

Retrieving Human Rights

Indra Sinha's Novel *Animal's People* and Critical Cosmopolitanism

The biggest problem for a novelist dealing with important historical events, especially an event as devastating as the gas disaster in Bhopal, is to find a way to present exegetical commentary naturally through the lives of the characters. In my own novel inspired by the Bhopal survivors, I tried to avoid the problem by setting the story in an imaginary city, presenting the history and politics as a hazy backdrop and focusing on the foreground characters.¹



Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People* (2008)² is not merely a fascinating, indeed a disturbing literary work about the aftermath of the Bhopal gas tragedy that occurred on December 3, 1984, but it also calls upon readers to engage themselves with a number of questions, such as informing themselves about the event, its politico-economic background and its long-lasting after-effects on people's minds, bodies and psyche. Besides, it raises the question of the novel's place within the literary tradition of the Indian novel in English, especially of works thematizing the fate of the poor, the weak and suppressed sections of Indian society. Finally, it asks the reader to analyse the author's chosen narrative strategy of "present[ing] exegetical commentary" on a horrible historical event and to judge its achievement from an aesthetic, a literary-historical and a moral point of view.

Information on the Bhopal disaster is widely available on the net, first

1 Indra Sinha, "The Justice Leak", *Tehelka*, 9, 27 (July 7, 2012) <http://archive.tehelka.com/story/main53.asp?filename=hubo>

2 Indra Sinha, *Animal's People*, Simon & Schuster Pocket Books 2008 [2007]

and foremost under www.bhopal.org; further, in reports and analyses in “India’s National Magazine from the publisher of *The Hindu*”, *Frontline* (www.frontline.in). Similarly “Tehelka — India’s Independent Weekly News Magazine” (www.tehelka.com), contains regular contributions to this day about the struggle for justice, while national and international newspapers like *The Guardian* or *The Economic Times* can also be consulted. Finally, Suroopa Mukherjee’s study *Surviving Bhopal: Dancing Bodies, Written Texts, and Oral Testimonials of Women in the Wake of an Industrial Disaster* (2010)³ offers a most comprehensive critical enquiry into the causes of the Bhopal tragedy, its horrifying dimensions, but it also testifies to peoples’ demonstrations and their political and legal activities directed at obtaining medical treatment and receiving compensation; in short, at retrieving their rights as human beings.

Apart from presenting a survey, Mukherjee problematizes her account as far as it relies on oral testimonials collected by her and meant to capture the victims’ suffering and protest. She asks herself: “What kind of history do we need to write to tell the story of the people who are brutally neglected by society?”, and concludes that “in the ultimate analysis, we need to understand that oral history like any other form of history is a double-edged sword that remembers and forgets simultaneously.”⁴

The scholar’s skepticism about retrieving and retelling the truth reflects modernity’s doubt in the master story and the power of language and in the very narration of personal experience. Implicitly, Sinha’s words, as quoted above, point in the same direction. However, the novelist’s strategy to convey ‘the truth’ by fictionalizing the historical event and its after-effects is less concerned with the problem of veracity than with the story’s performative function. He seems to ask, should readers of *Animal’s People* merely read or listen to the first-person narrator’s presentation or shouldn’t they also feel called upon to actively engage with the victims’ and their supporters’ political and legal struggle for justice and human rights against powerful state and corporate business institutions. It is a vexed question that takes us back to the function of literature, of poetry, as, for instance, discussed by the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno after the experience of the Holocaust. Is it not barbaric, he asked in 1951,⁵ to write a poem after Auschwitz? To dare recreate verbally a reality that lies beyond language? Adorno’s question invited criticism, and he responded, that

3 Suroopa Mukherjee, *Surviving Bhopal — Dancing Bodies, Written Texts, and Oral Testimonials of Women in the Wake of an Industrial Disaster*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2010

4 *Ibid.*, 125

5 Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, “Jene Zwanziger Jahre” [“Those Twenties”], ed. Petra Kiedaisch, *Lyrik nach Auschwitz [Poetry After Auschwitz]*, Stuttgart: Reclam 1995, 4

authentic artists in the present age are those whose works' utmost horror trembles ever after;⁶ which suggests an answer less from an aesthetic than a moral perspective — and, I would like to add here, also from the view of the performative function of an artist's work.

