



## NARRATING ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHE: POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM IN INDRA SINHA'S *ANIMAL'S PEOPLE*

*Belismita Gogoi*

*Ph.D Research Scholar, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Nagaon, Assam,  
India*

### Abstract

*In this paper, Animal's People (2007) by Indra Sinha has been discussed in terms of being a strong literary reaction against environmental disaster in the context of postcolonial ecocriticism. The novel, in fictionalizing the Bhopal Gas Disaster, turns the historical industrial tragedy into an ethical story of environmental witnessing, resistance and survival. The paper maintains that Sinha places environmental degradation in the historical context of colonialism and the current nature of neo-colonial capitalism that reveals how the power of multinationals corporations takes advantage of postcolonial spaces at the expense of making the marginalized population environmentally dispensable. The novel breaks down the human and nonhuman, the body and environment, and thus the anthropocentric and Eurocentric ways of thinking ecology, through the hybrid, posthuman identity of the animal main character. The article looks at the way oral narration, embodiment trauma, and subaltern testimony emerge as counter-discourses to legal, corporate, and humanitarian discourses that oppress the victims of ecological violence. Animal The People discloses through foregrounding disability, toxicity and community opposition that ecology cannot be divorced of social justice, political responsibility as well as historical memory. Finally, this paper argues that this novel, by Sinha, is an example of a larger ethical project of postcolonial ecocriticism, which is to reconstruct environmental crises not only as natural or technology failures, but as highly political effects of imperial histories, global capitalism, and unequal distributions of ecological disasters.*

### Keywords

*Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Environmental Justice, Subaltern Testimony, Neo-Colonial Capitalism, Posthumanism, etc.*

### Full Article

#### **Introduction:**

The relationship with nature has been reflected in literature since ancient times, where humanity has been changing its attitude towards the world. With the increasing environmental crises around the world, the literary narratives have become more and more a venue of negotiating ecological awareness and environmental moral responsibility. The intersection of ecological literature and ecology, now known as ecocriticism by critics, has provided a platform of dialogue between narrative and sustainability, representation and resistance. By creative recreations of environmental disasters, authors can not only describe the material devastation of the environment, but the moral and psychological damages of disasters as well. The one example of this intersection is the fictionalization of the Bhopal Gas Disaster of 1984 one of the most tragic industrial tragedies of all times by Indra Sinha in her *Animal's People* (2007). The ecological event in the novel is turned into a very human narrative that shows that environmental degradation cannot be discussed outside the frameworks of political suppression, corporate exploitation, and



postcolonial inequality. By so doing, Sinha puts the ecological crisis in the historical chain of colonial rule and capitalist modernity where nature turns out the unspoken victim of the industrial development (Singh and Singh, 2024).

In addition, *People of Animal* also revisits the concept of environmental disaster in a very postcolonial way, whereby the disaster fallout becomes a place of narrative defiance. The inhabitants of Khaufpur, the imaginary analog of Bhopal created by Sinha, are the embodiment of the ecological and cultural traumas of imperial modernity. Their experience of suffering as mediated by the voice of the protagonist, Animal, reveals how the poor, the disabled and the colonized are marginalized by environmental violence. Oral storytelling, fragmented memory and bodily trauma in the novel crosses the human and nonhuman boundary, and the anthropocentric conceptions of agency and identity. Animal, therefore, is not a simple tragedy but a sort of environmental testimony that criticizes the entire global capitalism and restores the voices covered by industrial strength (Rahman, 2021).

### **Origins and Development of Postcolonial Ecocriticism:**

Postcolonial ecocriticism is a product of Western environmental thinking being ignored by the Global South. Conventional ecocriticism tended to romanticize pure nature and Eurocentric concepts of conservation, without giving due attention to environmental experience of colonized countries. In its turn, postcolonial theory translated environmental justice with decolonial criticism, highlighting the fact that the exploitation of the environment cannot be conditional without imperial relationship of domination. Early ecological critic humans such as Ramachandra Guha and Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee reinvented ecology as a space of political and social struggle, attending to the ways postcolonial writing reclaims the suppressed ecological histories. *Animal's People* by Indra Sinha is one of the examples of such synthesis, which turns an industrial catastrophe into an ecological struggle and survival as one (Rahman, 2021).

