Animal's People and the Grotesque: Unnatural Narrativity, Power, and Protest

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Abstract: This article examines Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* through the intersecting frameworks of grotesque realism and unnatural narrativity to explore how form and language mediate subaltern experience. Set in the aftermath of a fictionalized Bhopal disaster, the novel defies conventional narrative structures through a posthuman narrator, Animal, whose grotesque hybrid identity challenges anthropocentric and neoliberal paradigms. The analysis foregrounds how Sinha employs bodily imagery, obscenity, and narrative fragmentation to critique dominant institutions such as law, medicine, and global capitalism. Particular emphasis is placed on scenes of defecation, self-cannibalism, and grotesque sexuality, which serve as symbolic acts of resistance and protest. Drawing on theorists such as Bakhtin, Fludernik, and Richardson, among several others, the article interrogates the novel's narrative inconsistencies, polyphonic structure, and the limits of representability for marginalized subjects. It argues that *Animal's People* redefines narrative voice by merging the abject with the comic, the human with the animal, and the real with the unnatural. Ultimately, the study contributes to broader scholarly conversations in posthumanism, ecocriticism, and subaltern studies by illustrating how grotesque and unnatural elements challenge established boundaries of genre, voice, and power.

Keywords: *Animal's People*, grotesque realism, posthumanism, socio-political landscape, ecological devastation

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Indra Sinha's 2007 novel *Animal's People* features a nineteen-year-old male protagonist known as Animal. Born a few days preceding the Bhopal disaster of 1984, Animal is grotesquely presented walking "on all fours." Zooming into the lives of Indian citizens, notably the subalterns and the untouchables, mainly through Animal's narrative voice, Sinha draws the reader's attention to the imagined and ecologically devastated city of Khaufpur. The representations of the landscape and characters mirror those of real victims affected by their exposure to lethal gases from a chemical plant operated by the Union Carbide Corporation, referred to in the novel as the "Kampani."

Scholars have addressed *Animal's People* through a variety of theoretical frameworks—ecocritical, postcolonial, anthropocentric, linguistic, structural, and psychoanalytical—each offering insights into the novel's complex interplay of narrative and politics. Ecocritical approaches, which align partially with this study, focus on the environmental destruction caused by corporate negligence and frame the novel as a critique of eco-crime (Carrigan 160–161; Kosar et al. 57–58). Postcolonial critics like Justin Omar Johnston interrogate how the narrative treats death as the cost of modernity (131), while Julietta Singh critiques humanitarian interventions that reproduce dehumanizing hierarchies—an argument that resonates with Animal's complicated resistance to being renamed (138). While the ecocritical angle focuses on environmental destruction, postcolonial critics highlight the legacy of imperial power structures.

Importantly, Chinese scholar Shunqing Cao expands the discussion by analyzing Animal as a figure who traverses the human/nonhuman boundary. Reading the novel through the lens of material ecocriticism, Cao argues that the vulnerability of the disabled body—far from signaling passivity—opens a path to reconceptualizing agency in the Anthropocene. As he puts it, "Animal, as a product of both nature and human industrial civilization, is a bridge between the human and nonhuman world […] his deformity implies a new kind of 'factory life'" (73). This insight deepens our understanding of how Sinha's grotesque aesthetics and unnatural narration are not merely stylistic, but central to the novel's reimagining of embodiment, resistance, and ecological interconnectedness.

Rather than treating these scholarly inputs as discrete observations, this article synthesizes them to argue that grotesque realism and unnatural narrativity in *Animal's People* function as critical tools that destabilize binaries—human/animal, voice/silence, health/disability—and articulate an aesthetics of protest grounded in damaged yet agentic bodies.

Unnatural Narration, Mediation, and the Illusion of Voice

The diverse readings of *Animal's People* stem from the unconventional narrative techniques Sinha employs, which enrich and diversify meaning through figurative language and unnatural narratology. These techniques are not deployed arbitrarily; rather, they serve to reflect the fragmented lived realities of the marginalized inhabitants of Khaufpur. In making the narrative fluid and open to various interpretive approaches, Sinha aligns the form with the content's inherent instability. The novel contains more than 700 similes and countless other rhetorical devices, many of which are used ironically by a narrator who insists on his animality. This surplus of figurative language disrupts the norms of realist fiction and forces the reader to confront a deliberately distorted narrative frame. Such linguistic excess, far from being ornamental, reflects the grotesque and unstable world Animal inhabits—an ecologically poisoned city where language, like the body, is often twisted, ironic, and broken. Through this, *Animal's People* foregrounds its critique of the socio-political structures that reduce the subaltern to something less than fully human. The narrator's grotesque voice, then, functions as a narrative protest—a subversion of form that parallels the character's refusal to adopt normative identity categories.

