



Green Crimes in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

Mr. Niku Chetia

Asst. Prof., Dept. of English, Rangapara College (Autonomous), Rangapara, Assam, India

Received: 24.07.2026; Accepted: 26.07.2026; Available online: 31.07.2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by Scholar Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Abstract

*Ecological damage, primarily emerging from human made factors, jeopardises the lives of humans. Often the deaths and crippling conditions resulting from catastrophic events are studied and investigated but not equated to a criminal offence. A close reading of Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* offers the horrific situations which an individual may undergo during one's lifetime. Taking Green Criminology as a theoretical framework which locates the ecological crimes and perceives the environment as victims, the paper attempts to locate the crimes depicted in the novel through its characters. It endeavours to depict presentation of animality as a crime, mindless actions of socially elite groups as sources of crime and the traumatic experiences as a manifestation of ecological crime.*

Keywords: Green Criminology, Animality, Trauma, Ecology

Introduction:

Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* is a fictional representation of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy. In December 1984, Union Carbide's Bhopal pesticide factory had a gas leak which killed thousands of people. The American owners attempted to blame the Indian managers for their incapability to follow the safety measures. This blame game ultimately resulted in misunderstandings among Indians and pointed towards massive malpractices. Termed as a massacre rather than an accident, the tragedy unleashed huge ecological damage causing the death of animals and humans. The story is an epicentre of critical analysis due to its implication of ecological crime. The tragedy occurred reportedly due to lowering of safety standards and staff not equipped and trained to tackle such disasters. Catherine Parry in *Other Animals in Twenty-Century Fiction*, mentions that certain safety protocols were not maintained when the initial leak was detected. It must be noted that the poisonous gas cloud, which killed around 3800 people, brought death to the people in the slums. Again, this is a reiteration that the marginalized people suffer most from the ecological damage. After the initial days of the disaster, Bhopal had to bear the after effects of the disaster in the form of premature deaths, chronic eye diseases, disabilities and animal deaths. Apart from these, the victims have suffered psychological disorders, and gastrointestinal conditions. The nearby water supplies and soil were contaminated by the chemicals and heavy metals. Parry asserts that the company did not take the legal responsibility of the disaster and had left no stone unturned to avoid expenditure on the decontamination process. The settlement of the company for a few million is again based on how the Indian lives are valued. The creation of disposable lives is a byproduct of ecocrime.

Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* recount the environmental degradation caused by industry and refers to environmental crimes leading to serious health problems for the poor people around the factory. There is a tendency to ignore the harm caused to the environment through human activities which act as slow poison. An industrial tragedy such as the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, which is metaphorically presented in the story, leaves the character of "Animal" crippled. Through the narrative, the author postulates serious questions- Was the tragedy accounted for as a serious crime? Were the human perpetrators responsible for the tragedy accounted for in their actions? If the aftereffects of harmful actions are not comprehended immediately, can activities harming the environment be considered a crime? A reading of Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People* through the lens of Green Criminology brings into perspective certain subtle pointers of ecological crime. The paper attempts to study how markers of social harm through ecological degradations cannot be ignored and subsequently be considered as a crime.

The problem of locating victims of environmental crime is its nature. It apparently appears to be victimless but the weaker and marginalised people are impacted disproportionately (Hall 103). Additionally, to locate the victims, the impacts of environmental crime on health, social life, economic stability and culture is an absolute imperative. The industrial society paved the way for a risk society where the industries have created manufactured risks (Potter 7). The manufactured risks refer to the devastating impacts of industrialisation, such as the depletion of ozone layer, global warming, birth defects. It also includes the physical, economic, as well as cultural loss that happens during such activities. Manufactured risks create social stratification in the society and may lead to social conflict. There is a growing consciousness among scholars to treat environmental harm as a crime.

Green Criminology:

Green Criminology puts attention to how humans have harmed the environment. In this sense, it differs from what we call "criminology", as green criminology puts special consideration to the environment. Green criminology considers the natural world as the victim of ecological harm inflicted against it. Critical attention to the novel within the framework of green criminology empowers us to have a holistic investigation of ecological harms. For instance, water pollution, seen in isolation, may indicate a disruption in the ecological system but green criminology considers how the species in the crossfire of water pollution get affected. It considers how both humans and nonhumans may be at the receiving end of ecological crimes. The prime intention of green criminology is to hold humans accountable for the destruction of the entire ecosystem including humans. Green criminology finds criminal laws biased towards poor people. Ecological harms are often carried out by rich people ignoring the problems that might recur in the future for the destitute.

