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Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*: A Study Based on Eco Toxic Consciousness Perspective

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Abstract:

Toxicology is the scientific study of the adverse effects that occur in living organisms due to chemicals. Chemical toxicants include lead, mercury hydrofluoric acid, chlorine gas, methyl alcohol and poisons from living things. When chemicals are released into our environment and disrupt the balance of our ecosystems, threatening our health, polluting the air and contaminating our food. It becomes a moral imperative for us to take preventive measures. Chemical substances can however also be dangerous to man and his environment, which depends on the quantities involved and its degree of toxicity. Indra Sinha beautifully narrates the toxic effect on a boy named Sunil whom the world has given a pet name 'Animal'. People did not receive him either as 'human being' or as 'animal'.

Keywords: Toxicity, UCIL, Environment, Khaufpur.

"There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborates the theory of the Earth,

No politics, songs, religion, behavior, or what not, is of account,

Unless it compares with the amplitude of the earth,

Unless it faces the exactness, vitality, impartiality, restitude of the earth".

Walt Whitman: "A song of the Rolling Earth".

People modify the environment for the purpose and obtain benefits from it. For example the provision of water, timber, food, energy, information, land for farming and many more. Obviously by using these resource people affect the environment in a lot of ways. The shape of the land was affected, wherever humans migrated. Although our distancing from nature began several thousand years ago with advancement in agriculture and social order, it is the age of

industry to which we vow our modern regard for nature. Humans have always had an impact on the environment, but with the age of industry that impact has been ultra-magnified.

The chemical substances used in the home and workshop are not generally dangerous, as long as the instructions for their use and storage, which usually come with the original container, are all followed. It is especially important to keep these products out of reach of children and not to transfer them to containers used for storing food. Large quantities of these dangerous substances are produced and used in industrial and commercial enterprises. The priority must be on prevention, but a positive result can only be assured if there are strict guidelines for using and handling these products, as well as professional knowledge.

Metals and Solvents from industrial process can pollute water bodies and poisons aquatic life. Factories released a large amount of hydrocarbons into our atmosphere. In America, May is recognized as *Multiple Chemical Sensitivity and toxic Injury Awareness Month*. Generally if the toxins affect the respiratory systems, the symptoms are coughing, tight chest difficulty in breathing and throat irritation. Depression, severe headache and dizziness are the symptoms for toxic affecting the spinal cord and brain. Visible reactions such as skin rashes and swelling and eye redness are common.

Toxic industrial chemicals are manufactured, stored, transported and used throughout the world. It can be in the gas, liquid, or solid state. Pesticides are used in agricultural process, which helps to product crops from insects. Pesticides are toxic to humans and lower animals. It can take a small amount of some toxins to kill. Other toxins that are slower acting, may take a long time to cause harm to the human body.

Results of the KEM College medical survey 100 days after the exposure

	Adults in group I%	Adult in group II%
Respiratory symptoms	79.7	27.6
Eye symptoms	65.6	31.5
Gastrointestinal symptoms	60.3	23.6
Neuromuscular symptoms	54.5	10.5
Gynaecological symptoms	75.5	53.84

Out of 250,000 exposed, population with medical disability:

Mild to moderate	43,864
Severe	63,385

Note : group I : People residing less than 0.5 to 2km from the factory.

group II: People residing more than 8 km from the factory.

(HEALTH-224)

Literature repeatedly focused on such man-made disaster and natural disaster. Eco consciousness prompted authors to choose subject material that would warn the reading populace of the human being's notion of reckless development, careless resource management, and rampant exploitation of natural resources. Taking upon themselves the moral responsibility of creating the eco awareness, many writers have resorted to eco critical writing. Stephen Jay Gould says, "We cannot win the battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature". Ecology is primarily concerned with a fight against pollution and resource depletion, and its goal is "sustainable development" whereas ecology is deep as it explores the "fundable presuppositions" of our values and our behavior toward the environment.

Earth first is a radical and revolutionary environment movement that emerged first in the USA in 1980. Inspired by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Aldo Leopold's *Land Ethic* and Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, the first activist Dave Foreman set aside millions of acres of land as ecological reserves all across the United States. Iris Murdoch suggests that humans develop a reverent sympathy that entails an "a tender and respectful interest in the diversity of the world." In *The Closing Circle* (1970), Barry Commoner discusses the rapid growth of industrialism and technology and their persistent effect on all forms of life.

