

**From Anthropocene to Symbiocene: Gaian Dynamics in
Indra Sinha's *Animal's People***

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“I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystems collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy... and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation and we, scientists, don't know how to do that.” James Gustave Speth, Former UNDP Administrator (Oliver, 2020).

“For us, all of us who live in this pacha (time-place) we are beings: the stone, the earth, the plants, the water, the hail, the wind, the diseases, the sun, the moon, the stars, we are all family, we are all kin. To all live together we help each other reciprocally, mutually; we are in constant conversation” A Peruvian shaman (Terre des Hommes, 2001, 10).

Abstract

The Anthropocene, the current geological epoch in which human activity is the dominant influence on the Earth's climate and ecosystems, poses a serious threat to the planet. This threat is rooted in our anthropocentric worldview, which sees humans as separate from and superior to the natural world. In recent years, however, there has been a growing movement to shift to a more symbiotic worldview, one that recognizes the interdependence of all life on Earth. This paper traces the emergence of a new theory that supports this shift by focusing on the Gaia hypothesis and on Albrecht's notion of the Symbiocene. It argues that these theories offer a more hopeful and sustainable vision for the future of our planet. The paper then builds its premise on the interchange between ecology and literature by examining the novel *Animal's People* by Indra Sinha. This novel depicts a post-apocalyptic world in which humans and animals have been forced to cooperate in order to survive. The paper argues that *Animal's People* offers a powerful example of the potential of a symbiotic worldview.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Gaia, Symbiocene, nature, Indra Sinha, *Animal's People*.

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من الانثروبوسن الى السيمبيوسين: ديناميت جايا عبر رواية شعب الحيوان
"لاندرا سينها"

المستخلص

يشكل الأنثروبوسين، العصر الجيولوجي الحالي الذي يكون فيه النشاط البشري هو التأثير المهيمن على مناخ الأرض والأنظمة البيئية، تهديدًا خطيرًا لكوكب الأرض. إن هذا التهديد متجذر في نظرتنا للعالم التي تتمحور من حول الإنسان، والتي ترى البشر منفصلين عن العالم الطبيعي ومتفوقين عليه. ولكن في السنوات الأخيرة، كانت هناك حركة متنامية للتحويل إلى رؤية عالمية أكثر تكافلية، والتي تعترف بالترابط بين جميع أشكال الحياة على الأرض. وتتبع هذه الورقة ظهور نظرية جديدة تدعم هذا التحول من خلال التركيز على فرضية جايا وعلى فكرة جلين ألبريشت عن السيمبيوسين. ويجادل بأن هذه النظريات تقدم رؤية أكثر تفاؤلاً واستدامة لمستقبل كوكبنا. ثم تبني الورقة فرضيتها على التبادل بين البيئة والأدب من خلال دراسة رواية "شعب الحيوان" التي كتبها إندرا سينها. تصور هذه الرواية عالم ما بعد نهاية العالم حيث يضطر البشر والحيوانات إلى التعاون من أجل البقاء. وتجادل الورقة بأن كتاب Animal's People يقدم مثالاً قوياً على إمكانية وجود رؤية عالمية تكافلية

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Introduction

Adjusting ourselves as humans to the planet we live on requires creating a new approach to look at the world. Instead of the current view of earth as either a gold mine to exploit for the progress of humanity, or earth as a sick planet to love, care for and preserve as an object outside ourselves, a perspective of 'becoming-with-nature,' (Haraway, 2016) which considers humans as part of/entangled with nature is not only recommendable but necessary for the health and sanity of humanity. Thus, a shift is needed from the Anthropocene (our supposedly current geological era) to the Symbiocene (derived from the word symbiosis which means mutual beneficial interaction between organisms). This study will trace the genealogy of the two terms and will also trace how the "Symbiocene" originated from "Gaia" theory upon which more holistic ecological theories are based. The study will also trace the development of alternative views and approaches to the Anthropocene but will choose the more hopeful and nurturing alternative, the "Symbiocene." Emanating from the call in the epigraph that the solution for our environmental problems is cultural, the study will examine the literary manifestations of the term, as literature is a vital component of culture and can assist individuals in expanding their horizons and in viewing a subject from numerous viewpoints. The study chose Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007), because it best reflects the exemplary attitude to life; an attitude that might bring harmony, peace, love and care to our planet. In the following parts, the Anthropocene is going to be defined, several holistic ecological theories are to be compared, then the Symbiocene is going to be traced and linked to Gaia theory, and finally depicted as a manageable and possible way of life in *Animal's People*. The study will conclude with a hopeful call to adopt a more symbiotic approach to life in general so that our planet might be deemed a "just and equitable" planet one day.

