of the state in terms of articulating the continuing suffering of the survivors and asserting the state’s failure to provide justice. The analysis however revealed clear differences in their conceptualisation of the nature of the suffering, the categories of victims, attribution of responsibility and the character of justice.

The BGPMUS has chosen to develop a class based conceptualization of injury which remains focused on the harm caused by the event of the gas leak, attributes responsibility to the state, and conceptualizes justice primarily in terms of significantly seeking enhanced financial compensation from the state. The ICJB, on the other hand, has developed an expanded framework of
injury; focusing on the issue of groundwater contamination, they articulate a narrative of a continuing ‘second disaster,’ adding new sets of injuries to those caused by the original leak. In doing so, they seek to create a new category of ‘water victims’. The ICJB uses this expansion of injury to re-implicate the corporation into the circuits of accountability and formulate a multidimensional justice. Unlike BGPMUS which focuses on state liability, ICJB’s attribution of blame is firmly relational emphasising the collusion between transnational corporate interests and state institutions.

The thesis tracked how these differences in meaning making have been shaped historically by the pre-existing identities and capacities of the core constituents of the two organisations and the diverse trajectories of their post-disaster resource development and institution building. These factors had a direct impact on their abilities to identify and respond to the political opportunities presented by the evolving trajectory of the disaster and structural shifts brought about by globalisation. I demonstrated how the ICJB built on the existing capacities of its constituents (the BGIA in particular) in the generation and mobilisation of scientific data through transnational collaborations which became easier to sustain with shifts in communication technology. This allowed it to effectively generate scientific evidence demonstrating the presence of groundwater contamination around the UCC factory site, the emergence of new sets of toxic injuries and link these to the pre and post-leak operational practices of UCC. It was further able to mobilise this information in persuasive formats in transnational forums and media representations. The effective transnational mobilisation of the narrative of the ‘second disaster’ saw Bhopal being firmly re-recognised as a continuing toxic disaster caused by corporate misconduct by prominent non-state transnational actors. The analysis demonstrates how on the other hand, BGPMUS lacking the capacities to engage in such transnational connective memory-work, has seen a historical narrowing of its symbolic meaning making in relation to the disaster.

The thesis tracked how the SMOs have to maintain these meanings and identities through continuous memory-work directed outwards towards
national and transnational forums, non-survivor populations and the wider victim community as well as inwards towards their group membership. The examination revealed how the SMOs have to engage in rigorous memory-work directed at their membership in group meetings to ensure the maintenance of identification with the group identity. Here, the analysis revealed the much greater difficulties that the ICJB has to face in comparison to the BGPMUS. The examination revealed how the ICJB seeks to develop a larger identity of ‘people poisoned by Union Carbide/ Dow Chemical’, which can connect gas victims and water victims. ICJB seeks to stabilise this new identity by mobilising it in diverse group level performances including the anniversary commemoration of the disaster as well as by continuous narrative iterations in group-meetings. This attempt however is severely constrained by the state’s memory-work which only recognises the injuries caused by the gas leak. The inequality in state recognition of the two sets of injuries hampers the creation of a new collective identity connecting the event of the gas leak and the water contamination. On the other hand, BGPMUS’s limited focus on the injuries caused by the gas leak and the articulation of justice within the framework of state liability tacitly accepts and reproduces the categorical identities imposed by the state. Every time the state initiates the process of payment of additional compensation, the organisational narrative of BGPMUS finds affirmation. In this regard, the BGPMUS despite its oppositional stance is bound in a relationship of dependence with the processes of state memory-work.

In relation to individual memory-work, as opposed to the almost uniformly negative encounters generated by state memory-work, SMO memory-work has been a more positive domain.

7.2.3 Survivors’ Memory-work: Self-identity and the Negotiation of Lived Suffering

Unlike, the remembrances of the state or social movement organisations which focussed on collective suffering, individual memory-work as accessed
in narrative remembering of the survivors was about making sense of the individual experience of continuing suffering. Individual experiences and life trajectories were of course diversely modulated by the imbrication of the disaster’s contingent impact, the actions of state institutions and group-level actors, personal agency and social positioning. In line with the analytical focus on examining the interrelation between the different processes of memory-work, the influence of state and SMO remembrance was traced. Clear differences were observed in both the degree and nature of the influence.

