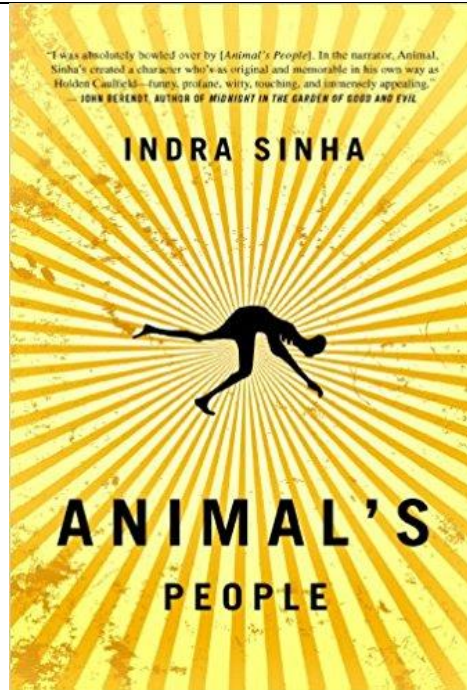


## Toxic Consciousness in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*: An Ecocritical Study

T. Geetha, Ph.D. Scholar & Dr. K. Maheshwari

---



### Abstract

Literary writers, now-a-days, have penned down the destruction of nature and environment in all the genres of literature. The main objectives of the ecocritical writers are to provide awareness towards the end of peaceful nature. They particularly point out the polluted environment that leads to the execution of living beings in future. Indra Sinha is such the ecocritical writer who highlights the Bhopal gas tragedy and inhumanities of corporate companies, in his novel, *Animal's People*. The environmental injustice that took place in the novel, clearly resembles the Bhopal Gas Tragedy that happened in 1984. The present study exhibits the consciousness of the toxic gas and its consequences to the innocent people in the novel.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Toxic Consciousness, Environmental Injustice, Bhopal gas tragedy and Corporate Inhumanities.

**Indra Sinha**

Indra Sinha, born in 1950, is the writer of English and Indian descent. His novel *Animal People* was published in 2009 that commemorated 25 years of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy. It recalled the world's worst industrial disaster that took place in Indian city of Bhopal. On a December night in 1984, the 'Union Carbide India Limited' (UCIL), the part of US based multinational company, pesticide plant in Bhopal leaked around 27 tons of poisonous Methyl isocyanate gas, instantly killed thousands of people. Since then, the disaster had claimed about 15000 lives, injured around 6 lakhs and continued to wreak havoc in the subsequent generations of victims. After that incident the common people as well as various international activists, continue to fight for their rights for their safety environment. As Smita Sahu in her article "The Emergence of Environmental Justice in Literature", asserts, "The novel discusses the devastating impact of gas leak from a chemical factory on, not just the people, but also on the ecology." (549). Sinha, as an ecocritical writer, has the concern towards the environment and gives an awareness of the destruction of environment because of the toxic gas. The aim of this study is to explore the consciousness of the toxic gas in the novel, *Animal's People*.



Indra Sinha

Courtesy: <http://www.simonandschuster.co.uk/authors/Indra-Sinha/46432418>

### **Bhopal Gas Tragedy**

*India Today* magazine had published an article on 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec 2017 on the Bhopal gas tragedy. They presented clear details of that incident. On Dec 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1984, the gas leaked from the factory of Union Carbide in Madhya Pradesh, Capital Bhopal, killed thousands of people directly. As per government records, the Bhopal gas tragedy killed 3,787 people. (*India Today*) In an affidavit, submitted in 2006, the government said that the Bhopal gas leak caused 5,58,125 injuries, included approximately 3,900 permanent injuries.