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The Anthropocene

The term, Anthropocene, was most likely coined in the early 1980s by University of Michigan ecologist Eugene Stoermer. He suggested the term to refer to the exponential increase in the transformative effects of human activities on the Earth. The term became influential in globalizing discourses in 2000 when the Dutch Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen proposed collaboratively with Stoermer that human activities had been negatively impacting our planet to the extent that we need to use a new geological term for a new epoch, superseding the Holocene, which dated from the end of the last ice age, or the end of the Pleistocene, about twelve thousand years ago. According to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Earth is experiencing an accelerated loss of biodiversity: 75% of terrestrial and 66% of marine environments are 'severely altered' by human actions (IPBES).

However, several scholars were dubious about this alleged power and exceptionalism to humanity. Haraway agrees with Jason Moore in his critique of the Anthropocene. They both argue that the human species per se is not the cause behind this global environmental destruction – it is the hegemonic “Capitalocene” - a “capitalist world-ecology” (Haraway, 2016; Moore, 2017). Nevertheless, both the Anthropocene and Capitalocene are seen as lending themselves “too readily to cynicism, defeatism, and self-certain and self-fulfilling predictions” (Haraway, 2016). Pignarre and Stengers argue that Capitalism operates through a culture of spells that immobilize thinking and paralyze collective action. They argue that anti-capitalist politics needs a counter magic capable of breaking the “spell” and capable of devising new practices of imagination, resistance, revolt, repair, and mourning, and of living and dying well. They remind us that the established disorder is not necessary; another world is not only urgently needed, it is possible, but not if we are ensorcelled in despair, cynicism, or optimism, and the belief/disbelief discourse of Progress.

Interconnectedness with nature

Haraway, in trying to uncover the illusory nature of human exceptionalism, cites, in *When Species Meet*, three historical wounds to human narcissism and superiority: the Copernican wound revealed Earth as only one of many planets in the cosmos, the Darwinian wound placed *Homo sapiens* in a world of companion species, the Freudian wound demonstrated that the unconscious could override the primacy of

conscious processes, including the rationality that led Man to his conviction of "unique excellence" (2008, 12). Haraway emphasizes that humans have always been dependent on and profoundly shaped by their relationships with animals. We can become worldly by "grappling with, rather than generalizing from, the ordinary," as *When Species Meet* demonstrates (2008, 3). Consequently, we may realize that we and other objects are not as distinct as we believe we are and as the view from above might lead us to believe, but rather we are entwined, embodied, and interdependent beings: companion species, a term through which Haraway invites us to see the human as just another knot in the worldwide web of interspecies dependencies.

The work of theorists like Karen Barad, in particular Barad's concept of intra-action serves as the foundation for Haraway's argument. The idea of intra-action is based on the premise that reciprocally transforming intra-actions take place on a variety of scales and timescales, ranging from long-term co-evolutionary processes that have shaped the living habits and even the physical characteristics of each partner (humans and animals for example) to routine microbial interactions between related species and households shared by people. Chen argues that the coherence of the body is continually contested and reciprocally impacted:

What, for instance, is the line between the fetus (often categorized as 'not yet living') and a rights-bearing infant-subject? ... Environmental toxicity and environmental degradation are figured as slow and dreadful threats to flesh, mind, home, and state. Myths of immunity are challenged, and sometimes dismantled, by transnationally figured communicable diseases, some of them apparently borne by nonhuman animals. Healthful or bodily recuperation looks to sophisticated prosthetic instruments, synthetic drugs, and nanotechnologies, yet such potent modifications potentially come with a mourning of the loss of purity and a concomitant expulsion of bodies marked as unworthy of such 'repair' (Chen, 2012, 7).