Marina Lambrou states that some narratives, including what narratologist Gerald Prince calls "the disnarrated" (events such as dreams, disappointments, wishes, failed endeavors, possibilities, unfulfilled aspirations, desires that do not happen but are referred to in the story) drift away from established approaches to character representation, plot, or the organization of time and space. Because such narratives offer other narratological techniques different from traditional ones,

they are classified as unnatural (Lambrou 40). Narratology scholars such as Brian Richardson, Jan Alber, Monika Fludernik, and Dan Shen argue that posthumanist narratives, among other postmodern works, use unconventional narrators such as dead bodies, objects, electronic devices, animals, and insects. These narrators are employed not merely to challenge literary norms, but to interrogate dominant frameworks of subjectivity and power. Such narratives aim to break the "mimetic illusion," as Richardson puts it, by offering perspectives different from traditional anthropocentric viewpoints ("Unnatural Narrative Theory" 385). Similarly, Fludernik contends that unnatural narrative encompasses elements deemed fabulous, magical, or supernatural, along with scenarios that defy logical or physical possibility (362). *Animal's People* is replete with such elements, albeit devoid of romantic or heroic connotations. The novel exemplifies these aspects through the use of a deformed, illiterate narrator who drives the narrative with the agency and coherence of a mainstream character while insisting on his animality. The presence of a mentally and physically suffering character who speaks to objects, animals, nature, and even dead bodies disrupts traditional notions of objective reality. More than a stylistic device, this unnatural narration becomes a metaphor for Animal's political invisibility and ontological instability as a character who inhabits the border between the human and nonhuman; he exposes the fragile construction of those categories. In this way, narrative technique becomes a vehicle for critiquing the very cultural and epistemological systems that have excluded and dehumanized the victims of industrial violence.

In this respect, Animal's extraordinary capacity for communication with various entities in his environment positions him as a transpersonal figure, one who gives voice to marginalized beings and perspectives that lack traditional forms of agency. He represents what Andrew Mahlstedt terms the "invisible," those excluded from normative systems of recognition and representation (62). Yet paradoxically, the very narrative that amplifies his voice also undermines its authenticity. Animal does not relay his story directly to the reader; instead, his narrative is mediated through multiple layers of translation and editorial intervention. The novel opens with a misleading editor's note asserting that the narrative is faithfully preserved: "Apart from translating to English, nothing has been changed" (Sinha n. p.). This claim is immediately problematized by the novel's form. Animal's original words, spoken in Hindi, are filtered first through an unreliable local translator, Chunaram, then through an unnamed English translator, and finally by the Australian journalist, who transcribes and edits the tapes. What appears to be a first-person narrative is in fact a third-hand construction. As Jan Vansina notes, "Translation always conveys less information […] some of its allusions are lost […] both groups of readers may […] gain quite a different mental image of the author […] however close a translation might be to an original, the two can never be fully equivalent" (490). This layered mediation introduces both linguistic distortion and ideological filtering. Translators and editors do not merely transcribe; they interpret, reshape, and often sanitize content based on their own assumptions or intended audiences. In this sense, the novel performs a form of narrative trickery, creating the illusion of direct access to Animal's voice while subtly exposing how the voices of subaltern and traumatized individuals are routinely filtered through institutional, linguistic, and epistemic power. The grotesqueness of the narrative is thus not limited to its content but extends to its structure, with the editorial 'voice' deliberately masquerading as transparent authority.