To understand Sinha's achievement of fictionally “present[ing] exegetical commentary” on an historical event, of configuring, indeed transfiguring it aesthetically, a comparison with Indian novels written in English and in an Indian language will be useful. At the same time, it will relate *Animal's People* to the literary tradition that thematizes the fate of the downtrodden in Indian society. From the post-First World War period onward, Indian authors invited their readers' attention to their fictionalized stories about socially and economically little-favoured individuals and communities. Among them we have K.S. Venkataramani's *Murugan the Tiller* (1927); Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937); and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. In the following decades these works were joined by Bhabhani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947) and *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954), Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *A Handful of Rice* (1967), and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956). Finally, Arun Joshi's *The City and the River* (1991), R.K. Jha's *Fireproof* (2006/07), Meher Pestonji's *Sadak Chhaap* (2005), Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) could be added.

By sharing several of their characteristics, *Animal's People* represents an impressive contribution to this narrative tradition. The story is told realistically and with a strong naturalistic undertone and focuses on the daily lives of some of the people belonging to more than half the Indian population, people who live below the poverty line.⁷ Similarly, Sinha's characters are aware of being discriminated against for social, religious or political reasons, but by contrast they are also made to act while Anand's or Markandaya's protagonists are not even listened to⁸ or supported by other victims⁹ and eventually prevented from empowering themselves. Among the few exceptions I can think of are the workers' combined actions during the Bombay trade union strike in Anand's *Coolie* or the women and the coolies' satyagraha and picketing on the Skeffington Coffee Plantation in Rao's *Kanthapura*.

6 Ibid., 53

7 In 2007, 55.4% or 645 million people lived below the poverty line, having less than US \$1.25 or fifty Rupees per day at their disposal

8 Bakha in *Untouchable*

9 Cf. *Two Leaves and a Bud*, or *Nectar in a Sieve*

Novels written after India's political independence, on the other hand, reflect gradual changes of sociospace, of social formations of identity 'below' those of state and nation,¹⁰ as technical modernization, improved educational opportunities, increased mobilization and urbanization begin to cause a diversification of the labour market and the emergence of new social networks. Among others, this led to what sociologists refer to as processes of disembedding and embedding which would affect existing individual and social relations. For example, the impoverished villagers in Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger* or Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* leave their villages and hope to find work in a big city, but eventually they fail, though for different reasons.¹¹ Transplanted from their original places of living, they are unable to embed in unfamiliar socioscapescapes — unless they employ questionable if not criminal methods of adaptation or join "the systemic embedding of the criminals in their social surroundings"¹²: a path followed by several characters in Suketu Mehta's docu-fictional tome *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (2004) and Vikram Chandra's 900 page novel *Sacred Games* (2006) — where this process is acted out between the gangster Ganesh Gaitonde and his opponent, policeman Sartaj Singh. Similarly, Balram, the White Tiger, quickly adopts his 'new' community's questionable socio-moral attitudes after he has embedded himself in the socioscape of international technology that has sprung up in Bangalore.¹³ By contrast, Markandaya's Ravi in *A Handful of Rice*, Biju in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), or Ammu and Velutha in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) are temporarily included in pre-existing socioscapescapes, but eventually rejected and excluded. The one novel I can think of, where a strong social network of a marginalized group, viz. street kids, empowers its members to some degree to run their lives independently, is Pestonji's *Sadak Chhaap*, though in the end ten-year old Rahul's struggle 'to belong' also proves futile.

10 See M. Albrow, J. Eade, J. Durrschmidt and N. Washburne, "The impact of globalization on sociological concepts: community, culture and milieu", ed. J. Eade, *Living the Global City: Globalization as Local Process*, London and New York: Routledge 1997, 20–36

11 After having assumed the role of the Brahmin priest Mandal Adhikari, or 'riding a tiger', Kalo admits his low-caste origin and voluntarily forfeits the social and economic benefits that had accrued to him from his faked status. Ravi, first successful as a tailor in his father-in-law's shop, loses customers after the old man's death, can hardly grasp 'a handful of rice' to feed his family any longer and ends in resignation

12 Bernd-Peter Lange, "Crime and the Mega City", *museindia* 24 (March–April 2009), www.museindia.com

13 A course of action ambiguously recommended by Neil Mukherjee who in his review does not only suggest that "Adiga is going to go places", but that "[w]e'd do well to follow him." (Adiga 2008, book jacket) Would we?