The field of environmental literary studies was planted in the mid-eighties, and got rooted in the early nineties. In 1985 Frederick O. Waage edited *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources*. It included course descriptions from nineteen different scholars and sought to foster "a greater presence of environmental concern and awareness in literary disciplines." In 1989 Alicia Nitecki published brief essays, book reviews, classroom notes and information pertaining to the study of writing on nature and the environment in 'The American Nature Writing Newsletter'. Some universities were shown much interest to include literature courses in their environmental studies curricula. As a result, in 1993, ecological literary study had emerged as a recognizable critical school. The contribution of formerly disconnected scattering of lone scholars, younger scholars and graduate students made this branch very strong.

At the same time, there is another interdisciplinary known as Ecoside which refers to "a substance that kills enough species in an ecosystem to disrupt its structure and function". In some other words "to cause extensive damage to or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by a human agency or by other any other cause, to such an extent that the peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been severely diminished" (Cunning, 104).

Environment justice reflects not only in human communities but also towards other species, ecosystems, landscapes, and environment as a whole. Environment justice communities are commonly identified as those where residents are predominantly minorities or low income;

where residents have been excluded from the environmental policy setting or decision-making process; where they are subject to a disproportionate impact from one or more environmental hazards; and where residents experience disparate implementation of environmental regulations, requirements, practices and activities in their communities. Environmental justice efforts attempt to address the inequities of environmental protection in their communities. Indra Sinha explores this aspect of environmental justice in *Animal's people* which gives a fictional account of the world's biggest industrial disaster. The novel discusses the devastating impact of the gas leak from a chemical factory on not just the people, but also on the ecology.

Union Carbide India Limited was a chemical company established in 1934. It was owned by *Union Carbide Corporation* and Indian investors including the *Government of India* and government controlled banks. UCIL, produced batteries carbon products, welding equipment, plastics, industrial chemicals, pesticides, and marine products. In 1970 UCIL, built a pesticide plant in Bhopal, India, which gained worldwide attention as a result of the Bhopal disaster. On December 3, 1984 a release of methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas immediately killed thousands of people and led to the death of more than fifteen thousand in subsequent weeks and months. The death rates currently about two or three people per week. The government of Madhya Pradesh confirmed a total of 3,787 deaths related to the gas release. A government affidavit in 2006 stated that the leak caused 5,58,126 injuries, including 38,478 temporary partial injuries, and approximately 3,900 severely and permanently disabling injuries. Others estimate that 8,000 died within two weeks, and other 8,000 or more have since died from gas related diseases. After the disaster the responsibility shifted from Union Carbide to Dow Chemical Company and fifteen to twenty people still die each month of illness related to disaster.

Indra Sinha beautifully narrates the difficulties of its characters and how they face each challenges caused by this tragedy. "I used to be human once. So I'm told. I do not remember it myself but people who knew me when I was small say I walked on two feet just like a human being."(Sinha,1)

Animal hated a lot of things which are forbidden to him. The list of his jealousies was endless; "Ma Franci, the other nuns at the orphanage, Chaukku the night watchman, women carrying pots on their heads waiters balancing four plates per arm. I hated watching my friends play hopscotch. I detested the sight of dancers, performing bears brought by those dirty buggers from Agra, stilt walkers, the one- leg-and-crutch of Abdul Saliq the Pir Gate beggar. I envied herons, goalposts, ladders leaning on walls. *I eyed Farouq's bicycle and wondered if it too deserved a place in my list of hates*".(Sinha,2))

The novel *Animal's People* is a story of a nineteen year old boy, named Sunil. His narration of the incident is taken place in Hindi and later translated in English. In *Animal's People*, Bhopal's name is changed to Khaufpur-the city of fear. Khaufpur is the name of the city where once had a high cultural life. But after the tragedy, it is equal to hell. The consequences of this Bhopal tragedy made the people to look at the life like a puzzle. Anyzmal says, Only my

hands I learned to walk, my legs grew feeble. My hands and arms are strong, my chest is strong. The upper half of my body is like a body builder's. I walk, also run, by throwing my weight onto my hands, hauling feet forward in a kind of hop. It took a long time to master this new way of getting about. Maybe it was months, maybe a year. When I could run I ran away because the teasing had begun.' (Sinha, 15)