To put it another way, the human body, which is already a supraorganism in which thousands of species of symbionts (bacteria, archaea and fungi) is just one example of this interconnectedness of species (e.g. Morais et al., 2021). Moving up in the ecosystem, all living organisms are deeply interconnected through matter and energy in the form of the nutrient cycles of the biosphere. Human health, other species' health and planetary health are intertwined (Meynen, 2021). The reciprocity of human and non-human beings was not a sudden inspiration of one particular theorist, but a gradual investigation that has been taking place

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for some time since the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. It is time now to bring Gaia theory to my discussion since it impacted a lot of new ecological holistic theories.

Gaia theory

The call to be one with nature dates back to 'eco-feminism' that sees parallels between patriarchal domination of nature and of women and proposes a transformative philosophy of self and society from 'control' to 'belonging', attributing more value to women's natural and social experiences that equate the feminine connections to nature with the giving and nurturing of life. For instance, Eisler emphasizes the importance of an "eco-feminist manifesto" and "Gaia tradition" that liberate instinctive sensibilities connecting people to nature through the life-giving forces manifested in women's bodies. In order to reshape the (false, unjust) modern (male) concept of reality, ecofeminist theories acknowledge that humanity is dependent on the planet's life-producing matrix. They do this by reintegrating humanity and nature, reshaping the human self toward life-sustaining mutuality or "healing" relationality (Adams, 1993; Reuther, 1992). Such views stress that relationships constitute existence, that humanity's natural place is to be tied emotionally, socially and physically to the Earth. Thus, the paradigm is not domination of the other (Earth) but respect and care for it (a power 'for' not 'over') (Adams, 1993; Starhawk, 1989). Reuther contends that in order to survive, humanity must treat all other forms of life with respect as integral aspects of the energy of which it is a part. She views this as both a privilege and a duty of intelligence.

[James Lovelock](#) used the concept of Gaia to illustrate, contrary to the original myth, not a compassionate mother earth, but rather a self-regulating system made of an array of indivisible elements that evolve through mutual modification. Gaia is not a passive incubator for the technological whims of the human intellect, rather, the earth transformed by the human mind is today 'repaying us in kind'. It reciprocates with disaster (Lovelock, 2000).

This idea of Earth as alive is not a new phenomenon; as Lovelock notes, "The concept of Mother Earth, or...Gaia, has been widely held throughout history and...still coexists with the great religions" (2000, vii). The ancient belief is a holistic view of the Earth as the source of life and cradle of being, interconnected in matter and spirit in an ongoing rhythm of life, death, and regeneration, admitting the life-sustaining interrelationship between humanity and nature and stressing egalitarian,

peaceful practice (in contrast to later male views favouring transcendence and competition). Such ideas function as signs of a ‘new consciousness’ that sees humanity as an integral part of Earth/Gaia in a mutualistic relationship with other life-forms. Consequently, Lovelock claims that the “concept of Gaia, a living planet, is for [him] the essential basis for a coherent and practical environmentalism” (Lovelock, 2000, 173) because Gaia theory is concerned with ecological problems on a global scale, not traditional conservational issues. This new consciousness resulted in a myriad of terms related to the concept of this interconnection of humanity and earth (Gaia) and of the value of all living beings (human or non-human): Deep ecology (Næss, 1973), the view that all living beings have intrinsic value, regardless of their utility to humans; Strong sustainability (Turner, 1993) a concept that regards some resources as too valuable and irreplaceable and should be protected regardless of the profit they might yield; *Agencements* (Despret, 2013) that argues for situated forms of responsibility that emerge from relations with animals; Symbiocene (Albrecht, 2019) a term taken from symbiosis which implies ‘organisms living together’, most often for mutual benefit; Zoe-centered egalitarianism (Braidotti, 2015), the relational capacity of the post-anthropocentric subject to include all non-anthropocentric elements; Chthulucene/tentacular thinking (Haraway, 2008) which means thinking about (or, thinking-with) humans and non-humans in times of heavy losses in life and quality of environment.; Interconnectedness (Oliver, 2020), a sustainability science concept which depicts human (and other) individuals as connected to other beings in a myriad of ways. The idea of the atomistic, autonomous self is an illusion. All of these approaches regard a change from considering ‘us and them’ to ‘all of us’ as essential. This change would generate new motivations to protect biodiversity emanating from an expanded sense of responsibility.