Novels originally written in an Indian language, including works by Dalit and Adivasi authors, suggest parallels.¹⁴ Merely verbal protest by individuals against social oppression and their wish to be accepted as members of the human community can be found in Daya Pawar's autobiography *Balute* (original in Marathi, 1974) and in Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan — A Dalit's Life* (English translation, 2003). Krishna Baldev Vaid's *Ek naukarani ki diary* (original in Hindi, 2007) takes its protagonist, a housemaid, a step further, by making her assert her individuality both by leaving her workplace in spite of her precarious economic situation and by condemning her middle-class employer's world. Finally, Uday Prakash's novella *Mohandas* (original in Hindi, 2006) tells the story of a well-educated low-caste person who fights for a job that he had been promised. He is outmanoeuvred by a social network — a specific sociospace — of corruptible and corrupted bureaucrats, engineers, politicians, lawyers, policemen and upper-caste members who deny him his individuality and literally divest him of his identity.

Such parallels between novels in English and in Indian languages are not coincidental — quite apart from running counter to the often raised argument that Indian English writing ipso facto represents an outsider's, if not an exotic point of view. On the contrary: these literary configurations represent humanitarian concerns about the living conditions of the underprivileged vis-à-vis the 'new' middle class across linguistic barriers and reflect Indian macro-politics: viz. a fundamental shift in Indian economic and financial politics that set in with Rajiv Gandhi's premiership in 1984 and began to affect all social layers of the population,¹⁵ though in a vastly different manner. "In the two decades following the gas disaster", Mukherjee comments, "India began its forward march toward greater progress and development in an increasingly global scenario." Nonetheless, "the forces of globalization and corporatization, with their models of development rendered communities as expendable by distancing them from the forward march of progress."¹⁶ Thus, the establishment of a global scenario in India and an increasingly deregulated and privatized economy — of which Union Carbide India Ltd. with its factory in Bhopal is one instance — has further harmed the socio-economic situation of the underprivileged and has created new socio-political formations within the asymmetry of power. On the one hand, a group of "high net worth [Indian]

14 Overviews of Dalit literature can be found in *museindia* 10 (2006), www.museindia.com; and in Sheoraj Singh 'Bechan', "Voices of Awakening", *The Hindu* (August 3, 2008)

15 S. Mukherjee, *op.cit.*, 39

16 *Ibid.*

individuals” (HNWI) has grown fastest in the world, with more ‘crime’ money banked by them abroad than by the rest of the world. Besides, there is “pervasive corruption in the lower bureaucracy”;¹⁷ politicians and members of parliament face criminal cases and entrepreneurs have “to bribe twenty to forty functionaries if [they are] to be serious about doing business.”¹⁸ As regards the growth of the ‘new’ middle class, termed ‘consuming class’ by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), Gurcharan Das holds that

[this class] is pushing the politicians to liberalize and globalize [and is] too busy thinking of money and [is] not unduly exercised by politics. [...] It has no clear ethos beyond money and the here and now.¹⁹

On the other hand,

half a century after Independence the Dalits and some of the backward castes are still the most wretchedly poor, the most illiterate, the most exploited, and the most disadvantaged in India.²⁰

A fact confirmed by Amartya Sen who rejects the belief “that India has managed the challenge of hunger very well since independence [, but] has done worse than nearly any other country in the world [...] with endemic undernourishment and hunger.”²¹ And yet, the ‘Argumentative Indian’ also observes that

[t]he possibilities of public agitation [I’d like to underline the term ‘public’] on issues of social inequality and deprivation are now beginning to be more utilized than before. There has been much more action recently in organized movements based broadly on demands for human rights, such as the right to school education, the right to food [...], the entitlement to basic health care, guarantees of environmental preservation, and the right of employment guarantee.²²

With reference to the “disaster scenes” in Orissa in 1992 and Gujarat in

17 Gurcharan Das, *India Unbound. From Independence to the Global Information Age*, New Delhi: Penguin Books 2002 [2000], 324

18 *Ibid.*, 202

19 *Ibid.*, 287–288

20 *Ibid.*, 146

21 Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, London: Penguin Books 2005, 213

22 *Ibid.*, 202

2001, Shiv Visvanathan specifies Sen's "more action [...] in organized movements", by pointing out

the emergence of a new civil society group, cultural and fundamentalist groups, sometimes just religious groups that provide new styles of rescue and competence.²³

