

**Life in a Toxic Homeland:  
The Biopolitics of Animality and Disability in Bhopal and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People***

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**Abstract**

When the Union Carbide chemical plant in Bhopal, India leaked poisonous gas into the surrounding area in 1984, it produced an environmental disaster that in turn inspired activism and advocacy on behalf of environmental justice. Thousands of vulnerable human and nonhuman kin were killed in the immediate aftermath as well as more indirectly through what Rob Nixon would call “slow violence,” in this case as a result of the environmental pollution that led to a toxic homeland. The Bhopal catastrophe can be linked to other environmental disasters in subsequent decades that have resulted from pollution, climate change, and the destruction of various bioregions in the name of capitalist development and globalization. Displaced human and nonhuman beings are often forced to leave their homes and make new kin, if they are fortunate enough to survive. But there are others who do not have the ability to flee, who must continue to adapt to their toxic or precarious homelands, living with the reality of disabling conditions and the threat of cancers and other serious illnesses. Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People* provides a window into this kind of reality through a fictionalized account of the Bhopal disaster and its aftermath. Through the disabled and animalized protagonist named Animal, a human who walks on all fours, we encounter a contaminated environment that is most dangerous for the most vulnerable and precarious lives, even though some forms of life are able to adapt and survive. Recent work in disability studies and animality studies can help us to see both the potential and some of the problems related to discourses of animality that are nonetheless reinforced in the novel. This paper addresses some of these issues in the context of recent posthumanist and biopolitical debates about problematic constructions of “life” in the anthropocene.

**Keywords:** biopolitics, disability studies, animality studies, ecocriticism, *Animal’s People*

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