### **Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Scope and Critical Perspectives:**

Postcolonial ecocriticism is an essential interdisciplinary approach that fills the gap between environmental humanities and postcolonial theory, discussing the connection between imperialism and environmental degradation. It condemns the colonialist impulse to exploit the natural resources and oppress the indigenous people, showing the environment as a victim and a witness of the empire in the past. This discussion is wider than the traditional ecocriticism that tended to concentrate on the Euro-American scenery and romanticized the nature writing. Rather, postcolonial ecocriticism reveals the fact that the ecological crisis has many roots in the histories of conquest, racial superiority, and financial exploitation. It attempts to reinvent global environmentalism through the eyes that recognize the unfair allocation of ecological injustices. Here, *Animal's People* by Indra Sinha plays a role of a paradigm of postcolonial ecological thinking- it explores the Bhopal Gas Disaster not just as an industrial tragedy but as an effect of the continued process of global capitalism colonizing the postcolonial spaces (Rahman, 2021).

Postcolonial ecocriticism highlights the need to establish justice and inclusivity in environmental politics by putting the voice of ecological trauma victims into a prominent position, especially the subaltern survivors of ecological trauma. It recovers silenced histories through acknowledging indigenous ecological experiences, collective strength, and environmental hybrid identities. The discipline also emphasizes the way literature can be used as the means of ecological activism, to combat the same systemic injustices that are perpetrated by colonial and neocolonial systems. *Animal's People* exaggerate this correlation between language, power, and survival and make ecology an anthology of pain and survival. By speaking of the hybrid identity of the protagonist, the animal, who is simultaneously a human and an animal, the novel challenges



anthropocentric hierarchies and extends the ecological thinking into posthuman landscapes. In this way, it fits into the broad parameters of postcolonial ecocriticism: a movement that makes literary analysis an ethical response to the politics of life and survival, the planetary susceptibility on an international scale (Singh and Singh, 2024).

### **Nature, Power, and Colonial Histories:**

Nature has been coupled with power structures long term serving as a source of influence and a point of conflict over colonial dominance. Colonial powers took advantage of landscape by dominating it through extraction of minerals, clearing of forests and the implementation of alien agricultural economies to destabilize the native ecologies. Postcolonial ecocriticism reveals the persistence of these histories of extraction in the wake of neocolonial capitalism that makes postcolonial environments a matter of persistent vulnerability. In the *Animal's People* by Sinha, the unfriendly environment of Khaufpur is used as a symbolism of the persistence of colonial exploitation in the contemporary industrial modes. The environmental offenses of the Kampani indicate the way global corporations continue to take over the imperial power of land and labor by means of polluting and making money (Spencer, 2010).

In this context, the story by Sinha is not only a description of an environmental catastrophe but a critique of environmental imperialism that still exists in the postcolonial present (Kosar et al., 2021).

### **Historical Context: The Bhopal Gas Disaster and Its Aftermath:**

The Bhopal Gas Disaster of December 1984 is among the most serious industrial disasters which occurred in history and resulted in thousands of deaths and the irreversible change of the lives of those who survived because of the leak of methyl isocyanate gas with toxic qualities in the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India. The disaster, in addition to its direct human cost, revealed profound inequalities in world capitalism that, through the loopholes that global companies can use to evade unfriendly environmental laws in developing countries, are prone to seek exploitation. As Bartosch (2012) puts it, such disasters leave behind the so-called sacrifice zones where human life and nature can be sacrificed to neo-colonial economic demands. The long-term heritage of sickness, corporate impunity, and governmental negligence is not only a manifestation of an environmental crisis but also the manifestation of a terrible moral and political drawback of industrial modernity (Alam, 2023).

*Animal*, which was written by Indra Sinha, is a powerful re-evaluation of the events that followed this tragedy through the mind of Animal, a survivor whose extreme deformity reflects the physical effects of toxic exposure. The novel, in addition to other characters, like Ma Franci, Somraj, and Shambhu, highlights the prevalence of suffering among the people of Khaufpur, which is a fictional version of Bhopal. By creating a historical trauma into resistance, Sinha enables the speech of those who are produced by legal and humanitarian discourses. The novel uses the testimonial narration of Animal to reveal the dehumanizing effect of toxic capitalism and make storytelling an ecological memory and moral response form (İpekci, 2017; Carrigan, 2012).

### **Fictionalizing the Bhopal Tragedy in *Animal's People*:**

*Animal's People* by Sinha turns the Bhopal Gas Disaster into a postcolonial allegory of ecological oppression and human perseverance. The fictional city of Khaufpur serves as a reflection of the city of Bhopal and its tainted soil, its sick bodies, and its muted victims as a figurative representation of the exploitation at the systemic level. The novel repositions agency into the hands of people that are oppressed by both the discourse of industrial modernity and the discourse of humanitarianism through the voice of Animal. His tape-recorded confessions are stepping the lines between fiction and documentary, personal suffering being turned into a common memory.