Indeed, the vast documentation of public agitation in Bhopal over three decades since 1984²⁴ testifies to the emergence of local civil society and its continued and continuing activities. Here, we encounter new types of local allegiances and new collective identities of active political subjects, which, I propose, have formed a public movement steered by *critical cosmopolitanism*,

as an alternative view [my emphasis] of globalization that is founded on the recognition of the struggles of individuals and groups for justice worldwide.²⁵

Fuyuki Kurasawa draws our attention to the inherent dynamic power of critical cosmopolitanism, its

dedication to the advancement [my emphasis] of global justice in all its dimensions, [for example of] domestic socio-economic redistribution [and] the pluralistic recognition of marginalized subjectivities, (463)

while Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande contextualize the term cosmopolitanism in their essay "Beyond methodological nationalism: Non-European and European variations of the Second Modernity",²⁶ by proposing a theory of cosmopolitan modernities. The authors advocate a "cosmopolitical turn-around in sociological and political theory and research", undergirded by the deconstruction of the (earlier) Eurocentric model of western modernization, or First Modernity. National institutions, they maintain, cannot any longer regulate the globalization of capital and risk, nor can they successfully challenge global conflicts, which in turn raise questions of social justice. Further, a theory of cosmopolitan modernities presupposes the existence of multiple [my emphasis] modern societies,

23 Shiv Visvanathan, "The Tsunamis of the Mind", *Tehelka* 8, 14 (April 9, 2011); www.tehelka.com-the-tsunamis-of-the-mind

24 See S. Mukherjee's bibliography, *op.cit.*, 197-208, as well as regular news and comments in *Frontline*

25 Adam De Luca, "Review Essay — Fuyuki Kurasawa's, *The Work of Global Justice*", *German Law Journal* 11, 4 (2012), 457-468; here 463

their plurality, and their dynamic entanglement and mutual interaction, all of which result from different paths of modernisation having been taken by different societies. To challenge global risks these societies are facing requires awareness on their part of cosmopolitical responsibility beyond nation-state borders and towards humanity within “imagined cosmopolitan communities”²⁷: a process of cosmopolitanization that

connects individuals, groups and societies and relates them across existing boundaries and dualisms in a new kind of way so that the status and function of ‘self’ and ‘other’ undergo a change.²⁸

Coalitions formed in the process of cosmopolitanization are heterogeneous and fluctuating but bound to each other “to represent the universal and to define the parameters of social life.” More recently, Beck has pointed out a further characteristic aspect of cosmopolitanization, viz. a process of acting upon cosmopolitical imperatives; in other words, embodying group cooperation across national boundaries in their effort to meet global risks and crises of an ecological, a technical, a financial or a humanitarian nature. Crossings, I’d like to add, also of social, ethnic, gender and religious boundaries.²⁹

To return to the novel, I propose that *Animal’s People* is an example of aesthetically representing a scenario of cosmopolitan modernities and that its main characters act as the kind of coalition outlined by Beck and Grande: agents inspired by critical cosmopolitanism and involved in the process of cosmopolitanization who, with their story, present documentary evidence of cosmopolitan modernities. Here, people from different social and socio-religious backgrounds join the victims’ struggle and create a socioscape, a web of social relations, that radically differs from those in earlier novels about the lives of landless labourers, poor peasants and villagers, about discrimination against untouchables and women and about the bleak prospects of unskilled urban workers to find a living. *Animal’s People* also comes across more authentically than earlier novels like *Coolie*, *Train to*

26 Ulrich Beck und Edward Grande, “Jenseits des methodologischen Nationalismus — Außereuropäische und europäische Variationen der Zweiten Moderne” [“Beyond methodological nationalism — Non-European and European variations of Second Modernity”], *Soziale Welt* 61 (2010), 187-216

27 *Ibid.*, 187

28 *Ibid.*, 195

29 Ulrich Beck, “Weltbürger. Das Zeitalter der Kosmopolitisierung” [“Cosmopolitan. The Age of Cosmopolitanization”], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (8. September 2013)

Pakistan or So Many Hungers because well-documented actual events of a real place like Bhopal are integrated into the story's fictionalized scenario of Khaufpur — which, in turn, enhances the performative function of this docu-fictional text. Finally, the “foreground[ing of] characters” transforms hitherto passively suffering people into actively engaged agents. Their struggle for justice and human rights empowers Animal and his people to act as cosmopolitans in the globalized world of the 21st century.

