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The Kakadu Jarnalis and the Mechanics of Extraction: Crip Linguistic Agency and the Subversion of the Humanitarian Gaze in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

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Abstract

Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People* has rightly generated a robust body of critical scholarship, particularly regarding its fierce indictment of global capitalism, its rendering of toxic embodiment, and its articulation of an ecological posthumanism. Yet, despite extensive critical attention, a significant analytical gap remains. While scholars have mapped the novel's environmental and biopolitical critiques, there is a distinct lack of focused analysis on the meta-narrative function of the "Kakadu Jarnalis" (the Australian journalist) and the tape recorder as specific instruments of Western humanitarian consumption. Consolidating insights from a trajectory of previously published articles that have systematically charted the intersections of postcolonialism and bodily difference, this paper addresses that critical blind spot. I argue that *Animal's* co-optation of the journalist's tape machine transforms a technology of Western voyeurism into a generative weapon of "crip" linguistic agency. Furthermore, *Animal* actively subverts the humanitarian gaze that seeks to commodify postcolonial trauma by repudiating being a disabled subaltern. This paper additionally establishes how Sinha operates the materiality of the recording process to involve the reader, thereby dismantling the extractive dynamics of literary humanitarianism, a necessary intrusion for contemporary disability and society scholarship.

INTRODUCTION

Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* is a traumatic examination of the basic necessity of survival, carelessness of the corporate world, and non-normative embodiment set in the toxic aftermath of a catastrophic chemical leak in the fictional Indian city of Khaufpur. The novel is a first-person narrative by Animal, a young man whose spine was permanently warped as a result of the toxic gas leaked "that night," thereby forcing him to navigate the world on all four limbs. Although the gas leak event encompasses the central plot of the novel because the novel reveals the aftermath of it and how it shapes the lives of individuals affected. However, it would not be wrong to say that the novel comes into existence only when a foreign journalist arrives to get a story of the aftermath of this event. For this purpose, he chooses Animal's narrative who, besides being a disabled individual, is also well-versed in English, Hindi, and French.

When the journalist arrives in Khaufpur, Animal observes the disgust on his face, and he addresses him, saying, "Such a look on your face when he brought you here, as you pushed aside the plastic sheet, bent your back through the gap in the wall. With what greed you looked about this place. I could feel your hunger. You'd devour everything" (Tape 2). This episode is sufficient to reveal the predatory nature of Western journalism in the Global South. The journalist arrives with predetermined notions of the tragic disabled victim. He expects to produce a narrative of despair that he can sell in the world of the Global North.

This paper interrogates the specific mechanics of how Animal's story is transmitted. Animal's attempt to take over the recording equipment and the presence of the "Kakadu Jarnalis" reinforce a rebellious recital of crip linguistic agency. He refuses to become a central, yet passive object reduced to a humanitarian gaze. Instead, he uses this technology intended to commodify him by

taking over the course of narration, which shows his rejection of the rehabilitative, sympathetic, and pitiful frameworks employed upon disabled individuals by the West.

The Hegemony of Normalcy and the Humanitarian Stare

The reaction of the journalist to the Animal's corporeality and social positioning of this corporeality can only be comprehensible if one knows how the concept of "normalcy" came into being. This becomes foundational because, if this concept didn't exist, the journalist would have shown no evidence of disgust on his face on seeing Animal. This concept emerged in the mid-19th century, resulting in the formulation of *l'homme moyen*, or the average man being driven by the rise of statistics. The emergence of this norm resulted in the shunning of those corporealities who do not adhere to it as "deviant". Further, it reduces disabled individuals to an error of the human race. This formed the basis for their shunning and marginalisation.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson terms this bourgeois paradigm as the "normate", which is a constructed ideology by those who possess cultural capital. They claim authority by having such bodily configurations which the society validates. The same normative authority was carried by the journalist when he entered Animal's place of residence. This particular episode has historical significance. The gaze that the journalist cast upon the Animal was the same as those of various onlookers when they saw disabled individuals during the arrangement of various freak shows. The arrangement of such freak shows served as a cultural ritual where human variation was displayed. This monitoring then metamorphosed into a spectacle of bodily otherness, and the "normalcy" of possessing a 'normal' body was established.