Consequently, the reader's understanding of Animal's experiences is shaped not only by unreliable narration but also by intentional narrative omissions. The editor admits to the presence of gaps in the recordings, including tapes that contain "sounds such as bicycle bells, birds,

snatches of music and in one case several minutes of sustained and inexplicable laughter." These fragments raise important questions about what counts as meaningful communication and who gets to decide. On one level, the non-verbal elements such as laughter, ambient noise, and birdsong, challenge logocentric assumptions about language and suggest that Animal's perception of reality diverges radically from dominant human frameworks. On another level, the presence of silence and sound without speech alludes to the limits of linguistic representation, particularly when trauma, disability, or ecological degradation are involved. These soundscapes may also signify the semiotic communication between human and nonhuman entities, a core concern in posthumanist and ecocritical thought. What appears as absence may actually be presence misrecognized: the refusal of speech may not reflect emptiness, but rather a language we have not yet learned to interpret. By including these auditory "gaps," Sinha foregrounds the failure of traditional narrative to fully contain Animal's story. The mediated structure, then, becomes not simply a plot device but a political metaphor: a critique of how the voices of disaster victims are co-opted, mistranslated, or silenced by well-meaning but structurally complicit intermediaries.

According to Jan Alber, the employment of unnatural narrators facilitates the blending of implausible scenarios with existing realities in the reader's mind. These narrators, he writes, "are better understood as hybrid combinations of human and nonhuman features" (93), offering a posthumanist critique of human superiority, ignorance, and the exclusion of nonhuman subjectivities (89). Through Animal—a liminal, cross-species figure—Sinha deconstructs human exceptionalism and exposes the limitations of anthropocentric consciousness. Unlike the omniscient human subject traditionally positioned above all others, Animal inhabits a zone between nature and culture, speaking in a voice that insists on the permeability of boundaries. He not only hears the thoughts of others but also engages in sensory dialogue with birds, trees, rocks, and even dead beings. For instance, he claims to hear Chunaram's thoughts and reflects:

> Since I was small I could hear people's thoughts even when their lips were shut, plus I'd get en passant comments from all types of things, animals, birds, trees, rocks giving the time of day. What are these voices, no good asking me. […] it's how I met Khã-in-the-Jar, which I'll tell about later, but the voices, some are like fireworks cracking the nearby air, others are inside me, if I listen carefully I'll hear them arguing, or talking nonsense. (8)

This disnarrated passage, in which impossible events are narrated as if ordinary, reveals both Animal's attunement to nonhuman communication and the epistemological dissonance between subaltern experience and dominant perception. His auditory exchanges challenge rationalist definitions of sanity and language, while simultaneously exposing the cosmopolitans' (as Murphy refers to the elite) blindness to suffering. These moments dramatize Maurice Merleau-Ponty's posthumanist insight that language is not the exclusive domain of humans, but a dynamic property of the entire sensible world. Animal's ability to communicate with a dead fetus, Khã-in-the-Jar, further emphasizes his role as a narrative medium for silenced lives, literal and symbolic. His relationship to the jar is not necrophilic or mystical but narratively political, displacing the privileging of normative voice and embodiment. While characters like Somraj and Ma Franci also exhibit heightened sensitivity to the nonhuman environment, Animal's perspective remains singular in its explicit rejection of humanist frameworks. Sinha's use of unnatural narrative here does not merely blend fantasy and realism for effect; it strategically repositions marginalized and abject subjects as bearers

of ecological and ontological insight. In doing so, *Animal's People* destabilizes what counts as speech, knowledge, and truth, thus challenging the foundational binaries upon which modernity rests.

However, the novel's exploration of language raises fundamental questions about its power, ownership, and exclusions. Ironically, despite Animal's remarkable linguistic expressiveness and his ability to communicate with both human and nonhuman beings, his voice remains unheard, or more precisely, unheeded by the cosmopolitan elite in Khaufpur and beyond. These elites, including government officials and corporate representatives, monopolize narrative legitimacy by controlling media, legal discourse, and institutional recognition. Their selective hearing operates as a systemic filter, legitimizing certain voices while silencing others deemed irrational, grotesque, or subhuman. As Andrew Mahlstedt notes, this silencing is rendered absurd through narrative irony: when Animal attempts to speak in court, the Indian judge does not hear or even see him, producing a comic effect that underscores the structural injustice of invisibilized subaltern voices (62). In this sense, the grotesque and the unnatural are not aesthetic flourishes but narrative critiques of humanism's boundaries, where "human" is defined narrowly by class, literacy, and civility. In response to their exclusion, Animal and his community engage in what might be called grotesque resistance: defecating on railways, mocking bureaucrats, and even imagining acts of bodily transgression such as auto-cannibalism. These expressions, while extreme, become forms of political language, rejecting dominant codes of decorum and substituting them with a profound idiom of rage, survival, and refusal. Sinha thus creates a language of resistance that is embodied, abject, and iconoclastic, challenging the systems that police who may speak and how.