Mentally and physically they were drawn to the hell. "On that night it was a river of people, some in their underwear, others in nothing at all, they were staggering like it was the end of some big race, falling down not getting up again, at Rani Hira Pati Ka Mahal, the road was covered with dead bodies." (Sinha, 32)

The causes behind the Bhopal gas tragedy are the factory workers (Union Carbide Indian Limited) and the Government. They were unaware of the toxic chemical Methyl Isocyanate, which is one of the most deadly chemicals used as an intermediate chemical in the production of pesticides. To reduce the pressure of MCL, the workers added water into MCL tank. The chemical reaction forced the pressure release valve to open and allow the gas to leak. Most of the workers panicked when the gas escaped from MCL plant. There were no effective public warnings and public education about what to do in an emergency. The Indian Government also welcomed the UCC to build a pesticide factory in a highly populated area.

Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* is the fictional reworking of the Bhopal disaster. It not only deals with the Bhopal issues, but also with the environment awareness. The novel is based on the violent impact of the tremendous chemical leak. Sinha did not mention the name of the company [UCC], which released 40 tonnes of methyl gas into the city of Bhopal in 1984, killing thousands and contaminating drinking water which remains toxic even today. In Bhopal out of the 20,000 families from MIC affected areas almost 3000 children were born with serious deformities and majority of them suffer from multiple deformities. The protagonist animal is a good example for deformed child in the novel.

According to Indra Sinha, the whole town groans under the weight of toxicity. It affects not only the internal organs of its citizens but also their inner most being.

Khaufpur is many things to many people, and sometimes, when we recall particular pages in its history, we lose sight of all things that our city is: the capital of an ancient kingdom, a place of romantic beauty, fine architecture and splendid scenery, a historic city surrounded by the deepest forests in India, a centre of music and arts, where the ghazal and the khayal flourished, where as great a voice as our own Aawaaz-e-Khaufpur made those amazing flights of fancy and fantasy by the shores of this very lake. Our city has been touched by great tragedy, but it is also a city of science, of engineering, of scholarship and of hope. (www.khaufpur.com)

Such place was spoiled and poisoned by the Bhopal tragedy. Sinha chooses a deformed victim called Animal as the protagonist of the novel, to voice the plight of the sufferers. The book is written in Animal's point of view. The narrative is recorded on a total of twenty three

tapes of various length. He gives a gripping account of a post-apocalyptic Khaufpur to an unnamed journalist. Animal's narration illuminates the inhumanities of the company as well as struggle of the victims for justice. He offers truth to the journalist so that some changes be brought in the living conditions of the poison victims. He makes a frank, open and true narration of the harrowing experience of the Khaufpur to the journalist. The narrative recounts the struggle of several people against the hollow promises of politicians and the judicial system to win a proper compensation.

Animal's spine was toxically twisted due to the incident caused by chemicals. The boy lost his parents on that night. He constantly denies his humanity and claims that he is an animal. He openly displays his hatred toward humans yet there is a side of him that yearns to be a human being. His name derives from the fact that his spine is so crooked and bent. He has to go around on his hand and knees like an animal. His backside is raised higher than his head. When an American doctor comes to Khaufpur, he regains his lost hope of being able to stand on his own two feet and dream for the day to come. When Elli asks Animal about his back strange voices tell him, "She will change your life!"(Sinha,72). The sight of unborn little creature, also a victim of the leakage, brings him the realization that he walks on four legs with a bent back is better than the "unborn victim of the Kampani's poison".

The minds of the people get blurred and their sense of reality is one of confusion. There is no hope of light. When thousands of people were killed in Kushwanth Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and eaten by the vultures and dogs, here not even a single vulture or dog is alive to do the same. Zafar works tirelessly for the financial compensation to the victims, both the living and the dead. He explains to Animal that even doctors will not test the victims properly. Even people try to make some profit in the name of 'service.' No doubt, some individuals tried to help them each other. Like every Khaufpuri, Somraj hated the 'Kampani'. He ran a poison relief committee and helped the victims who were still coughing their lungs up so many years after that night.