From a narratological perspective, this effect is achieved by Sinha's choice of a first-person narrator who wants to tell his story. Initially sceptical of the “Kakadu Jarnalis [...] from Ostrali” (*Animal's People*, 3), who asks him to tell his story to people in the world, Animal initially responds, “what can I say that they will understand?” (7), but in the end yields to the journalist's request because

here's a lot to tell, it wants to come out. Like rejoicing, the world's unspoken languages are rushing into my head. Unusual meanings are making themselves known to me. Secrets are shouting themselves into my ear, seems there is nothing I cannot know [since] this story has been locked up in me [and] it's struggling to be free. (11–12)

Unlike an autobiographer, Animal perceives himself not as the teller of his own story but as a mediator. His thoughts about himself and his role preceding his story acquaint the reader with the narrator's psyche (3–12) — and draw attention to the fact that Sinha dedicated his book to Sunil Kumar, a boy who at the age of thirteen lost his parents and five siblings in Bhopal on the day when forty-two tons of toxic gas escaped from a storage tank on “the premises of Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL), a subsidiary of Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), United States.”³⁰ Sunil brought up a younger sister and brother, became involved with activists' groups who fought for restitution and did health work for the disaster's survivors. He campaigned against Union Carbide at home and abroad, fell mentally ill and heard voices plotting to kill him.³¹ Eventually, he was treated for schizophrenia and, in July 2006, committed suicide at the age of thirty-five.

No doubt, Sunil who was interviewed by the author in 2004 impacted on Sinha and influenced his authentic portrayal of the seventeen-year old, orphaned, impoverished, physically handicapped, mentally traumatized and semi-literate narrator. However, we must bear in mind that Animal's

³⁰ *Frontline* 29 (August 2012), 16

³¹ S. Mukherjee, *op.cit.*, 51

creator is an educated member of the middle-class, an intellectual who chose a subaltern living on the fringes of society; a young man who was “not part of the country’s development plans,”³² and whose access to the hegemonic part of society — who, in their own eyes, represent the state — remains closed. Who then controls the story? Could Sinha be called an organic intellectual who through *Animal* articulates what his narrator cannot really express? Here, the discourse on the subaltern’s voice raises its head again, cannot be shunned, but must be kept in mind in the following analysis.

The personal interaction in *Animal*’s richly textured³³ story of about a dozen major and minor characters and their communal struggle to alleviate the fate of the Khaufpuri gas victims and fight for compensation and justice can be subsumed under the category of cosmopolitanization: a process which has already set in when *Animal* begins the story and which is pushed forward during the course of events covering more than two years between 2001 and 2003.³⁴ Metaphorically speaking, the characters’ interaction resembles the movement of concentric waves spreading from a centre where a stone has hit the water. *Animal* is the centre and connects with the innermost circle of activists: Zafar bhai, Somraj, Nisha, Farouq and Elli Barber. In turn, they connect outward with ‘Zafar’s gang’ (27), Faqri and Ma Franci and, still further outward, the small family of Hanif, Huriya and Aliya as well as with Pyaré Bai: all of whom represent the large group of severely affected gas victims, a group later joined by Anjali, who had been sold by her poor family to work as a prostitute. Again, further outward they connect with Bajju, Bhoora, Chunaram, Dr. Misra, Shastri, Khan, Uttamchand, Chaurilal Babu, and journalists of the Khaufpur Gazette: all of them Khaufpuri citizens less immediately affected by the disaster, yet on occasion supportive of the activists. Finally and on the widest and outermost concentric wave, we have the nameless crowd of victims and their supporters. Their demonstration against the conspiratorial meeting of American lawyers and Indian politicians, whom

32 Ibid., 59

33 The rich nature of the novel’s texture is largely nourished by *Animal*’s language which testifies to his entertaining, humorous and not infrequently cynical ways of expressing himself and foregrounding his bravado in its directness and outspokenness. Its main linguistic elements are a mix of English (143, 194), Hindi (122, 167, 209, 284), and French (100-101, 276); frequent vulgar and abusive expressions (45); at times, by way of illustrating a point, quoting made-up poems and rhymed statements in Hindi (66) and English (45, 75, 348); or Hindi songs either from films or made up.

34 The “Editor’s Note” preceding *Animal*’s story refers to him as “a nineteen-year-old boy”, obviously pointing at the narrator’s age at the time of recording his story. Born “before a few days before that night” (1) in 1984, he would be between seventeen and eighteen years old in the story told.

they suspect to secretly arrange a financial settlement before the court has taken a decision on the lawsuit for compensation, lead to the dramatic climax of the story in front of the court building: violent clashes with the police that involve even peace-loving Somraj who slaps a policeman and, like Animal who bites another one's arm, is beaten up and has to be rescued by the demonstrators.