The oral narration, rather than the written testimony, is a foregrounding of the subaltern mode of storytelling, which places lived experience in greater emphasis than institutional stories. In this manner, Sinha is opposed to Western modes of victimhood, but it depicts the survivors as multifaceted agents, who survive in the face of environmental and social decay (Bartosch, 2012).

### **Environmental and Human Consequences of Industrial Negligence:**

The Bhopal Gas Disaster is an example of ecological and human impact of unregulated industrialization. The situation was made to create an environment of a long-term death and disease as the toxic gases poisoned not only human lungs but the soil, air, and water. The crisis revealed how profit without control by the corporate world turns nature into a murder weapon against the weak. *Animal's People* embodies such realities through dramatizing the physical and mental corrosion of the residents of Khaufpur, the effects of which are evident on their bodies as a result of environmental injustice. Sinha underlines this change by comparing the usual, happy life of Animal before the tragedy with that after the disaster in which he is changed into an animal not just in his posture but also in his temper. Animal clearly remembers how the chemicals found their way into his body, and he talks about unbearable pain, constant coughing, frothing, strong burning pains on his neck and shoulders, and frequent fevers, explaining how the chemicals went as deep into his body as possible and redefined his life.

I was six when the pain begins.... I could not raise my head, so unpleasant it was. I just couldn't lift it. My agony was tightened and pulled down by my neck. I had to stare at my feet as the Devil was sitting me on the back of and fanning me with the tongs of red-hot. The burning in the muscles became a fever, the fevers getting bad I was brought to the hospital, the nurse gave me injection [ [...]]. then my back began to twist. Nothing could be done (Sinha, 2007)

The deformity, stench, and contamination in the story are depicted in visceral imagery to blur the boundaries between human misery and ecological ruin (İpekçi, 2017). The description of the negligence of industry as presented by Sinha is not only morally outrageous but also reflects on the neocolonial institutions which enable multinational corporations to get off with the hook. The continued pollution of Khaufpur is a metaphor of the persistence of colonial exploitation in the contemporary world where environmental degradation is the new face of imperialism (Carrigan, 2012).

### **Embodied Suffering: Disability, Toxicity, and Trauma:**

*Animal's People* by Sinha prefigures the human body as a place of intersection of environmental and political violence. The physical effects that industrial toxicity has on the main character can be seen in the deformed spine of the protagonist, which forced him to become a crawling creature. This is an actual rather than a metaphorical disability marked in by chemical pollution and corporate desensitization. The story reveals the process of industrial pollution that turns the body into an ecological text instantiating the traces of injustice in a system. The description of Sinha is consistent with the interpretations of postcolonial ecocriticism of the body as a witness and archive, showing how the body is made by toxic spaces (Misra, 2024).

Simultaneously, the novel also retrieves disability as a place of strength instead of being victimized. The physical difference of Animal turns into a rebellion against social segregation and capitalistic exploitation. His suffering embodied in himself expresses an ecological awareness beyond the traditional form of humanism. The toxic body, which was initially treated as the symbol of oppression, becomes the symbol of survival and witness, coming out of the dominant discourses of purity and wellness. In this regard, the novel by Sinha is a reorganization of trauma as political consciousness as corporeal experience is related to collective ecological opposition (Brici, 2024) (Kosar et al., 2021).



### **Animal's Voice and the Politics of Marginality:**

Indra Sinha develops the voice of Animal in *Animal* in the people of the earth as a rebellion against the marginalization that surrounds him politically, linguistically and socially. Animal is a deformed baby born as a result of the poisonous heritage of the industrial disaster, and recounts the tale of the poisoned people of Khaufpur in a way that obscures the line of distinction between the human and the nonhuman. The physical and psychological effects of environmental cruelty are represented by his deformed form and rebellious tone. In making a narrator, ostracized by society as subhuman the focus of the narrative, Sinha is subverting the colonial and capitalist structures of who is worth sympathy and being talked to. The voice of animals restores power to unheard poor and makes personal misery a societal protest. He is crude, poignant, and rebellious in his narration all at the same time- a statement that can only be made by the fringes of the truth. Due to this voice, Sinha criticizes the discriminative nature of global humanitarianism, showing the fact that the subaltern subject has to break the silence and speak using disobedience, humour, and bodily crudeness (Bartosch, 2012).