### ***Animal's People***

---

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 18:5 May 2018

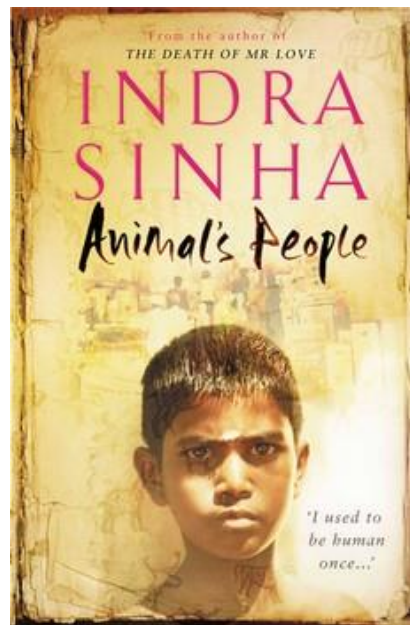
T. Geetha, Ph.D. Scholar & Dr. K. Maheshwari

Toxic Consciousness in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*: An Ecocritical Study

111

*Animal's People* took place in the fictional town Khaufpur. It was the novel about a young nineteen years old boy named Animal. As long as Animal remembered, he walked on fours, because his spine had been twisted due to the terrible gas leakage incident caused by the chemicals in Kampani's factory. Priya Naik says, in the review of the novel, "In *Animal's People* the Union Carbide is Kampani, Bhopal is Khaufpur and Anderson, the man who come to represent the evils of the Union Carbide is Peterson".

The chemical leakage incident resembled the incident of Bhopal disaster. Lesley Mason, in the review, denotes, "The place you should seek is not Khaufpur. It is Bhopal. Remember Bhopal? If you do, then I urge you to read this book to ignite your anger and your compassion anew. If you do not, then I urge you to read that you might learn or reconsider or, at the very least, remember."



Courtesy: <http://www.simonandschuster.co.uk/books/Animals-People/Indra-Sinha/9781416526278>

The book is written in Animal's point of view. The whole story was the recordings in tapes. Indra Sinha presented twenty-three tapes as the sections in the novel. The tapes followed how Animal was treated by the people, his thoughts, the people's sufferings, their struggle towards justice and the Kampani's irresponsibility.

The tragic night, that the whole story was biased on, caused death to many of the town people. The people who survived were suffered with terrible diseases due to that chemical fog and the poisoning of water. Khaufpur had full of poor people and they couldn't have money for their treatment. Their angriness towards the Kampani made to suspect everything and everybody. Elli Barber, an American doctor, came to Khaufpur to start a free clinic in Khaufpur to help the people. The people at first suspected Elli that she had contact with the Kampani. But later, they realized that Elli was not Kampani's person and the people visited her free clinic.

---

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 18:5 May 2018

T. Geetha, Ph.D. Scholar & Dr. K. Maheshwari

Toxic Consciousness in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*: An Ecocritical Study

112

## **Zafar**

A man named Zafar was the professional activist who fought against the Kampani. He had a group that he worked with. The group consisted of Farouq, Zafar's right-hand man, Somraj, a former professional Singer, and Nisha, Somraj's daughter, later married to Zafar. Animal was also brought into Zafar's gang and was used as a spy. They struggled for getting justice. They fought against the Kampani and the politicians who supported the Kampani. Elli also joined with them as she was not the person from Kampani. Zafar went on hunger strike before the hearing of the court case. Zafar died in the hunger strike. When Zafar was burning up because of his hunger strike, Animal went up to him. Animal could not tolerate Zafar, the admirable man who was about to die. Zafar's death almost drove him crazy. Tania, in her article on *Animal's People* highlighted the sacrifice of Zafar as, "Zafar is an amazing man in that he holds on to his beliefs and principles even when he is on the brink of death, burning up from within. Even at this point he refuses to sip a drop of water." Zafar's death made the court case to win by the Kampani. The people of Khaufpur were left to deal with their terrible diseases without hope of getting better.

## **Place of Death and Sickness**

Khaufpur was a place of death and sickness. Animal, a nineteen years old boy who lost his family and his spine incurably twisted that makes him to walk on four legs since from that incident. Not only Animal, so many Khaufpuris have lost their families and their health has been irreparably damaged for life from that night. The toxic gas that leaked from the factory twisted the life of many people in Khaufpur. Almost all the residents of Khaufpur had been affected by the gas disaster. Thousands of people died, and their health had been disturbed.