As their names tell, among the activists we find Indian Muslims — Zafar and Farouq, a member of the Yar-yilkai community, Uzbeks, who had arrived from Samarkand generations ago — , as well as Boora and Faqri. There are Hindus like Somraj and Nisha; the French Christian nun Mère Ambrosine called Ma Franci; and the American doctor Elli Barber. We meet older — Pyaré Bai, Dr. Misra — and younger — Nisha — women; older — Boora, Shastri, Khan — and younger — Farouq — men; intellectuals and artists like Zafar and Somraj and the semi-literates Farouq and Faqri; lawyers, students, a tabla player, shopkeepers, bureaucrats and auto-rikshaw drivers. It is, indeed, a local alliance of campaigners across religious, caste, gender, social, generational and national boundaries who constitute a cosmopolitan community in a nutshell, together with Animal, who doggedly rejects to be classified as either a Hindu, a Muslim or perhaps an “Isayi” (14). Instead, he insists on being called Animal, the name once forced upon him by the orphanage kids he grew up with, “who started calling me Animal one day [...] ‘Jaanvar, jungli Jaanvar’. Animal, wild Animal.” (15)

Were we to follow his individual story here, we would quickly realize the weight he carries on his crippled body and in his mind in spite of his daredevil attitude. A profoundly ambivalent attitude both towards himself and others controls his inner and outer world: his thoughts and hopes, and the despair that overwhelms him over and again on the one hand, and the various roles he has to play vis-à-vis his fellow beings on the other. Looked at from a narratological angle, Sinha could hardly have created a more authentic narrator, because it is precisely Animal's ambivalence that distances the reader from his story, and challenges us to weigh Animal's judgments of his own feelings and his behaviour as well as of those of the group members he describes. We ask ourselves, should we believe or doubt his words? Here I return to Adorno's revised view and suggest that our estimate of the aesthetic achievement or failure of the story takes second place against its claim of authentically conveying the moral nature of the activists' resentment against the US company and Indian politicians and their deep empathy for and practical engagement with the victims.

Of course, Animal's ambivalence feeding into his story is also rooted

in the multiple roles he is made to play: a second narrative device. Having turned into a smart street kid ever since he became crippled at the age of six, and having adopted the ‘language of the street’ and become a master of the lashing tongue as well as of survival strategies, Jaanvar, “one who lives” (35) in a hole on the contaminated factory site, which he calls “my kingdom” (30), appears to be the perfect go-between to connect his own with Zafar’s world; the world of the group’s intellectual leader, who has given up everything in life and dedicated it to the poor (22); the leader who has won over Animal to work with his group — and earn a small income. Zafar’s faith in life, his “sensible view” (207) and deep belief in “humanity, [and] that deep down people are good” (207) impress Animal as much as his Gandhian-like non-violent pursuit of justice. (202) At the same time, he cannot help but call Zafar — as well as Pandit Somraj, known as *Aawaaz-e-Khaufpur* “until that night took away his wife and baby son and fucked up his lungs” (33) — and other members of ‘Zafar’s gang’ “just a bunch of fucking do-gooders.” (27) Nonetheless, he accepts his role of go-between by, for instance, delivering money collected by the do-gooders to the needy, and he is the one who reports “to Zafar if anything unusual was going on in the bastis [and what he has found] out what the government, munisipal etc were up to, because those buggers are always up to no good.” (27)

The campaigners’ activities are manifold, varied, and by no means always agreed upon, apart from being obstructed by those in power. They range from Zafar organizing the protest against the “Kampani”, addressing the demonstrators, arguing legal points with local politicians and judges, and generally acting as the victims’ spokesman; Somraj running a poison-relief committee for the poorest people; his daughter Nisha participating in street marches — and teaching Animal how to read and write; Ma Franci attending sick and injured people; Farouq acting as Zafar’s right hand man and, of course, Animal carrying, for example, 20 000 Rupees to a woman so she can pay back her debts to the money lender. He also sees to it that the sick little girl Aliya is given medical help by Elli Barber, the American doctor, who sets up a clinic and offers free health service: a step deeply distrusted by members of the group since they assume the Kampani behind her, which they suspect of using the Free Clinic as a ruse not to pay the victims. In his role of “Namispond Jamispond” (110) Animal acts on Zafar’s request to find out who she is, but he is unable to establish her identity. Zafar’s subsequent call to boycott the clinic is followed by the people, but not really shared by Somraj and Animal who convinces the Pandit to meet Elli because he trusts her humanity.