The analysis demonstrated that the state’s memory-work heavily impacted individual remembrance in a negative manner. The legal settlement by not pronouncing on the issue of the culpability of the corporation for causing the injuries had prevented any national level public discussion about the causality of the event and the lessons to be derived from it. No resources were provided to the survivors for recognising the specificity of their suffering and its historical significance. Further, the claims process, the only means through which the survivors could secure institutional recognition of their injuries was structurally disposed to undervalue their suffering. The process of injury categorisation and claims disbursal did not provide the survivors’ any space for the storied narration of their suffering. In fact, claims bureaucracy made it clear that survivors’ personal experiences were of little value as evidence by rejecting their claims and demanding documentary proof. Further, this process assigned the survivors fixed injury categories quantifying their suffering. The majority of the survivors were categorised as having suffered no long-term injury. State memory-work continually re-iterated these category-based identities through the long drawn out process of monetary compensation.

The individual remembrances were gathered following another such iteration of the categorical identities. The analysis revealed how the survivors clearly challenged the validity of the categorical identities imposed on them. The survivors signalled the multidimensionality of their suffering as well its continuing nature and evaluated the state’s processes as being unjust. However, the narratives also demonstrate the inability of survivors to entirely reject the category-based framework. Within this framework suffering was
articulated as a domain of individualised competition making it hard for individuals to sustain positive relations with other survivors. The analysis traced how the category based framework forced individuals to both devalue the suffering of other survivors as well as develop deeply negative views of their own agency and capacity. On the other hand, I tracked the limited but largely positive contribution of the frameworks provided by the SMOs. I revealed how some survivors have been able to use the experiences, objects and networks provided by participation in SMO activity to step out of the claimant identity and develop alternative understandings of their experience of suffering. I outlined how these survivors have been able to transform their suffering into effective speech and action securing recognition from a variety of non-state forums. Employing the memory of these positive encounters, survivors were able to sustain activist identities characterised by the possession of speech and agency.

7.3 Contributions to Wider Literature on Memory

7.3.1 Relations between different individual and collective remembering

The thesis provides an empirical examination of the relations between individual and collective remembering. Calls for the investigation of the connections between inner, individual level processes of memory linked to lived experience and the wider, historically inflected, collective and institutional registers of remembrance have been repeatedly put forward within the field (Radstone 2005; Cubitt 2007; Olick 2009). There have however been few studies that have empirically engaged in such multi-level examination, the tendency being to focus on either individual or collective levels (Radstone 2005). This propensity has been especially pronounced in examinations of the remembrance of past suffering, which have been characterised by problematic mobilisations of the concept of trauma (Keightley and Pickering 2012). On the one hand, there are accounts marked by post-structuralist
valorisations of individual trauma viewing it as a rare and valuable moment of authenticity, the breakdown of all stories seen as providing opportunities of political resistance; on the other, there are collective mobilisations which limit the concept to the public articulations of suffering detaching it entirely from individual experience (Kantsteiner and Weilnblock 2008; Keightley and Pickering 2012). In doing so, none of these conceptualisations allow for examining the relations between the cultural and institutional processes marking the collective remembrance of suffering and the individual remembrance of the lived experience of suffering. The thesis avoids such theoretically problematic and analytically unproductive usage of the concept of trauma. It demonstrates instead the utility of a multi-level model of memory-work in more productively mapping the crucial interactions between collective and individual negotiations of suffering.