### **Posthuman Identity and Ecological Consciousness:**

The national ecocritic *Animal's People* by Indra Sinha is a solid argument in the posthuman turn of modern ecocriticism in breaking down the boundaries between the human, the animal and the environment under the severe force of industrial modernity. Posthumanism challenges the Enlightenment image of the autonomous, rational human being, by being interdependent, vulnerable and hybrid. It is through this toxicity that the protagonist exposes him to that these theoretical questions are literally and physically brought to life in the Sinha narrative in the person of the deformed animal that has lost its chance at a normal life. This is because by being made to walk on all fours, Animal finds himself in a transitional role of both human and animal, and becomes the undermining of the human exceptionalism of a chemical-damaged world. His crippled body is the living record of the industrial violence demonstrating that afterhuman condition is not the abstract postulate of philosophy but the experience determined by the unfairness of the environment and social marginalization. Through his profane, piercing voice that Sinha uses, we learn the idea of how industrial capitalism demeans human and nonhuman life and turns it into a disposable substance, which transforms the meaning of existence with the polluted ecosystems (Zigo & Tkalec, 2019).

The novel does not only confine this picture of posthumanity to suffering of only one individual but extends it to destruction of ecology in a bigger scale. Khaufpur setting is shown as oddly silent with no fliers singing and the recurrence of dead peacocks, goats and herons around the toxic waste sites of the Kampani (Sinha, 2007). The scenes underline the idea that industrial toxins are invincible, and human and environmental misery cannot be separated. Ecological awareness among the Animal people is therefore achieved through an ecological insight concerning the general vulnerability where the fate of the human bodies is bound to the fate of the animals, the land and the water. By dramatizing this interrelated precarity, Sinha reinvents ecological ethics in a posthuman manner that would put relationality over hierarchy and coexistence over domination (Johnston, 2016).

### **Corporate Power, Neo-Colonialism, and Environmental Exploitation:**

In the people of *Animal*, the domination of corporations is the modern-day continuation of colonial exploitation that uncovers the fact that the neo-colonial capitalism is the cause of environmental and social inequality in the postcolonial territories. The toxic disaster in Khaufpur is embodied by the multinational Kampani that drains resources and labor in the guise of development and escapes the responsibility of its actions. Sinha reveals such an imbalance by



portraying the industrial laxity of the Kampani, dumping of toxic waste, and pollution of the land and water, which subject the local people to a life of perpetual suffering. With the support of the government and its legal dragging, corporate impunity emphasizes the moral subversion of the globalization process and the way of production where the postcolonial populations are turned into waste in the world economies (Ipekci, 2023).

Through turning the corporate discourse of development into a warning story of environmental destruction, Sinha re-categorizes industrial modernity as a new kind of colonization that demoralizes life and land. The continued contamination of Khaufpur and the lack of justice to its people reverberates the extractive logics of colonialism, which proves how imperial hierarchies are perpetuated in global capitalism. *Animal People* makes a statement about resistance to these systems of domination through the years of struggle of the survivors to compensate and restore the environment. The tragedy of the people of Khaufpur turns into a compelling case of the ethical bankruptcy of transnational capitalism, redefining ecological disaster as a political question of a global character due to the dependence on the economy, exploitation of nature, and neo-colonial control (Carrigan, 2012; Singh and Singh, 2024).

### **Resistance, Activism, and Ethical Responsibility:**

In the *Animal People*, resistance is a survival mechanism, as well as a moral reaction to the ecological unfairness. Sinha does not support the descriptions of people of Khaufpur as victims who were forced to remain quiet, but he shows them as active subjects who face corporate exploitation and government negligence. Their quest to receive justice, which took the form of protest, litigation and simple survival, is, in a way, a kind of grassroots environmentalism based on lived experience, as opposed to institutional authority. This opposition is in line with the postcolonial ecocriticism that focuses on the subaltern agency and the local knowledge because marginalized communities redefine power through expressing their ecological plight. Such characters as Zafar and Nisha can be seen as an example of collective action as an ethical reaction to structural violence and how personal trauma is turned into solidarity between people. By putting these voices to the centre, the novel has a problem with Western humanitarian discourses that objectify the Global South and demand the oppressed be heard (Carrigan, 2012).