Garland-Thomson minutely observes that while the male gaze reifies sexually, "the stare is the gaze intensified," rendering the

disabled subject to an isolated, grotesque spectacle. Animal comprehends this intense, pathologising stare immediately. He notices the way the journalist adopts a kind of performative reverence, speaking in "a hushed respect as if you were speaking a prayer, like you were in the presence of the lord of death" (Tape 2). However, underlying this lies a deeper, voyeuristic horror. Animal, at once, catches the journalist's internal panic as if he is reading the thoughts emerging in the foreigner's skull regarding his "twisted haunches."

Chunaram, the owner of a local tea shop, acts as the broker for this visual and narrative exploitation. Chunaram used to sell the spectacle of his own bodily trauma by taking money from people to watch him rip off his flesh. He instructs Animal to "just keep talking till the tape stops" in exchange for fifty rupees. He attempts to force Animal's lived reality into a standardised mould, promising the journalist the "Usual, what else?" (Tape 2). This transaction reveals the deeply entrenched global economy of pity, where subaltern trauma is exchanged for Western currency and moral self-congratulation.

Neoliberal Biopolitics and the Extraction of Trauma

The material reality of Animal's twisted spine cannot be divorced from the economic forces that produced it. His impairment is the direct consequence of the chemical leak from the foreign-owned "Kampani" factory, an event that exemplifies the brutal mechanics of neoliberal biopolitics. Within late-capitalist neoliberalism, populations are frequently managed through "accumulation by dispossession," where corporate entities extract value at the expense of human life and ecological stability. The Khaufpuris are reduced to what Giorgio Agamben might term "bare life," shunted into toxic zones of expendability where their physical deterioration is treated as an acceptable byproduct of global industry.

However, the journalist represents a secondary, arguably more insidious wave of extraction. If the Kampani extracted capital at the cost of the residents' physical bodies, the journalist seeks to extract cultural capital from the resulting trauma. This dynamic aligns with the concept of "ablenationalism," wherein postindustrial nations deploy inclusionist rhetoric to assert their moral exceptionalism on a global stage. The Western journalist arrives to document the "poor, disabled Indians," positioning himself and his intended readership as compassionate saviors, while conveniently ignoring that a Western multinational corporation perpetrated the toxic disaster.

Disability, in this neoliberal framework, is often shunted into cultural locations—charities, asylums, or sentimental journalism—that strip disabled individuals of their agency and political voice. The charity model relies heavily on the "poster child," a helpless figure paraded to evoke sympathy and generate profit while reinforcing a model of dependency. The Kakadu Jarnalis demands of Animal to play the role of the poster child for the Khaufpur tragedy. He expects the narrative of "ous raat, cete nuit," which translates to "that night, always that fucking night," (Tape 2) in the hope of capturing the pure essence of victimhood.

Crip Technology: Hijacking the Machine

It would not be wrong to say that it is precisely at this juncture that Animal enacts a radical insurrection. Harnessing Robert McRuer's "crip theory," we can postulate that Animal's resistance acts as a deliberate refusal of "compulsory able-bodiedness." Compulsory able-bodiedness is a politically driven cultural paradigm which assumes able-bodied identities and perspectives are universally preferable. This compulsory able-bodiedness neglects the individuality of disabled individuals as it believes that they do not possess a universally acknowledged perfect body. This assumption demeans their individuality as it supposes that disabled individuals want to get 'cured' or

'fixed'. It assumes that they want to be integrated into society, hoping that they can also get normalised and are not 'othered'.

However, Animal does not adhere to this hegemonic belief. This is evident when the journalist puts the recorder in front of Animal. His immediate answer was not to utter the tragic tales, an outcome of the gas leak. Contrastingly, he responded with calculated silence and disorderly rudeness. He stops Chunaram from further translations and takes control of the audio space by singing filthy songs to shock the journalist deliberately: "I may be just a twisted runt / But I can sniff your mother's cunt". This use of vulgarity is a calculated move by Animal. He sabotages the recording process altogether. Animal is very intelligent because he at once comprehends that the journalist is "hoping the gibberish sounds coming from my mouth were the horrible stories you'd come to hear," and he explicitly denies this satisfaction: "Well, fuck that. No way was I going to tell those stories. I've repeated them so often my teeth are ground smooth by the endless passage of words" (Tape 2).

The ultimate subversion occurs when Animal demands a physical and symbolic price from the journalist. This changes the label attached to his non-normative corporeality. He rebuffs the lure of international fame when he questions the fundamental ethics of exposing his life to an audience that has no interest in whether he survives or dies. "What am I to tell these eyes?" Animal demands. "Have these thousands of eyes slept even one night in a place like this? Do these eyes shit on railway tracks?" (Tape 2).

