

Environmental Injustice in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

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Abstract

The present paper intends to explore the effect of the ominous Bhopal Gas Tragedy, the industrial disaster which killed thousands and left scores of survivors ailing with health problems or disfigured along with the environmental injustice. The story centers around the story of Animal, a nineteen year old boy literally named after the Hindi word Jaanvar, his permanently twisted body affects his psyche, his occasional misogynistic attitude results from the permanently bent spine causing him to walk on all fours. This large scale disaster, the corporate inhumanities creates the trauma, both physical as well as mental totally transforms protagonist's personality. His presence is the signifier of consequences of the toxic gas on the common people in general in Khaufpur which clearly resembles Bhopal Gas Tragedy in general. Indra Sinha being one of the writers belonging to the postcolonial era has penned down story of the chemical leakage to highlight its environmental injustice witnessed by the characters in the novel.

Keywords: Environmental Injustice, Environmental Injustice, Postcolonial writers, Corporate Inhumanities.

Indra Sinha, one of the commonwealth writer of British and Indian descent belongs to the postcolonial era. His Booker shortlisted novel *Animal's People* has recalled the worst Industrial homicides happened in 1984 in the city of Bhopal. In one of the multinational company named 'Union Carbide India Limited, the pesticide plant leaked around 27 tons of poisonous Methylisocyanate gas claiming the thousands of lives, creating havoc in the subsequent generations to come. It was in the late 1990s that Greenpeace, upon testing the site of the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, found that toxicity had seeped into the soil and contaminated ground water over the years the plant had been in Bhopal, affecting the lives and health of the people in the vicinity of the plant. Residents were complaining of cattle deaths and damage to crops even

before the disaster, They have an unequal access to ecological benefits like clean air, water and open space. They are disproportionately impacted by environmental issues. Several studies have been conducted and are published on tragedy of Khaufpur is as well as on other sub themes of the Sinha's novel, like, **Smita Sahu's** article on, "An Identity Crisis in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*" reflects the picture of inner conflict of the protagonist in search for his missing identity. Afterwards **Heather Snell's** "Assessing the Limitations of Laughter in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*", focuses on the estimation of happiness of the four-footed protagonist of Sinha's book. Next, **Anthony Carrigan's** "'Justice is on our side?' *Animal's People*, generic hybridity and eco-crime" reflects on the struggled life of the protagonist and other Khaufpuris for justice which was in real happened in Bhopal in Dec.1984. Subsequently, "Animal speak' against Corporate Inhumanities: Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*" published in the **Sodhganga** where **Navleen Multani** focuses on "The worst of the world's corporate homicides, the Bhopal gas tragedy, resonates through the pages of *Animal's People*. The social activists as well as the Environmentalists were fighting for the rights of the survivors of this tragedy which is an evidence of inhumanities of corporate companies. According to the survey conducted by the **Indian Council of Medical Research**, 68 percent to 86 percent of those affected by the gas were from a very depressed socioeconomic class, a large percentage of whom were Muslims and low-caste persons.

Professor Suroopa Mukherjee, characterizes the stated attitude of bureaucrats and doctors in the wealthier, unaffected part of Bhopal, who are the service providers for the victims, as follows: "A large section of this population has become lazy and greedy. We cannot get domestic help in Bhopal because that section of society lives on the dole. NGOs and activists back them. They take to the streets and voice their complaints. Every gas victim in Bhopal is a politician who takes advantage of a corrupt system." Around the world it has been observed that the poor and the powerless that suffer as a result of industrial accidents or environmental contamination, and most of their stories will never be heard. The environmental and contamination issues in Bhopal have been ignored and marginalized by the government. The present paper exhibits the devastating impact of gas leak on the population and environment due to the toxic gas.