Another striking form of narrative disruption lies in Animal's ambiguous motives for telling his story. His narrative is laced with disnarrated elements, probabilities, imagined events, and unrealized desires, which reflect the internal contradictions of a subject both disenfranchised and self-assertive. For example, Animal's impulse to tell his personal tale emerges from both self-negation and self-assertion. He instructs Chunaram to tell the journalist that for people like him, they "are not really people," they are anonymous extras who exist outside the frame of official narratives. Yet in the same breath, he insists: "Tell mister cunt big shot that this is my movie he's in and in my movie there is only one star and it's me" (Sinha 9). This oscillation reveals a double consciousness: on one hand, Animal critiques the voyeuristic Western gaze and its commodification of suffering; on the other, he hungers for recognition, finding in storytelling a rare opportunity to define himself. When he finally begins to speak on the tapes, Animal describes the sensation with an exhilarating metaphor: "This story has been locked up in me, it's struggling to be free, I can feel it coming, words want to fly out from between my teeth like a flock of birds making a break for it" (12). The imagery of birds in flight captures the release of a voice long suppressed by external powers. In these moments, Animal not only asserts his agency but transforms language into a performative spectacle. He imagines the world as his audience, describing how words take shape: "As my words lift they change colours and shapes, they become pictures of things and of people. What I say becomes a picture and the eyes settle on it like flies" (12–13). This metaphor extends the grotesque into the act of perception itself, speech becomes flesh, consumed by watchful, invasive eyes. Even without confirmation that Western audiences (or any audiences) are listening, Animal's belief in being witnessed affirms the narrative's investment in voice as both aesthetic form and political force. The grotesque here becomes a medium through which an abject body narrates itself back into visibility.

Accordingly, the polyphonic structure of *Animal's People*, layered with tapes, translations,

editorial notes, and cultural dissonance, raises critical questions about the reliability, ownership, and politics of voice. While Animal narrates in the first person, his voice is always filtered: through Chunaram, the unnamed translator, and the foreign journalist-editor who frames the tapes for Western audiences. This chain of mediation not only disrupts narrative authenticity but also exposes the illusion of unfiltered self-representation. The question of who speaks, and who is allowed to speak, becomes especially fraught in a novel where the main character identifies as nonhuman. Multivocality here does not simply enrich the narrative; it fractures it, making it nearly impossible to locate a stable, singular voice. This destabilization is particularly resonant in relation to the "animal question": the ethical and epistemological problem of representing beings who cannot claim discursive agency within human language systems. As the narrator himself asserts his animality, the translated oral narrative gestures toward an unsettling paradox: the impossibility of giving voice to the voiceless without speaking for them.

What emerges, then, is a posthuman critique of anthropocentric communication, where language becomes both a site of empowerment and erasure. The scarcity of authentic representation is not due to an absence of meaning on the part of the animal subject but rather to the structural excess of human mediation, which insists on rendering the animal legible only through anthropocentric frames. This framing renders Animal's voice both amplified and appropriated, present and alienated, heard and disqualified. In problematizing this dynamic, Sinha's novel exposes how unnatural narrativity, through gaps, contradictions, and narrative distortion, functions as a political strategy that mirrors the real-world silencing of subaltern and nonhuman voices. Rather than resolving the problem of speech, *Animal's People* uses narrative dissonance and grotesque form to dramatize it, turning the failure of perfect voice into a powerful commentary on who gets to be heard in our ecological and postcolonial realities.

The Grotesque in Theory and Narrative: Laughter, Defiance, and Corporeality

Scholars interpret the grotesque through contrasting lenses. For example, while Wolfgang Kayser views the grotesque as a disorienting and fearful phenomenon that "alienates the familiar and apparently harmonious world […] under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence" (37), Mikhail Bakhtin sees the grotesque as celebratory, regenerative, and subversive. In Bakhtin's words, grotesque realism is "completely gay and bright"; it "liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying" by taking "away all fears" (47). This distinction is crucial in understanding how *Animal's People* mobilizes grotesque aesthetics not to evoke horror but to confront oppressive systems through laughter, irreverence, and defiance. The grotesque in this novel becomes a subaltern idiom, an aesthetic strategy through which characters reclaim dignity, critique dominant ideologies, and affirm the vitality of life amidst ruin. It is particularly useful for understanding the novel's reimagining of postcolonial suffering not as victimhood, but as messy, embodied resistance.