Symbiocene

Initially coined by M. Beth Dempster, the term “sympoiesis” refers to a collective production system with no definition of spatial and temporal limits. The word sympoiesis derives from the ancient Greek *sún* (“with, together”) and *poiēsis* (“creation, production”), meaning “making-with” or “becoming-with,” as opposed to autopoiesis (meaning self-creation). Haraway argues that nothing can really create itself. Therefore, nothing is really autopoietic but needs other organisms and environments to become what it is. In this regard the theory of autopoiesis should be coupled with the theory of sympoiesis, which refers not to autonomous but to collectively produced systems. Sympoietic thinking will yield “response-

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ability,” that is one’s ethical sensitivity and the ability to respond accordingly. Haraway defines “response-ability” as “cultivating collective knowing and doing” (2008, 34); thus, rendering each other (all living beings) capable (Haraway, 2008).

By adopting a sympoietic mindset, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things, we may usher in a new era, the Symbiocene, that nurtures all aspects of being human in a world of other beings: “From the wonder of the ‘wood-wide-web’ of the plant world to the menagerie of the human microbiome, the biosciences have gradually assembled enough evidence for us to fully appreciate the centrality of symbiotic co-existence between diverse species as a foundation for life” (Albrecht, 2019). The term, ‘the Symbiocene’ was first used by Albrecht in a blog post in 2011 in the hope that in a relatively short period of time (perhaps decades), there will come a time for humanity to realize and embrace that almost every element of culture, agriculture, economy, habitat and technology will be seamlessly re-integrated back into earthly symbiotic life (Albrecht, 2019). The idea of the Symbiocene stimulates all humans to create a future where positive Earth emotions will prevail over the negative, in response to “the game is over, it’s too late” (Haraway, 2008) scenario propagated by the Anthropocene. To have a commitment to action requires hope and belief that the action will lead to good outcomes (Albrecht, 2019).

The concept of the Symbiocene is structured around human intelligence that mimics the symbiotic and mutually reinforcing life-reproducing forms and processes inherent in living systems. Such intelligence is latent inside humans since the evolution of humanity as a species within the pre-existing matrix. It calls for all inputs and outputs to be fully recyclable, toxic waste to be eliminated from all facets of human enterprise, renewable energy to be safe and socially just, and human industry and technology to be fully and harmoniously integrated with natural and living systems at all sizes (Albrecht, 2019). This can be attained by what Albrecht calls “symbiomimicry,” a human enterprise that replicates the processes of life eventually producing mutually beneficial associations between different life forms (Albrecht, 2019), and finally yielding a more connected, sustainable, and equitable world.

Symbiocracy

For this symbiotic system to run successfully, we must choose leaders who comprehend and affirm the life-sustaining organic forms, processes, and interactions, and we must grant that governing body the power to

carefully consider a range of innovative proposals from humans. People in positions of authority (Symbiocrats) under a symbiocracy must have a thorough awareness of entire ecosystems and the symbiotic interactions that allow them to function. Humans must use their intellect and resourcefulness to develop overall harmony in a community of interests in order to coexist (Albrecht, 2019). In the following part, Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* will be used to demonstrate the drastic effects of the Capitalocene on the life of poor Indians and the remedial symbiotic attempts at devising a more mutually beneficial and sustainable way of life for all creatures.