The Bhopal Gas Tragedy, 1984 was a catastrophe that had no parallel in the world's industrial history. In the early morning hours of December 3, 1984, a rolling wind carried a poisonous gray cloud from the Union Carbide Plant in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh (India). Forty tons of toxic gas (Methy-Iso-Cyanate, MIC) was accidentally released from Union Carbide's Bhopal plant, which leaked and spread throughout the city. The result was a nightmare that still has no end, residents awoke to clouds of suffocating gas and began running desperately through the dark streets, victims arrived at hospitals; breathless and blind. The lungs, brain, eyes, muscles as well as gastro-intestinal, neurological, reproductive and immune systems of those who survived were severely affected. When the sun rose the next morning, the magnitude of devastation was clear. Dead bodies of humans and animals blocked the street, leaves turned black and a smell of burning chili peppers lingered in the air. An estimated 10,000 or more people died. About 500,000 more people suffered agonizing injuries with disastrous effects of the massive poisoning. None can say if future generations will not be affected. (The Bhopal Gas Tragedy,2008,<http://www.bmhc.org/Bhopal%20Gas%20Tragedy.htm>, Accessed 20th June 2017)

Although this novel is set twenty years after the disaster, the novel dramatizes the illusion of singular event: from the narrative perspective, the events like poisons themselves are suspended in medias res, in a state of environment, epidemiological, political and legal irresolution. If the unfolding of slow violence across environment time is typically managed through powerful strategies of dieantiation, in Sinha's novel hose distancing strategies depend primarily, in geographical terms, on transnational corporate distance and, in temporal terms, on both slow emergence of morbidity and on a legal procrastination, which provide orevaricative cover for the "world capital of fucked lungs"; it is also a place of interminable trials- bodily and legal(Sinha,16).

The poison from the factory not only created physical problems, but also affected the mental health of the people by producing anxiety depression, phobias and nightmares. Ma Franci who lost her knowledge of Hindi and English on the next day of disaster itself and thinks everyone else is speaking gibberish. She is a nun from an orphanage where Animal grew up. Language can never pose problem for her to serve the poor. She acts as Animal's mother figure and is described as kind, although middle senile. She defies the order of her superior as she knows that Khaufpur has felt the first of God and the "Apokalis" has begun. Ma has big hope for Scorpions.

The toxic fumes affected not only the lungs, kidneys, wombs and eyes of the people but also the environment. Similarly in *Animal's people* to the toxic gas from the company damages people's eyes, lungs, liver, kidneys, intestines, muscles, brain, reproductive and immune systems. The survivors continue to suffer from respiratory and skin disorders. In Bhopal, people in poor colonies were forced to use hand pumps to draw water or use other groundwater sources. Though they were aware of the poison after the disaster, they had no choice but to drink the poisoned water. In this novel Khaufpuris are also forced to use poisoned water from wells and pumps.

The doctors in the government hospital refuse to see patients who are admitted, unless they turn up in their private clinic. When Animal goes to government hospital in Khaufpur, the doctors don't want to touch him. The poor boy couldn't get money to go to private hospitals. Toxic material leaches as the factory decays, enters the ground water used by the slums for washing, cooking, and drinking. Everyday Animal sleeps on the dry grasses in the factory where tons of toxic chemical waste was seeping into the ground for years. He wanders all the places inside the factory except the warehouse which contains sack of abandoned chemicals. Babular Gaur, State Minister responsible for relief and rehabilitation in Bhopal, he tells to Reuter's reporter, "There is no pollution and even if there was it got drained away by the monsoons years ago". In this novel the minister for poison relief negates the hazardous effects to the toxic release. In front of the journalists he drinks the poisoned water and then he tries to vomit. The minds of the people get blurred and their sense of reality is one of confusion. There is no hope of light. When thousands of people were killed in Kushwanth Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and eaten by the

vultures and dogs, here not even a single vulture or dog is alive to do the same. Zafar works tirelessly for the financial compensation to the victims, both the living and the dead.

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