In light of Bakhtin's view, the novel reads as a carnivalesque counter-narrative that ridicules and reverses dominant structures, those of the Kampani, the courts, and official medicine, while challenging the symbolic power of death itself. Animal's various monologues and dialogues with Khã-in-the-Jar, the two-headed dead fetus preserved in formaldehyde, are steeped in grotesque comedy, despite their macabre content. Describing the fetus, Animal remarks: "Glaring at me from inside the jar is a small crooked man. An ugly little monster, his hands are stretched out, he has a

wicked look on his face, as if he's just picked your pocket and is planning to piss on your shoe" (57). The dead body here is not mourned; it is made comically animate. This laughter is not incidental, it is ideologically loaded, mocking the very seriousness of death and deformity, and transforming abjection into agency. Even Bakhtin's claim that "death is always related to birth; the grave is related to the earth's life-giving womb" (50) resonates here, as grotesque realism turns decay into dialogue and ridicule into survival. In a similar vein, Animal's absurd presence beneath the judge's bench during a courtroom scene, rendering himself literally invisible to legal authority, stages a grotesque reversal of hierarchical power. The court's blindness to his existence becomes the butt of the joke, as Animal both undermines and mocks the systems that fail to see or hear the subaltern body (51).

Kayser's observation that the grotesque, at its zenith, becomes "an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world" (188) aligns, perhaps unexpectedly, with Bakhtin's more regenerative conception when read through the grotesque lens of *Animal's People*. The grotesque in this novel emerges not only through linguistic vulgarity or narrative style, but through the very construction of Animal's being, his physical deformity, social liminality, and affective disobedience. As both alienated subject and reluctant redeemer, Animal embodies the grotesque as a living contradiction, a product of industrial disaster and posthuman resistance. His self-described acts of auto-cannibalism—"In gone times I've felt such hunger, I'd break off lumps of the dry skin and chew it. […] mmm, chewy as a nut. Nowadays there's no shortage of food, I eat my feet for pleasure" (13)—collapse the boundary between survival and perversity, hunger and satire. Auto-cannibalism, typically classified as a pathological behavior, becomes a hyperbolic gesture of both desperation and agency. The decayed, desiccated parts of his body are not cast away but consumed and integrated, an image that vividly recalls Bakhtin's idea that grotesque realism ties "death to birth, dismemberment to renewal" (50). In this way, Animal does not simply embody grotesqueness, he performs it as defiance. His body becomes the grotesque site of resistance, consumption, and symbolic regeneration, confronting the postcolonial reader with a corporeality that cannot be ignored or dignified.

This defiance is not limited to bodily acts; it pervades the narrative's linguistic texture as well. The overwhelming presence of the "lower strata," in both material imagery and verbal obscenity, intensifies the grotesque register. The narrator's frequent deployment of scatological and anatomical slang (e.g., "dick," "prick," "cock," "cunt," "arsehole," "shit," "piss," "fart") exceeds 480 instances, forming a linguistic substratum that directly opposes the sanitized, bureaucratic rhetoric of the Kampani and government authorities. This deliberate saturation of obscenity in a novel otherwise concerned with ecological injustice, human suffering, and postcolonial decay is not gratuitous, it is political. It debases the discourses of authority while elevating the lived materiality of the oppressed. Animal's unabashed pride in his penis, his affection for bodily functions, and his refusal to speak with decorum signal a Bakhtinian revolt against what Robert Levine calls "the sacred and exalted," recoded "on the level of the material bodily stratum or else combined and mixed with its images" (67). Rather than a nihilistic collapse, this grotesque realism becomes a weapon, deconstructing cosmopolitan pretensions and asserting subaltern visibility. In doing so, Sinha's language restores dignity to those who have been denied symbolic capital by investing the grotesque with meaning, memory, and agency.

