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978-1-107-12697-8 - Toxic Histories: Poison and Pollution in Modern India

David Arnold

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## Toxic Histories

Toxic Histories combines social, scientific, medical and environmental history to demonstrate the critical importance of poison and pollution to colonial governance, scientific authority and public anxiety in India between the 1830s and 1950s. Against the background of India's 'poison culture' and periodic 'poison panics', David Arnold considers why many familiar substances came to be regarded under colonialism as dangerous poisons. As well as the criminal uses of poison, Toxic Histories shows how European and Indian scientists were instrumental in creating a distinctive system of forensic toxicology and medical jurisprudence designed for Indian needs and conditions, and how local as well as universal poison knowledge could serve constructive scientific and medical purposes. Arnold reflects on how the 'fear of a poisoned world' spilt over into concerns about contamination and pollution, giving ideas of toxicity a wider social and political significance that has continued into India's post-colonial era.

DAVID ARNOLD is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Warwick. His published work includes *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*; *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*; *Gandhi; The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science, 1800–1856*; and *Everyday Technology: Machines and the Making of India's Modernity*.

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## Acknowledgements

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This book owes its origins to the reading of two others. One is Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, read one pleasant summer in the incongruous surroundings of Sag Harbor on Long Island, and the realization of how much of that fanciful tale of intrigue and enchantment related to ideas of Oriental toxicity and the Eastern poisoner. The other was Cecil Walsh's account of the Agra murders of 1911–12, which suggested much more even than the 'engrossing' poison story he unveiled. Since then, the book has grown into a more protracted engagement with the social, scientific, medical and environmental history of South Asia since the early nineteenth century, but over all this, to my mind, hangs the appalling tragedy of 'the world's greatest industrial disaster' – the poison gas leak at the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal in December 1984, even though it happened more than 30 years after Indian independence. This book is in part an attempt to provide a historical lineage for that catastrophe.

In the course of researching and writing this book, I have incurred many debts. I especially want to thank Jane and Bob Stine for their generous hospitality over the years, and also to express my indebtedness to the late Anil Agarwal for the inspiration and example of his environmental campaigning. My thanks go, too, to the many academic colleagues and friends who have regaled me with poison tales of their own, notably Clare Anderson, Michael Anderson, Barbara Dinham, Pratik Chakrabarti, Indira Chowdhury, Judy Farquhar, Margot Finn, Harald Fischer-Tiné, Marta Hanson, David Hardiman, Mark Harrison, Sarah Hodges, Shruti Kapila, Steve Legg, Jim Manor, Projit Mukharji, Henry Noltie, Robert Peckham, Margaret Pelling, Sanjay Sharma, Subhir Sinha, Claudia Stein, John Tresch and Michael Worboys. I am further indebted to the Wellcome Library, the British Library, the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, the University of Warwick library, the National Archives of India in New Delhi and the Tamil Nadu State Archives in Chennai.

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## Abbreviations

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<i>AR</i>	<i>Asiatic Researches</i>
<i>ARBSNC</i>	<i>Annual Report of the Bengal Smoke-Nuisances Commission</i>
<i>ARCE (NWP)</i>	<i>Annual Report of the Chemical Examiner, North-Western Provinces</i>
<i>ARCE (UP)</i>	<i>Annual Report of the Chemical Examiner, United Provinces</i>
<i>ARCED (Bengal)</i>	<i>Annual Report of the Chemical Examiner's Department, Bengal</i>
<i>ARMC</i>	<i>Annual Report of the Municipal Commissioner</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Calcutta Review</i>
<i>IAMS</i>	<i>Indian Annals of Medical Science</i>
<i>IJM</i>	<i>Indian Journal of Malariology</i>
<i>IJMR</i>	<i>Indian Journal of Medical Research</i>
<i>IMG</i>	<i>Indian Medical Gazette</i>
<i>IMS</i>	<i>Indian Medical Service</i>
<i>IOR</i>	<i>India Office Records</i>
<i>JASB</i>	<i>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal</i>
<i>NAI</i>	<i>National Archives of India</i>
<i>NWP</i>	<i>North-Western Provinces</i>
<i>RCA (Bombay)</i>	<i>Report of the Chemical Analyser, Bombay</i>
<i>RCE (Punjab)</i>	<i>Report of the Chemical Examiner, Punjab</i>
<i>RHO</i>	<i>Report of the Health Officer</i>
<i>TMPSC</i>	<i>Transactions of the Medical and Physical Society of Calcutta</i>
<i>TNA</i>	<i>Tamil Nadu Archives</i>
<i>ToI</i>	<i>Times of India</i>
<i>UP</i>	<i>United Provinces</i>