The people who sit at the helm of social economic affairs own institutions and organisations which strive to manage and regulate the criminal justice system and legislation. They try to define what constitutes ecological crimes so that economic prosperity is not blocked. In "The Growth of a Field: A Short History of a 'Green' Criminology", Avi Brisman and Nigel South discuss the theoretical framework of green criminology. They assert:

criminologists most frequently employ the term 'green criminology' to describe the study of ecological, environmental or green crime or ha

Green criminology identifies crimes committed against the environment at different levels. At a cursory level, these green crimes can be categorised into primary, secondary and tertiary levels depending on the nature of the environmental crimes. The primary green crimes include those crimes committed against the environment and other species (not humans). Humans commit abominable primary green crimes, enough to grab national and international attention, prompting states to formulate legislation to counter it. Crimes of air pollution, deforestation, water pollution, and crimes against animals are among the primary green crimes. Secondary or symbiotic green crimes emanate from environmental destruction. These are indirect green crimes which are triggered by environmental damage. The crimes committed while violating certain rules and regulations made to monitor the environmental disaster or damage are secondary or symbiotic green crimes. In certain instances, victims of environmental damage are seen committing green crimes. These crimes are included at the tertiary level of green crimes. The tertiary level of green crimes offers a wide perspective and justification as to why victims of environmental disasters commit green crimes. For instance, an individual may commit a crime as a response to forceful migration caused by the destruction of habitat due to human activities. Exposure to environmental pollutants which bring behavioural changes in individuals may result in crime and these indirect crimes resulting from environmental damage fall under the tertiary level of crime. While attempting to critically analyse environmental issues, criminologists have adopted dual approaches namely the legal procedural approach and the social-legal approach where environmental crimes are interpreted in differentiating ways (Brisman and South 43). The corporate perspective limits what constitutes a crime. The corporate perspective is under the influence of the socio-economic elites where the inclusion of what constitutes a crime is limited to avoid criminal prosecution. On the other hand, the environmental justice perspective attempts to include crimes which may not violate the law but have a huge potential to bring destruction to the environment including humans and animals.

Animality and Crime:

The distinction between animals and humans is apparent. By calling the main protagonist as Animal, which means he is not human is an establishment of the Western categorisation of animality and humanity. There is a definite boundary between what can be called human and what can be relegated as an animal. The physical deformity with a warped spine makes him akin to a four-footed animal. Through the perspective of green criminology, the novel can be perceived as an attempt to showcase animality which is often attributed to both humans and animals. When humans or animals are attributed to animality, a presumption on the possession of less intelligence and savagery is imminent (Wolfe 101). This categorisation intended to demarcate humans from animals' functions as a detrimental effect on the main protagonist. The company accidentally released toxic gases enveloping the city of Khaufpur and engulfing the people. The repercussions of the ecological crime leave the main protagonist of the novel named "Animal" crippled for life. Animal recalls being a human erstwhile and people telling him that he was a person who walked on two feet akin to other human beings. "Animal or *Jaanvar*" (as he is called in the novel) cannot walk upright, the way he used to do in the distant past, and his inability to

become a human being makes him despondent. His feelings of jealousy as he finds himself physically different from other human beings is a result of the ecological crime. The ecological harm not only affected him physically but also his inner self. The character Animal feels disappointed about people not understanding his inner self. The author deliberately creates the character "Animal" having no clear-cut familial history. He doesn't belong to any religion and is brought up in an orphanage. The intention is to present the indiscriminate nature of ecological crimes which doesn't spare its victims based on religion. The intensity of the ecological crime is that the character of "Animal" faces scathing discriminatory attacks from the kids around him. "Animal or *Jaanvar*" internalizes itself as an animal, refusing to accept the identity of a human being, despite certain characters asking him to do so. For instance, Nisha, the girl whom he loves, never considers him an animal. For her, "Animal" is only a name and his disability is never a point of discussion. She treats "Animal" as a completely normal human being. Similarly, Zafar tells "Animal" that he should consider himself as especially abled rather than an animal. However, ecological crime severely affects his thinking and makes him internalise himself as an animal. In so much so that he is confused about his sexual identity. His thoughts about sexual desires are met with severe mental distress. Animal's concern emanates from the environmental harm as he was a healthy individual prior to his suffering.

The Dominant Group and Crime:

Ecological crime undeniably affects the destitute in the novel. "Animal" struggles to make a living due to his physical disadvantages. "Animal" befriends a dog named Jara who calls him his friend. "Animal" finds an uncanny resemblance between his life and the yellow dog Jara. Similar to the life of Jara, he has no fixed abode and no traceable parents. The socio-economic elites of Khaufpur are accused of committing ecological crimes. Since they are the establishment or dominant group which determines the fate of the socially marginalized groups, the destitutes are at the mercy of their decisions. The character Zafar appoints "Animal" to spy on what the government and municipal bodies are doing. "Animal" mentions that the government and the municipality are up to no good. There is a huge potential for the factory to decimate the city once again. Zafar mentions that the dry grasses contain brown lumps, which if ignited, can release poisonous gases. First concerns are ignored by the authorities. Zafar tries to resist another tragedy, which might potentially unfold in the city of Kaufpur. The character Zafar knows his fight is against the rich and people in power. He mentions an animal about the poison victims having nothing to lose. On the night of the tragedy, the American bosses of the Kampani called the Chief Minister to stop the "thighs of fate" medicine. This medicine which proved to cause illness in future generations could have saved the lives of many. Animal is furious to know about the government acting according to the whims and fancies of the company. According to him, the chief minister is waiting for the poison victims to die and does not bother about their lives. Green crime takes into account the irresponsible handling of ecological disasters. In the novel, the protagonist mentions the long pending court case dragging for years without any result. There have been no noticeable convictions made against the perpetrators. Despite causing deaths, the accused leaves the factory without cleaning the poison which pollutes the entire ecosystem. "Animal" mentions that people lost their family members and health for life.