Animal's contempt for religion is not merely iconoclastic; it serves to further the grotesque mingling of the sacred and profane. He outright dismisses divine benevolence, asking bitterly, "Where was god the cunt when we needed him?" (Sinha 14). His language deliberately vulgarizes

spiritual authority, replacing reverence with rage and bodily references. Even as he swears in god's name, it is always tinged with sarcasm or derision. Zafar and Elli share similarly irreverent stances: Zafar detests god-talk, and Elli casually remarks, "After this I fell out with god, we went our separate ways" (203). When Animal wrongly assumes Zafar and Farouq have died, his fury toward God intensifies, accusing the deity of sadism: "O god if really you exist, how wicked you must be, how you must hate us folk to torture us so" (326). Yet, this anguished outburst still pivots toward grotesque vanity as he boasts about his penis. In doing so, Animal collapses the gap between the sublime and the vulgar, foregrounding the grotesque as a mode of emotional excess and paradox. His sacred oaths are not solemn but obscene, displacing moral absolutism with embodied irony. The grotesque here is not simply about filth or shock; it is a strategy of coping, mourning, and resisting frameworks that have failed the subaltern body.

As Bakhtin asserts, "the combination of human and animal traits is one of the most ancient grotesque forms" (316), and *Animal's People* embraces this tradition with vigor. Animal may not be biologically nonhuman, but he straddles the ontological divide between human and beast, creating a hybrid identity that confronts and destabilizes normative categories. Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund argue that grotesque figures "disrupt notions of normalcy" by embodying hybridity, transgression, and motion (10), qualities Animal enacts with defiance. Even the uncanny voice of Khã-in-the-Jar underscores this duality, mocking Animal's bent posture while calling attention to his conspicuously erect penis: "My two heads rise from one neck. From your hips, at the point where your back bends, rises a second you who's straight, stands upright and tall" (Sinha 139). The grotesque body, as Bakhtin emphasizes, "is not a closed, complete unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (26). This open, fluctuating embodiment finds resonance in Animal's unstable attachments, his simultaneous love and resentment toward Zafar and Elli, his hatred of the Kampani and yearning for dignity. These relational contradictions, like his own body, are in constant motion. Through such grotesque excess and fluidity, *Animal's People* dramatizes the dismembered yet agentic condition of the subaltern, whose identity is always shifting, never fixed, and perpetually resisting.

Excrement as Resistance: Filth, Power, and Protest

Sinha vividly portrays the materiality of dirt and pollution in Khaufpur, directing the reader's attention to the visceral realities of life at the margins: realities often ignored by official narratives and sanitized humanitarian discourse. The downtrodden districts of the city are saturated with filth, not just physical but also linguistic and symbolic. From the outset, Animal's reflections establish excrement as a recurring metaphor for both social condition and political critique. Questioning whether the privileged Eyes have ever "shit on railway tracks" (7), a common practice in Khaufpur, Animal exposes the classed divide in bodily experiences. Public defecation, which recurs in lines like "dawn shits on the railway line" (3), becomes a stark counter-image to private, modern sanitation, revealing how infrastructural neglect is entwined with social devaluation. His vulgar self-classification—"a doctor with a mission to save, even shits like [him]" (8–9)—reframes bodily abjection as a shared, if unwelcome, ground between him and Elli, the Western aid-worker. The grotesque becomes a way to destabilize hierarchies: though he's "condemned to smell pissy gussets and shitty backsides" (2), Animal uses scatological language not just for realism, but for critique. His repeated encounters with and invocations of "shit," from being treated "like shit"

(88) to mocking slogans as "high-sounding shit" (177), undermine sanitized political speech and instead assert a counter-discourse born from material degradation. In this world, profanity is not mere obscenity; it becomes a resistant vernacular, a language of the dispossessed. His defiant lyrics—"I'll shit in your shoe and piss in your tea" (172)—do more than provoke; they perform a rhetorical reversal of power, pushing excrement upward as a form of protest. As Animal notes with irony, the poor must shit together, while "the rich are condemned to shit alone" (184), a statement that critiques not just inequality, but the privatization of basic human needs. The excremental, here, is grotesque precisely because it rejects transcendence, grounding the narrative in the body and exposing the spiritual sterility of the elite.