### **Conclusion:**

Through the prism of postcolonial ecocriticism, *Animal's People* by Indra Sinha is a very ethical book which reinforces the image of environmental disaster and the interpretation of its essence. Through fictionalizing the Bhopal Gas Disaster, Sinha transcends through documentary realism to reveal the underlying political, historical, and ecological context that gives rise to such tragedies. In the novel, the destruction of the environment is not a singular and industrial failure, but its extension into the colonial and neo colonial exploitation that pervades world capitalism. By the poisonous environment of Khaufpur and the suffering of the people that is embodied by it, Sinha illustrates how ecological exploitation is not evenly shared, but instead spread unevenly that touches upon marginalized, disabled, and postcolonial populations. The hybrid, posthuman identity of *Animal* challenges the anthropocentric hierarchies and prefigures the entanglement of the human bodies, nonhuman life and polluted environments and locates ecology as something that cannot exist outside the framework of social justice, memory and resistance.

In the more general context of its implications, the *Animal*, in its turn, emphasizes the ability of literature to serve as a witness to the ecology and as a moral act. Subaltern voice, oral narrative and bodily trauma in the novel disrupts the prevalent legal, humanitarian and corporate narratives of survivorship that deny the voice of the survivors and avoid responsibility. Focusing on grassroots opposition and community solidarity, Sinha redefines environmental justice as an





ethical duty that goes beyond national borders, species, and human exceptionalism. This paper confirms that postcolonial ecocriticism is an important model in interpreting the ecological crises of the present day as historically constructed and politically perpetuated. In conclusion, *Animal and People* demands the renewal of ecological ethics based on compassion, responsibility, and collective vulnerability that helps the reader to remember that the ecological disaster cannot be addressed without the interdependence of imaginative forces of empire, capitalism and environmental violence in the modern world.

### References

- Alam, M. M. (2023). Ecological Rifts as Disaster in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*. *South Asian Review*, 44(1), 18-27.
- Bartosch, R. (2012). The Postcolonial Picaro in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*—Becoming Posthuman through Animal's Eyes. *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*, 3(1).
- BRICI, A. (2024). Postcolonial Transcorporealities in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007). *Philobiblon: Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities*, 29(2).
- Carrigan, A. (2012). "Justice is on our side"? *Animal's People*, generic hybridity, and eco-crime. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 47(2), 159-174.
- İPEKÇİ, Y. (2017). Ecological Otherness of the Human and Non-Human Beings in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*. *International Journal of Language Academy*, 5(6).
- Johnston, J. O. (2016). "A Nother World" in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 62(2), 119-144.
- Kosar, T., Yaqoob, H., & Mohiuddin, G. (2021). Representation of Environmental Crime and Struggle for Eco-Justice in *Animal's People* by Sinha: An Ecocritical Analysis. *Inception-Journal of Languages & Literature*, 1(2), 55-66.
- Misra, M. (2024). Paired with the impaired: disability, disaster and the role of the nation in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*. *Postcolonial Studies*, 27(1), 99-114.
- Rahman, S. (2021). The Environment of South Asia: Beyond Postcolonial Ecocriticism. *South Asian Review*, 42(4), 317-323.
- Riaz, S., Noreen, S., & Mahmood, R. (2023). Ecocritical Responsiveness and Diasporic Imagination: An Eco-Colonial Representation in Diasporic Writings. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 31(1).
- Saha, T. (2024). Ecocritical analysis of the environmental crisis and colonialism in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* and *The Hungry Tide* (Doctoral dissertation, BRAC University).
- Singh, J., & Singh, S. (2024). Ecological imperialism and indigenous resistance: A postcolonial ecocritical analysis of selected Indian English novels. *South Eastern European Journal of Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.70135/seejph.vi.1497>
- Sinha, I. (2007). *Animal's People*. New York, Simon & Schuster. 1<sup>st</sup>.ed.,.
- Spencer, R. (2010). Ecocriticism in the colonial present: the politics of dwelling in Raja Shehadeh's *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape*. *Postcolonial Studies*, 13(1), 33-54.
- Zigo, I. R., & Tkalec, G. (2019). Questioning the Limits of Humanity in *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie and *Animal's People* by Indra Sinha. *Open journal of social sciences*, 7(1), 96-109.



**Article Received:**15/12/2025

**Article Accepted:**22/12/2025

**Published Online:** 26/12/2025

**To Cite the Article:** *Gogoi, Belismita.* “Narrating Environmental Catastrophe: Postcolonial Ecocriticism in Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People*.” *Literary Cognizance: An International Refereed/Peer Reviewed e-Journal of English Language, Literature and Criticism*, Vol.-VI, Issue-3, December, 2025, 252-259. [www.literarycognizance.com](http://www.literarycognizance.com)

This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