The study revealed that individual meaning making in relation to suffering is not entirely determined by the meaning making undertaken in institutional and group-level remembrances. The memory narratives of the gas survivors in Bhopal do not directly conform to the narratives mobilised either by the state or the SMO. In fact, the survivors demonstrate considerable agency and creativity in fashioning narratives that offer explicit critiques of the state’s claim-making. At the same time however, the study revealed how the identities and meanings mobilised by the state can heavily constrain individual interpretation of past and on-going suffering. This is so because of the state’s unmatched capacity to stabilise meanings and identity relations by institutionalising them in material structures and processes. These material institutionalisations in turn have a direct impact on the individual experience of suffering and consequentially on its remembering. In the case of Bhopal, the survivors have experienced their post-disaster suffering within the context of negotiating an uncaring and antagonistic state bureaucracy while performing the state imposed identity as individualised claimants. The study demonstrates how this limiting of the scope of the individual experience of suffering limits the meanings that individuals can assign to it in remembrance: interpretations linked to state corruption, apathy and neglect of poor citizens.
get foregrounded while issues of toxic injury, corporate liability and the continuing contamination get obscured. Disaster gets limited to the routine complaints of the state-citizen relationship. Alternative interpretations require access to alternative experiences and institutionalisations such as those facilitated by the SMOs.

Exploring this interplay between collective and individual remembrance of suffering does not simply help illuminate the general relationships between collective and individual processes of meaning-making and identity construction, it also helps foreground the key ethical and political imperative that drives examinations of memory and suffering: examining the remembrance of suffering matters because it is implicated in the alleviation of past and current suffering and the prevention of future suffering. Remembering Bhopal as a toxic disaster has direct implications for the way in which the on-going physical suffering of the survivors is addressed. It is also vital for the recognition and alleviation of new injuries arising from the issue of water contamination and for the prevention of such injuries in the future.

The study provides a model for the examination of these relationships. It does not fix the political role to be played by state level institutions or small groups. As clearly emphasised in the analysis, the identity and interests guiding the meaning-making undertaken by the state were historically determined.

### 7.3.2 Memory in the Global Age

The thesis contributes to key debates about memory politics in the global age. It responds to calls within the field demanding a critical questioning of accounts reifying structural shits in the nature of memory and assigning it a politically progressive transnational connectivity. It does so firstly by focussing firmly on the work done by actors as they engage in the local, national or transnational scaling of remembrance. Secondly, it demonstrates how the capacities to engage in such connective memory-work are not equally
distributed. Finally, it illustrates the extremely contested nature of transnational claim-making.

The study demonstrated how state institutions through their memory-work removed from view the transnational connections of the disaster and limited it to domain of a locally contained bureaucratic process. The ICJB was able to contest this local scaling through the narrative of the second disaster relating to the water contamination. The study revealed the enormous amount of memory-work that ICJB had to undertake in order to connect UCC and Dow Chemicals to the issue of water contamination. The study revealed how the ICJB was able to secure recognition for this connection from transnational non-state forums. The analysis demonstrated that BGPMUS lacking ICJB’s scientific and communicative expertise was unable to respond to the political opportunities presented by the emergence of water contamination and the purchase of UCC by Dow Chemicals. The thesis demonstrated how ICJB’s narrative about the transnational connections of the disaster was actively contested by the corporations involved. The corporations also had the active support of US and Indian politicians and state officials as well as Indian corporations who argued that the SMO’s narrative of corporate culpability was inimical to India’s economic interests. Further, the examination of the individual survivors’ remembrance demonstrated the continuing salience of categorical identities imposed by state-memory-work and the limited engagement with the ICJB’s narrative of transnational corporate liability.

7.3.3 Turning the Gaze onto ‘New’ Injustices

Overall, the thesis demonstrates more complex global-local dynamics within the field of memory-politics than those suggested by accounts opposing ‘good’ global memories to ‘bad’ national ones. Such simplistic binary oppositions derive in part from the fact that discussions of memory struggles within the field of memory studies have tended to concentrate on injuries inflicted by state regimes. In examining these contestations, nationalist memories denying the suffering of victims are seen as being productively
delegitimised by transnationally shared memories of past suffering such as those of the Holocaust. Examining the case of Bhopal, where the injuries are attributed to a non-state transnational corporate actor, brings a new set of memory struggles within the purview of memory studies. Memory Studies by not including these struggles within its purview was guilty of reproducing the institutional non-recognition of such injuries within the transnational human rights regime. The thesis remedies this exclusion and this conclusion has signaled some of the vital analytical insights that this expansion of the field facilitates.
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