Victims like Pyare Bai lost her husband, Pandit Somraj lost his family and his voice, Huriya Bi lost her daughter and was left with mutilated granddaughter. The disaster had not even spared the unborn, like the aborted fetus that Animal named as "Kha-in-the-jar" (8) which abided the witness for the damage done by the poisonous gas. Living in a city, teeming with tales of tragedy, Animal narrated several other stories of victimhood. Khaufpur remained poisoned for decades after that accident and the plight of its people continues to contaminate the ecology of the town. The novel replicated the bleak picture of modern Bhopal, where toxic chemicals still lay exposed. The novel also revealed the environmental degradation issues in the urban area that represented a distinct rhetoric of environmentalism.

## **Animal Records**

The whole novel was the recorded events of Animal to an unnamed journalist (jarnaliss). At first Animal refused to recite the incident and happening. Because he knew no justice would come whatever happened. After convincing, he accepted to narrate the incidents. These lines by Animal, illustrated how dangerous the poison was. "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're still doing their work." (29) Animal's narration illuminated the corporate inhumanities, the struggle of the victim for justice, poisonous gas, polluted place and so on. Indra Sinha used 'Animal' as the voice of the poor and helpless people who were all waiting for the justice. The novel was a message to the readers by the

author. Indra Sinha, through the reports of Animal to the unnamed journalist, conveys to us the incidents and all the suffering. “So, from this moment I am no longer speaking to my friend the kakadu jarnaliss, name’s Phuoc, I am talking to the eyes that are reading these words, Now I am talking to you”. (12)

### **Physical Appearance of Animal Does Make the Difference**

The very first line of the Animal indicated the physical structure of Animal which had ruined because of that poisonous gas. Animal narrated the incidents to the journalist with the starting point as, “I used to be human once. So, I’m told. I don’t remember it myself, but people who knew me when I was small say I walked on two feet just like human being”. (1) Animal didn’t remember when he walked on two legs. The toxic gas twisted his spine and still he was walking on four legs. Animal said that some people around the world pitied on their stories and the cruel incident. But there would be no use of it. In the interview, “Unfashionable truths”, of Animal, by Nabanna Mistri, Animal is asked what made him feel that his narrative about Khaufpur’s tragedy would make a difference. He replied, “Tragedy is a useless word pinned to the arse of what can’t be told or thought or felt. For years I narrated stories of that night, I spoke till my tongue ached and my teeth were ground smooth by the passage of words. Nothing changed. Now I have given up talking of great calamities my story is not about tragedy. It is about small people who live their lives in the shadow of giant words.” He insisted that the journalists were like vultures. Somewhere a bad thing happens they would come and enquire. To Khaufpur, the journalist had drawn ‘by the smell of blood’, said Animal, ‘that night, always that fucking night’ (5) would never change anymore.

### **Behaviour of Journalists and Others from Outside**

Animal was doubly bent with bitterness. He gave an open and true narration of the terrible experiences of the Khaufpuris to the journalist. In the book review of *Animal’s People*, Josh and Lucie said that, “Animal, symbol of the victims of the disaster, is no hapless victim, however. Foul-mouthed, mischievous and frequently distracted by thoughts of sex, Sinha has created an amazing mouthpiece for this tale. Animal’s often scathing view of the humans around him is allowed to also carry a great love and passion for the people of Khaufpur.” Animal knew that, “People see the outside, but inside where the real thing happens, no one looks in there, may be, they don’t dare.” (11) He was aware that the books which had been written earlier about the victims could not change anything much less than the lives of Khaufpuris. (3-5) So at first Animal didn’t show any interest. He believed nothing could change forever regarding the justice. But at last he accepted to record his narration. Animal narrated the incident of the helpless poor people who had been the victim of that incident. People were grappling with the aftermath of the leakage-toxic wells, malformed babies, breathing problems and blindness even after twenty years of tragedy. He spoke against the inhumanities of the Kampani because it was also responsible for his own deformity, for the Ma’s madness, for Hanif’s blindness, for Aliya’s fever, for Somraj’s sadness and above all for the misery of the unborn Kha-in-the-jar.