Symbiomimery in *Animal's People*

Indra Sinha (born 1950 in India) is a British writer of Indian and English descent. His novel *Animal's People* was shortlisted for the 2007 Booker Prize and winner of the 2008 Commonwealth Writers' Prize. Since its publication in 2007, Indra Sinha's novel, *Animal's People* has been a focus for many studies ranging from the politics of toxic environmental degradation (Mahlstedt, 2009); literary humanitarianism (Rickel, 2012); narratives of catastrophe and ecological posthumanism (Bartosch, 2012); interdisciplinary exchange between postcolonial ecocriticism and green criminology (Carrigan, 2012); disability studies (Chattopadhyay, 2014); mutual engagement between postcolonial studies and disability studies (Kim, 2014); ecological otherness of the human and non-human beings in a postcolonial environment (Ipekci, 2023); the universality of local atrocities (Doing, 2018); and the interrelation of theological anthropology and eco-theology (Pruszinski, 2021).

The novel is based on the industrial disaster of the 1984 Bhopal gas leak and the subsequent toxic contamination that immediately killed at least four thousand people, injured tens of thousands more, and impacted countless number of people in the following three decades due to long-term saturation of soil and groundwater. The novel is set in the fictional city, Khaufpur where Animal, the nineteen-year-old protagonist lives. Sinha was inspired by a report from a friend who had seen a boy going around on all fours in Bhopal. Sinha immediately felt the urge to tell this boy's story and the subsequent complicated ways of surviving and coping in life: "We [the character Animal and Sinha] talked at once and had huge arguments. He didn't want a bit part. He wanted to tell it all," says Sinha (Vaiju, 2007). Sinha, in choosing Animal to narrate the story not just in writing but in his own voice in the form of recording tapes, "further displaces the idea of the human as a sovereign creator and architect of testimony" (Richardson and Zolkos, 2023, 7). Sinha is attesting to the

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myth of human exceptionalism and arguing for human and nonhuman “environmental embeddedness and reciprocity” (Richardson and Zolkos, 2023, 7). Animal was born days before the chemical gas disaster and his backbone was severely deformed to the extent that he can no longer walk upright. He was brought up by a French nun, Ma Franci, after being orphaned by the disaster. He makes a living using his wit and by sometimes quarreling over food with dogs among which he got to know his companion dog, Jara. He gradually falls in love with a young girl, Nisha, the daughter of a once famous singer whose lungs were damaged in the accident. However, Nisha is in love with Zafar, an outsider who came to Khafpur to advocate on behalf of the Khafpuri people against the “kampani.” Elli, an American doctor, is another outsider who arrives at Khafpur to establish a clinic to cure the people still suffering the enduring impact of the disaster.

Here we have a group of dissimilar living beings (human) like Zafar, Nisha, Somraj, Elli and Ma Franci, and (non-human) like Animal and his dog Jara and the talking embryo in the jar. Although Animal has a chance towards the end to undergo an operation and walk upright, he dismisses this opportunity and opts to stay as an animal walking on all fours. This group eventually will reflect reciprocal care and nurturance where neither side is rendered quiet nor passive, and neither side is the only one being acted upon and lacks the ability to act back against the actor(s). Each member in the group inspires and is inspired by the other. In all kinds of human creativity, we not only mimic the form of life (biomimicry), but also the mechanisms by which strong and healthy relationships between various living forms are created. It seems that organizing resources and procedures so that the young, weak, and vulnerable get their fair share in order for the totality to have the best chance of survival and thriving is crucial to existence, as evidenced by examples like the “wood-wide-web.” The use of symbiomimicry in human industry will produce and distribute resources in such a way that, by nourishing all people, we thereby nourish the ecosystem upon which we all rely (Albrecht, 2019). The wood-wide-web is a still researched hypothesis that contends that trees share resources and potentially communicate with each other through fungal interlocutors, “the least affected trees might be able to continue photosynthesizing, and supply struggling trees with carbon, thereby increasing the resilience of the entire community” (quoted in Yong, 2016), urging scientists to think that “Forests might be more socialist than we thought,” (quoted in Yong, 2016). If humans are to learn from such an

ecosystem, it will be to stop accumulation of excess resources and gifting them to others (humans or non-humans) in more need.