Animal makes a surprising petition to assert his dominance. He demands that the journalist hand over his cargo shorts. There is a symbolic implication attached to this demand. He is not demanding his multi-pocketed shorts because he is fascinated by them. These cargo shorts, rather, serve as a symbol of Western astuteness, privilege, and dominance. By

stripping the journalist of his shorts, Animal reduces him both physically and symbolically. This strips him of his power to cast a humanitarian gaze.

Animal refuses to use the machine journalist's presence. He resists his presence altogether. He hides the tape recorder in a wall "where the scorpions live." He delays dictating his story in the journalist's presence and starts it after the Australian has left Khaufpur. By doing so, Animal transforms the tape recorder machine from an instrument of Western surveillance into an assistive technology for crip storytelling. He purportedly uses the machine on his own terms whenever he wants to speak. This renders him a unique, undeniable narrative authority instead of possessing a physically and socially marginalised body.

The "Eyes," Narrative Prosthesis, and Posthuman Subjectivity

Animal uses the tape recorder – addressing his audience as 'Eyes' – in a sleight of metaphorical distillation of the voyeuristic consumption of disability and suffering of the Global South. As Animal speaks into the machine, he imagines his words to be rising in the dark, where "the eyes in a flash are onto them... the eyes settle on it like flies". This vivid imagery underscores the invasive, parasitic nature of the international readership. Animal explicitly states his discomfort with this dynamic, noting, "I don't want them to see me... I am saying this into darkness that is filled with eyes" (Tape 2).

Protecting himself against these consuming 'Eyes,' Animal secures his crip subjectivity by rejecting the category of the 'human.' In literary representations, disability frequently functions as 'narrative prosthesis' (Mitchell and Snyder). Within this framework, disability serves as a crutch upon which narratives lean for metaphoric power. Disabled characters are used to signify moral deficit or to trigger a protagonist's emotional growth before curing or killing them. Animal refuses to be a

narrative prosthesis for the journalist's award-winning exposé.

He asserts, "I'm not a fucking human being, I've no wish to be one" (Tape 3). For Animal, bipedal, upright humans represent the architects of the Kampani's violence; 'humanity' is synonymous with the very destruction that ruined his spine and his city. When he navigates on his hands and feet, he realises the privilege of bipedalism. He observes that the "world of humans is meant to be viewed from eye level" (Tape 2). In contrast, his unique vantage point exposes him to the hidden, visceral realities of the city's underbelly: "Lift my head I'm staring into someone's crotch. Whole nother world it's, below the waist."

Animal has no desire for a miraculous rehabilitation, nor does he mourn his lost bipedalism. He completely inhabits his unique corporeality. He discovers that his four-legged locomotion grants him a distinct spatial mastery over the ruined geography of Khaufpur, allowing him to navigate the toxic "enchanted forest" of the abandoned factory where upright humans cannot safely tread. His physical form, deemed a tragic deficit by the medical and journalistic models, becomes the very foundation of his survival and his unyielding posthuman subjectivity. He aligns himself not with the "humans" who look down on him with pity, but with the feral dogs of the city, embracing a radical interdependence that falls completely outside normative humanistic frameworks.

CONCLUSION

Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* is a vital text that demands to be read not only as a critique of corporate environmental terrorism but also as a fierce meta-fictional assault on the mechanisms of narrative extraction. The novel actively subverts the voyeuristic gaze of Western humanitarianism. This subversion becomes clear once critical focus shifts to Animal's manipulation of both the journalist and the tape recorder. Animal asserts a radical crip linguistic

agency through multiple avenues: he refuses the role of the compliant victim, physically diminishes the journalist, and directs an aggressive, profane address toward the 'Eyes' of the reader.

Instruments meant for his commodification are thus transformed into tools of resistance. Consequently, his story demands confrontation as an undeniable, combative reality, completely foreclosing any passive consumption or pity. True postcolonial and disability justice requires the active dismantling of the frameworks the Global North uses to 'listen to'—and thereby control—marginalised bodies. Sinha's text makes this necessity starkly visible. By speaking into the dark, on his own timeline and in his own vulgar, poetic tongue, Animal reclaims not just his story, but the very sovereign right to his own twisted, powerful, and deeply unruly body.

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