Animal spoke about “Kha-in-the-jar” (8) often which disturbed his thoughts. It was a fetus in a glass jar. The sight of the little creature, also a victim of the leakage, brought him the realization that be on fours with a bent back is better than the “unborn” (237) victims of the

Kampani's poison. Whenever he saw the foetus in any medical places, Animal could not tolerate. He says that the unborn children paid the highest price for the Kampani because those little creatures not even know what happened to them. Because of that poisonous gas, so many unborn children had been aborted. He said, in Khaufpur, they might be called a friend as Kha, so that those unborn were his friends. (59)

### **Victims**

Many characters shown in the novel were the victims of that terrible incident. Animal, who was the narrative person, had listed out their plights and sufferings. Animal, at first, was a normal child, slowly the toxic affects him. When he was six, the pain began with burning sense in his neck and his shoulder. He could not lift his head. He had gone with some medical treatment. But everything went in vain. "Further, Further, forward I was bent" (15). He lived on the ridicules of other people due to his differently abled structure. That led to poverty. He was begging with his pet dog Jara. Sometimes he had to sell his blood to get food. (25) These happenings made Animal to be angry with Kampani. He was fully frustrated about the injustice given to Khaufpur.

Animal had no fixed abode or traceable parents. Roaming in search of food brought him to meet Nisha who would take him out of a life of misery. Her father Somraj also showed love and care towards Animal. Nisha called him "a true human being" (364) She gave shelter to Animal at her father's home. Nisha showed a parental concern for Animal throughout the novel. She cared for Animal a lot. She treated Animal as a child and helped him in learning discipline. Later, Animal worked with Zafar, whom fight against the Kampani and Animal gained respect from others.

### **Nisha and Other Family Members and Friends**

Nisha lost her mother and her brother on that night. She lived along with her father Somraj. Nisha supported her father and her husband Zafar to fight against the Kampani. But she affected a lot mentally that she knew that they would not get justice forever from that Kampani. She never knew her mother and brother. She said that the Kampani had stolen them and made her alone with her father Somraj. Somraj Tryambak Punekar was an extraordinary singer until that night. His name was known throughout India. He had got many awards and honours for singing. People called him "Aawaaz-e-Khaufpur, the voice of Khaufpur". (33) Somraj also the victim of that incident that he lost his wife and baby son. Moreover, he got lung disease which he couldn't sing properly. Nisha said that her father's breath was also stolen. ". . . she says that when the Kampani stole away her father's breath it also stole his life, because breath is the life of a singer." (33) Later Somraj became solemn and a private man. Even he started music class, he got no pleasure, and nobody saw him smiling. "Somraj Pandit rarely laughs. Nor will he sing aloud. Out of his suffering he makes songs that he alone can hear". (155)

### **Ma Franci, Nuns and Children**

Ma Franci, a nun came from France more than forty years ago to spread the word about Isamiyan and did some service to poor people in Khaufpur. When she came there, she knew several languages. But after that disaster she forgot all the languages she had known except

French, her native. She was affected mentally a lot and she had some madness. The orphanage, which she was a part, was badly hit by that venomous gas. Many of the children and nuns died. Those who survived were sick. “The orphanage was run by *les religieuses francaises*, it was in Jyothinagar near the factory and on that night, it was badly hit. Many of the children died, nuns too.” (37) Ma was called back by the authority to return to France. But she refused to go and stay there in India to serve poor people. She was old and reached eighty. She always had cared for Animal. Animal understood her madness due to that poisonous gas and helped her in return. She insisted Animal about the feeble condition of the earth and gave philosophical instruction to Animal about the horrible world. Later she died due to the “Chemical Bomb” (337) in the fight that occurred when hunger strike was on.

### **Aliya**

Aliya was a small school girl. She was also one of the victims of that incident. She was fond of Animal. She was a granddaughter of the couple Huriya and Hanif Ali. When Elli, American doctor who opened a free clinic for Khaufpuris, asked Huriya regarding her granddaughter’s health, she replied that Aliya had been ill for almost a year with a cough and fever. Elli found that she had an infection on her throat due to poisonous gas. Elli asked Aliya how long had she been coughing. Aliya replied “forever”. (181) Later, she became serious with her strange face even after the heavy treatment, she could not be saved, and Aliya was dead.