Moreover, excrement and grotesque imagery function ideologically within the novel to depict how structural violence manifests through the body and mind. The recurrent metaphors of blood, shit, and death are not gratuitous but ideologically loaded signs that mirror the psychosocial trauma of communities subjected to slow violence. In line with David Savran's notion of "the crisis of the subject, marooned in capitalist modernity" (215), Sinha's characters exhibit fractured psyches and compulsive behaviors that reflect necropolitical abandonment. The Kampani, the faceless emblem of corporate capitalism, is rendered grotesque and supernatural, "a blood-dripping demon" that threatens to rise from the dead and consume Khaufpur (41). This vampiric image frames capitalism not merely as exploitative, but as cannibalistic, consuming human lives without remorse. Animal's own grotesque habit—"I eat my feet for pleasure" (13)—ironically mirrors this logic of consumption: unlike the Kampani, his act of self-cannibalism is both a testament to survival and a mockery of rational norms. This grotesque inversion is echoed across the novel's eccentric characters and absurd situations, from Chunaram ripping off his finger for bribes to Fatlu Inspector being bitten by Animal. Yet, these grotesque moments are not purely comic, they expose the absurdity of biopolitical control and the limits of liberal humanism. Most notably, the repeated depictions of communal defecation are not only realistic but symbolically charged: the act of shitting in a public space becomes a political occupation of land, a mode of reclaiming visibility and autonomy. In Animal's obsession with his penis and bodily fluids, Sinha reclaims the very zones that power renders abject, asserting them as sites of resistance, grotesque visibility, and uncontainable vitality.

In *Animal's People*, Sinha draws sustained attention to the presence and significance of human waste, invoking Bakhtin's discourse on the carnival as a liberatory space that privileges the lower bodily stratum. Yet, unlike Bakhtin's jubilant carnivalesque atmosphere, the novel presents a dystopian realism, where grotesque imagery is grounded in suffering and abandonment. The lower bodily functions and substances, especially excrement, are not celebratory but emblems of systemic neglect. The word "railway" appears thirteen times, marking its geographic and symbolic closeness to the characters' lives, while scatological terms like "shit," "shitting," and "defecating" occur 53 times, amplified further by references to "fart" and "piss." This statistical density is not incidental. It reflects how the corporeal becomes political. One moment captures this with clarity: "'Look Elli,' I say, feeling like I want to explode, 'I'll tell you what disgusts me about this place, which isn't what disgusts you, such as scorpions, filth, lack of hygiene, etc. It's not that if I want a shit, I must visit the railway line'" (184). The railway line becomes both literal and symbolic: a space of public defecation, shared degradation, and daily protest. Sinha sets up a stark juxtaposition between shit and steel, two opposing material forces. Steel, mentioned eight times, symbolizes the imperial-industrial complex (associated with American might and Kampani

power), while shit marks the bare life of Khaufpuris, their vulnerability, and their earthy resistance. In this contrast, excrement becomes more than filth; it becomes a counter-symbol to capitalist abstraction and sanitized modernity.

This symbolic weight of excrement resonates with broader cultural and historical discourses. Constantinou observes that feces—human and animal—have been paradoxically regarded in Western medicine as both pollutant and cure, used in wound care and as early antibiotics, complicating notions of purity. Similarly, Martin Pops, in "The Metamorphosis of Shit," tracks how scatology underpins the sacred in Western literature, noting how Martin Luther's divine inspiration is linked to excretion and bodily release. Citing Auden, Pops affirms that "excretion is both the primal creative act […] and the primal act of revolt and repudiation of the past" (29), a statement that aptly frames Animal's excremental defiance. Conversely, Cecilia F. Klein identifies a longstanding Western tendency to portray feces as barriers to growth, referencing Dante's depiction of flatterers wallowing in excrement in Hell. Gay Hawkins, too, highlights excrement's power to return as an uncanny reminder of the repressed body and its uncontrollable outputs (40). These contradictory cultural interpretations, where feces signal both purification and pollution, creativity and contamination, inform how Sinha stages a politics of abjection. In *Animal's People*, public defecation functions simultaneously as an index of infrastructural injustice and as a grotesque spectacle of visibility. Against a backdrop of neoliberal neglect and postcolonial fallout, excretion emerges as both a metaphor for marginalization and a material act of insurgency.

Viewed through a Freudian lens, anal excrement assumes both developmental and symbolic significance. Freud, as cited by Pops (49–50), considers feces to be part of the infant's early identity formation, both as a cherished possession and a tool of rebellion. Its expulsion marks a psychological milestone in the child's journey toward social conformity and assimilation. However, in the context of *Animal's People*, this symbolic act of defecation functions not as assimilation but resistance. Shitting on the railway tracks, one of the most recurrent images in the novel, becomes a transgressive gesture: an infantile yet profound rejection of authority and societal norms. It signifies the Khaufpuris's refusal to be "house-trained" by hegemonic powers such as the Kampani, the courts, or governmental structures. This quotidian act, replete with filth and defiance, embodies what the grotesque aesthetic and Bakhtinian carnivalesque celebrate: resistance through the lower stratum of the body. In this case, feces become an agent of protest, rendering visible the political through the visceral, the symbolic through the scatological.