Though Zafar eventually relents and the clinic starts functioning,

tension within the group is heightened again by his decision, taken against Somraj and Nisha's entreaty, to go on a hunger strike during 'nantap', the height of summer, together with two women and Farouq; a fast to last till the day of the court hearing. Though watched by "hundreds of women [...] in a mass of bright saris and black burkhas [...] always women who support" (288), dissent prevails about Zafar's strategy within the group. It testifies to individual differences but also reflects the story-teller's ambivalent feelings toward single group members and, more importantly, indicates the author's narrative strategy to avoid creating a flawless "bunch of do-gooders": yet one more narrative device to bolster up the story's authenticity.³⁵

Animal's story seems to close on a note of apotheosis: "So, after all, we've won", he says; and quoting Zafar's earlier words that "we are left with nothing. Having nothing means we have nothing to lose [...] and] with the power of nothing we are invincible, we are bound to win" (54), he exclaims: "The power of nothing rose up and destroyed our enemies" (358): Elli, clad in a burkha, had smuggled herself into the hotel conference hall and "emptied a bottle of stink bomb juice into the air conditioner" (361), which led to the break-up of the meeting.

In the group's common struggle for the retrieval of human rights, boundaries have been successfully crossed: the American Elli and Pandit Somraj marry, and so do forty-year old Muslim Zafar and the young Hindu woman Nisha. Animal continues to have his lunch with them every day, but he is back in his old place, and preparations are underway for him to travel to the States and be operated upon. The process of cosmopolitanization, the activists' struggle in Khaufpur against economic, financial, health and ecological risks, across religious, social and national boundaries, has been pushed forward and is firmly anchored in the here and now of cosmopolitan modernities — but has not quite achieved its aims. The Kampani will continue to evade its responsibility, supported by politicians and lawyers, and "there is still sickness all over Khaufpur, hundreds come daily to Elli doctress's clinic." (365)

Towards the end of their essay, Beck and Grande ask whether there exists a chance for establishing cosmopolitanism in the sense they propose and draw up several scenarios: an optimistic one based on the belief that cosmopolitical responsibility will grow and transform humanity into

35 In Anjali Deshpande's novel *Impeachment* (2012) we come across a very similar constellation of increasingly differing voices within the group of the Friends of Bhopal (FOB) in New Delhi. Finally, it leads to its break-up in spite of the members' preparedness to actively support the legal case of Bhopal victims for compensation.

a political subject; a realistic one that doubts a solution will be worked out between the producers and the recipients/victims of global risks; or a negative one of a vicious circle caused by climate catastrophes, ensuing global migratory movements, fundamentalist counter movements, violence and climate wars.³⁶ I propose that the cosmopolitanization process at the centre of *Animal's Story* is located at the intersection of the alternative trends towards the optimistic and the realistic scenario. The novel places its hope for cosmopolitanism on the allegiance of professionals — intellectuals, lawyers, doctors, teachers, artists motivated by their humanitarian commitment — and the socially, economically and educationally deprived; an allegiance metonymically encapsulated in the interaction and cooperation of Zafar, Somraj, Nisha and Elli with Animal and his impoverished and sick Khaufpuri friends.

Looking back at Indian English narratives about the country's marginalized humans, Sinha's novel represents the first example I know of which literally configures the manifold conflicts between the powerless and the power-wielders from the angle of critical cosmopolitanism. An emerging local group acts upon the cosmopolitical imperative of cooperation and establishes agency and empowerment across subnational and national boundaries. Though Animal does not really end his story on an optimistic note when he reaffirms his view that "the poor remain. [... and] tomorrow there will be more of us" (366), his admiration for Zafar's confidence that "we'll get them in the end" (365) lingers on in him — and in the readers' minds. As do Zafar's words, "*Jahaan jaan hai, jahaan hai*. While we have life, we have the world", which, as Animal admits, sent "thrills up and down my crooked back, they want to make me weep. 'Wah. wah,' I say, before I can stop myself." (284)

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³⁶ Beck/Grande, *op.cit.*, 206–207

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