Facts about Environmental Disaster :

The autopsies revealed that the human blood seemed to be turned purple red, the lungs turned ash colour. The gas leak caused thousands blinded, breathless and giddy. The psychological trauma caused by the incident lead to depression, anxiety, impotence, loss of appetite, nightmares. Large number of cattle, dogs and cats and birds were killed. Plant life was severely damaged by exposure to the gas. There was widespread defoliation of trees. Later toxicological studies carried out by the Indian Council for Medical Research confirmed the presence of hydrogen cyanide in the tissue samples kept from autopsies carried out at the time of the disaster. Indeed the ICMR has said that the disaster is not due to MIC alone but its pyrolyzed products as well (ICMR Report, 2010, 7). If we consider the factual details of the tragedy, as per the government records, 3,787 people were killed. While 5,58,125 people sustained injuries, 3,900 were permanently injured as declared in an affidavit submitted in 2006. The novel *Animal's People* is set in the fictionalized town Khaufpur resembling Bhopal. ("Khauf" meaning "terror" and "pur" a suffix meaning "city" in Urdu) The story proceeds through the recordings in tapes. Twenty three tapes form the sections in the novel. These tapes talk about the people's sufferings, their world view, their protest against the Kampani's irresponsibility. The chemical fog and poisonous water caused terrible diseases. Khaufpur population is poverty stricken. The novel centers on a young man physically deformed by a large scale chemical spill. The permanent bent spine forces the boy to walk on all fours. He gains the epithet 'Animal'. This disfigured transformation turns him into a strong, often vulgar personality. In many ways, the character presents a case of what critic **Monique Allewaert** terms *Para humanity*. The opening lines of the novel indicate Animal's nonchalant attitude when he says, 'I used to be human once. So I am told. I don't remember it myself, but people who knew me when I was small say I walked on two feet like a human being.' He lives by scavenging like street dogs on the streets of Khaufpur. His jealousies turned him mad and made him shout also on peoples who are walking on two feet instead of four like him. Except Nisha and few others like Ma Franci, Zafar, Somraj, Elli, and Aliya, most of the Khaufpuris mocked at him and compared him with Jara, the female dog. Because of his physical disabilities, girls hardly sympathise with him but never love him. Narrator's painful words made this fact clear, "Because I am an animal, that's the real reason isn't it, that you can never marry me? (Sinha 332)". He loved Nisha but, she shows only her sympathy towards him, which hurts his heart lot. When Nisha refuses his marriage proposal, he decides to commit suicide, "I ask myself do you want to die? comes the reply, yes (Sinha 334)" and

he consumed "thirteen golis" (Sinha 334) of 'datura' means "a highly poisonous plant (Sinha 369)"To his surprise, he Still survives. The identity crisis experienced by Animal, the hero is highlighted by the writer. Other characters equally carry the legacy of this disaster. They experience multiple losses .

The critic Rob Nixon defines the term slow violence as 'a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. They have lost faith in humanity itself making them suspicious about everything and everybody. Elli Barber, an American doctor, who intends to open the free clinic for natives was suspected to be associated with the Kampani,s further gains their confidence. Ma Franci, a Roman Catholic nun from France ,Animal's surrogate mother loses her capacity to speak Hindi or English. She was mentally affected serving the poor in Khaufpur. Aliya a small school girl was a granddaughter of the couple Huriya and Hanif Ali suffers due to the throat infection Somraj, once a famous singer loses the ability to sing. Pyare Bai loses her husband, Huriya Bai loses her daughter .Even the unborn children were not spared. Zafar the professional activist unites all to fight against Kampanis and the politicians. He loses his life in the hunger strike as he refuses to sip a drop of water. Nisha lost her mother on that night. She is a famous singer Somraj's daughter. Almost all characters in the novel seem to have been affected by the gas disaster. The city remains poisonous for decades after the accident with contaminated ecology. The lines of Animal **"No bird sing.No hoppers in the grass. No bee humming. Insects can't survive here. Wonderful poisons the Kampani made ,so good it's impossible to get rid of them, after all these years they are still doing their work."**(29)Animal is the voice of the marginalized people. He becomes the voice of angst against the establishment. The writer talks about the toxic wells ,blindness and deformed babies ,as the aftermath of the gas leakage. So many unborn children were aborted .so the very sight of a fetus in glass jar disturbs Animal His life is forever tied to the event of that night. Thus, he introduces himself growling, "My name is Animal. . . I'm not a fucking human being, I've no wish to be one" (23). He explains to the reader, "This was my mantra, what I told everyone. Never did I mention my yearning to walk upright" (23) . Sinha tells the story of "ousraat"(that night) Media is supposed to rise up to the occasion to address the crisis in Bhopal. But the disaster becomes the means to mint the money by repeatedly selling the