Ecological Crime and Trauma:

The environmental damage has psychologically distraught the lives of the people. Ma Franci, Animal's primary caretaker, loses her knowledge of Hindi. The condition of *Jaanvar's* caretaker is heartbreaking. She fears the factory and associates with a blood-dripping demon rising from the dead to take the lives of people. Throughout the story, the fear of the factory resonates in the voice of Ma Franci. Zafar is conscious of the potential harm the company might incur in the future. He posits a significant question – Is poison presumed harmless until it kills? The Kampani is compared to poison which proved its efficacy on the day of the tragedy. For this, he wants proper compensation for the citizens of Khaufpur and wants to win his case in court. The thought of Kampani's capability to do further harm makes him resist and consider the owner committing a crime.

Green Crimes and Counter Responses:

The ecocrimes facilitate the social demonisation and construct of the disabled. Sinha's creation of a disabled human incapable of harming the perpetrators is a counter argument to Gary Potter's claim that victims of environmental harm are more likely to commit crimes at later point in their lives (Potter 14). Animal embraces his identity as a nonhuman with near certainty. The characters Zafar and Elli Barber negotiate with Animal's acquired disability in antipodal trajectories. Zafar's position, rather than providing a cure for Animal, is excessively invested in rights and emancipation (Bhattacharjee 3). In the context of green crimes, locating the psychic and somatic traces of ecocrimes is an absolute imperative, which is unfeasible without environmental activism. The ecocrimes exacerbates the chasm between the locals and the Whites, for which Elli's concern is greeted with noticeable defiance. Elli's advent to Khaufpur is "met with skepticism and resistance" (Bhattacharjee 3). Sinha's choice of a third world, with a green crime committed by a nation from Global North, is a deliberate attempt to illustrate the disposable lives. Beyond the somatic disfigurement, ecocrimes affect the victim's psyche and socio-cultural imaginary. Elli's cure is purely focused on the somatic. Her frustration emanates from her incomprehensibility of the people of Khaufpur. Sinha's brilliance lies in constructing Elli as an ambiguous character. Her intention to cure Animal is noble; but she devalues and calls the people of Khaufpur 'mad', and blind'. Psychic disfigurement is hard to cure.

Conclusion:

The novel *Animal's People* is a scathing literary indictment of environmental crime. It vehemently suggests ecological violence as a systemic assault which cripples humans and animals. The detrimental effect of Green Crimes manifests in corporate negligence, making the protagonist's life miserable, and the environmental damage takes a central role in text rather than a mere background detail. The novel compels the readers to bring a renewed focus on the minute differences which ecological disasters bring to human lives. The focus of ecocrime is not only on the protagonist Animal, but also on the other characters and situations, thereby appealing to the readers to take green crimes more seriously.

References:

1. Bhattacharjee, Rimjhim. "Disability, Sexuality, and 'cure' in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*." *Philosophy, Ethics and Humanities in Medicine: PEHM* vol. 20,1 30.14 Oct. 2025.
2. Brisman, Avi, et al. "The Ordinary Acts That Contribute to Ecocide: A Criminological Analysis." *Routledge International Handbook of Green Criminology*, Routledge, 2020, pp. 52–67.
3. Brisman, Avi, and Nigel South. "The Growth of a Field: A Short History of a 'green' Criminology." *Routledge International Handbook of Green Criminology*, Routledge, 2020, pp. 39–51.
4. Broughton, Edward. "The Bhopal Disaster and Its Aftermath: A Review." *Environmental Health: A Global Access Science Source*, vol. 4, no. 6, pp. 1–6.
5. Hall, Matthew. "Victims of Environmental Crime: Routes for Recognition, Restitution and Redress." *Environmental Crime and its Victims: Perspectives within Green Criminology*, edited by Toine Spapens et al., Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014, pp. 103–21.
6. Parry, Catherine. *Other Animals in Twenty-Century Fiction*. Palgrave, 2017.
7. Potter, Gary. "The Criminogenic Effects of Environmental Harm: Bringing a 'Green' Perspective to Mainstream Criminology." *Environmental Crime and its Victims: Perspectives within Green Criminology*, edited by Toine Spapens et al., Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014, pp. 7–22.
8. Sinha, Indra. *Animal's People*. Simon and Schuster, 2008.
9. Wolfe, Cary. *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species and Posthumanist Theory*. University of Chicago Press, 2003.