Animal's obsession with his sexual organ similarly parallels his use of excremental language as both rebellion and identity formation. His "lund" becomes a metonym for symbolic assertion over class, gender, and bodily autonomy. His erotic fantasies, like his defecatory ones, are disproportionately projected onto figures of authority and privilege, namely, those affiliated with the cosmopolitan elite. His declaration that his "beastly lund wants to be pointed at Elli, brute thinks it's a kind of magic to mark her as prey" (Sinha 227) illustrates the convergence of animalistic instinct, socio-political critique, and psychosexual projection. Elli, representing medical professionalism, Western humanitarianism, and female autonomy, becomes the target of Animal's symbolic aggression, until she becomes romantically involved with Somraj. The erotic fantasy here is not driven by desire alone but by a coded longing for power inversion. Ironically, when Animal is faced with a sexual opportunity with Anjali, a prostitute from his own class background, he experiences impotence. This failure does not suggest physical deficiency but exposes the constructedness of his desire, rooted not in lust but in confrontation. His mythical "lund" fails him because Anjali is not

the othered object of cosmopolitan resentment but a mirror to his own marginality. Through this failed encounter, Sinha highlights how Animal's sexual identity, like his grotesque body and his defiant scatology, functions as a complex site of resistance, vulnerability, and social commentary within the grotesque realism that shapes the novel's core aesthetic.

Conclusion

Sinha's *Animal's People* subverts conventional narrative realism through a posthumanist, grotesque framework that critiques anthropocentrism and foregrounds environmental and social injustice. The unnatural narration, delivered by a quasi-human figure whose body defies anatomical norms, destabilizes mimetic expectations and enables readers to witness suffering from the margins. Animal's hybrid status as neither fully human nor fully animal grants him access to both worlds while denying him full participation in either. His exchanges with the dead fetus Khã-in-the-Jar, described with gallows humor—"as if he's just picked your pocket and is planning to piss on your shoe" (57)—generate laughter rather than revulsion, demonstrating Bakhtin's view of the grotesque as life-affirming and regenerative.

Narrative inconsistency and polyphonic dissonance, via editorial interjections, interruptions by Jarnalis, and Animal's own internal contradictions, render his voice both empowered and problematized. While he speaks for the dispossessed, his language and perception remain distorted by trauma and unresolved hybridity. As a grotesque narrator, Animal embodies transgression, motion, and indeterminacy. Though he converses with humans, animals, and even the inanimate, the cosmopolitan elites and authorities fail to hear or see him, most starkly illustrated in the courtroom scene where the judge cannot perceive Animal's presence—an unnatural moment that epitomizes institutional blindness to ecocide and marginality.

In response to this systemic invisibility, Animal and his community engage in grotesque acts of protest, public defecation, self-cannibalism, and vulgar defiance, that challenge decorum and hygiene as tools of classed and neocolonial oppression. These symbolic acts destabilize notions of modern order, and yet they expose contradictions within the protest itself, echoing Rob Nixon's concern with "slow violence" (2). While defying the Kampani's destruction, the Khaufpuris also contribute to ecological degradation, revealing protest's uneasy alliance with complicity.

Animal's obsession with his penis becomes a personal and symbolic resistance against disempowerment. His sexual aggression, particularly toward figures like Elli from the cosmopolitan class, reflects his effort to reclaim agency. Yet, his impotence with Anjali, a local prostitute, reveals another layer: a moment of recognition, empathy, and restraint. The grotesque collapses into the ethical when Animal withholds sexual dominance and contemplates helping Anjali escape sex work. The episode foregrounds the narrative's central tension: Animal's identity as both beast and moral agent.

Ultimately, his decision to reject corrective surgery in the USA affirms his grotesque embodiment and signals loyalty to his people. The refusal is not a rejection of healing, but of assimilation. It underscores the novel's thematic insistence on remaining in the struggle, unfinished, unresolved, and radically unnatural. In closing, *Animal's People* does not end with redemption or closure but with continued resistance. The grotesque, unnatural, and marginal are not healed, they persist, defiantly, as the locus of truth.

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