### **Pyare Bai**

Pyare Bai, a poor woman, began the story of her own to Zafar and Nisha. She had been married to Aftaab, he had worked in the Kampani’s factory and told about that dangerous chemical in that factory. “If by chance you got any on your hand, Aftaab said, the skin would blister.” (84) On that night, Aftaab was badly affected and many were damaged by the poisons. As the days passed, his condition grew worse. “He was too breathless to be able to do physical work”. (84) With that illness, they could not afford money for their family. Not only their story, there were many innocent people had their pathetic story like that. Animal said, “All of us worked every day with people with awful tales to tell.” (85)

### **Kampani Refuses to Help Hurting People**

Elli described the people’s bad health condition to her ex-husband Mr. Frank. He was a lawyer who worked for the Kampani. She said about the people she had met in Khaufpur, of Hanif Ali, left behind for twenty years by the poisonous gas. Once Elli watched a woman with a child poured her milk onto the ground. Elli narrated the incident to him. She asked the reason behind that. The woman answered, “I won’t feed my kid poison. . . Our wells are full of poison. It’s in the soil, water, in our blood. It’s in our milk. Everything here is poisoned. If you stay here long enough, you will be too.” (107) She added the horrifying thing she saw every day and told how the Kampani refused the help for this hurting people. The gas affected the eyes, lungs, even uterus of the people. Some girls frequently had their menstrual problems due to that toxic gas. Elli described about the fetuses (babies) and she pleaded to her husband to get the Kampani at least to clean the factory.

“You can try”, she says. At least get the Kampani to clean the factory. Its poison are in the wells, they’re in people’s blood, they’re in mother’s milk. Frank, if you

came to my clinic, I could show you. Specimens, I mean. Foetuses, habits that never made it, you wouldn't want to see such things, even in your nightmare” (322)

### **Emphasis on the Suffering of the People**

Indra Sinha emphasized the suffering of the people and the description of that night all through the novel. He particularly pointed out the toxic consciousness to the readers. People were so pathetic and in depressed condition. People lost their loved ones and met poverty because of that incident. For more than twenty years, thousands of people's health had been ruined by that poison and the people waited for relief. Thus, Indra Sinha presented the consequences of toxic gas and the plights of people in the novel.

---

### **Works Cited**

- Josh and Lucie. <http://JoshandLucieOverlandAdventure.wordpress.com>. “Review: Animal's People by Indra Sinha.” 2011. Web.
- Mahajan, Karan. *Review: 'Animal's People' Toxically Twisted*. 2008. Web.
- Mason, Lesley. [www.thebookbag.co.uk](http://www.thebookbag.co.uk). “Review: Animal's People.” 2018. Web.
- Mistri, Nabanna. [www.khaufpur.com](http://www.khaufpur.com). “Unfashionable Truths”. Web.
- Naik, Priya. *Review: Animal's People*. 2008. Web.
- Parry, C. *Other Animals in Twenty-first Century Fiction*. “Animal's People: Animal, Animality, Animalisation”. 2017. Print.
- Prakash, K. Dutta. *India Today*. “Bhopal Gas Tragedy: What had happened this day 33 years ago that killed thousands?”. 2017. Web.
- Sahu, Smita. *The Criterion*. “The Emergence of Environmental Justice in Literature”. 5(2), 2014. Web.
- Sinha, Indra. *Animal's People*. Britain: Simon & Schuster. 2007. Print.

---

T. Geetha, Ph.D. Scholar  
[gitatenglish@gmail.com](mailto:gitatenglish@gmail.com)

Dr. K. Maheshwari, Associate Professor (Retired)  
[krishnan.maheswari88@gmail.com](mailto:krishnan.maheswari88@gmail.com)

Department of English  
Sri GVG Visalakshi College for Women, Udumalpet, Tamilnadu, India

---

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 18:5 May 2018

T. Geetha, Ph.D. Scholar & Dr. K. Maheshwari

Toxic Consciousness in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*: An Ecocritical Study