The goal of the group is to try to hold the kampani accountable for the damage it caused to the Khaufpuri people and environment. They were able to risk everything—for them, nothing—to seek retribution against the Kampani during the Khaufpuris' immense suffering. The Khaufpuri people gain the most power as a result of their extreme suffering because they have nothing to lose: “We have nothing and this makes us strong. Not just strong, but invincible. Having nothing, we can never be defeated” (56). This force fuels the pursuit of justice by Zafar, Animal, Nisha, Farouq, and the others and finally aids in their victory. They are able to stop the kampani from avoiding accountability for the thousands of Khaufpuri deaths it has caused.

The Khaufpuri people succeeded in doing so, and they were able to rise up and bring about change. The Khaufpuri did defeat the adversary of hopelessness. Having gained confidence and authority, they now have optimism that the Kampani will be held accountable for its atrocities. They've discovered a kind of strength within themselves and Animal vanquishes his own enemy, which includes his sentiments of alienation, dread of hope, and fear of being rejected, “A desperate business is hope, not to be encouraged if you can be content with small happiness, but the curse of human beings and this animal alike is that whatever you have, always you want more” (59). This quote reflects the wise saying of India's great moral leader Mohandas Gandhi that there is enough on Earth for everybody's need, but not enough for everybody's greed. If humans care and nurture for earth/Gaia, it will support the needs of all its inhabitants. This is a call to forsake the Capitalist mindset and adopt a Symbiotic one; for instance, trees and other plants take only their needs of water and nutrients because excessive watering will lead to lack of oxygen and roots would die, and excessive nutrients can be toxic. Consequently, excessive water and nutrients are transferred to other plants in more need. This Symbiotic way of thinking might guarantee living beings will not be leading their life, at least within the near future, with fear of imminent extinction.

In the beginning of the novel, Animal adopts this way of thinking but for the wrong reasons: “Grim animal living without hope, that’s how I saw myself. I asked nothing, expected less and was filled with anger at the world” (83). Animal feels bitter towards other humans and acts as an outsider. Animal is self-centered, grudgingly jealous of Zafar for being loved by Nisha. He made selfish, animalistic decisions for self-preservation, such as spying on Elli, poisoning Zafar, and divulging one

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of Somraj's secrets, but he nevertheless feels regret for each one of them; this guilt is evidence of his human character. Additionally, Somraj's prompt pardon emphasizes his people's unwavering acceptance of him in spite of Animal's attempt to remove himself from them.

The group in its affection and support to Animal helps in his transformation and conviction that he is absolutely human. Animal changes as he considers and absorbs his experience, becoming more conscious of the humanity he does possess. Animal understands that the people who live with him—Ma, his friends, and his neighbors—love, accept, and support him just as he is. He is regarded by them as a "full and true human being." He is overtaken with sorrow and tears when he recalls the horror of his attempt to poison Zafar. The expression of feeling on the outside is a symbolic acknowledgement of Animal's human nature, and this moment marks a turning point in his life.

Sinha subverts the definition of humanity in his novel. Despite resembling a beast, Animal is much more human—and undoubtedly more compassionate—than the novel's antagonists. In addition to denying responsibility for the lives it has destroyed, the Kampani and its legal team display a lack of empathy and arrogance when confronted with the pain of the victims. When Nisha considers the hopelessness of the Khaufpuri's quest for justice, she asserts that appeals to humanity are useless because they are "not human" but rather animals. This viewpoint reveals the flaw in Animal's reasoning. One's compassion, love, and care for others are what define one as a "normal" human being. In addition, the title of the novel *Animal's People* includes not just human beings but animals as well. Animal in counting the best "people" in his life, includes Jara, the dog: "in this world my best *people* have always been women, such as Jara, Ma Franci, Nisha" (79, my italics). Thus, humanity is not limited to bodily shapes as much as the feelings of love, care and support for each other. Sinha's novel *Animal's People* subverts the traditional definition of humanity by showing that compassion and love, rather than physical appearance, are the true markers of what it means to be human.

***Animal's People* and Symbiocracy**

In the present era of the Anthropocene, the governing bodies are usually big industries moguls supported by armies of lawyers and dictators who are frenzied by huge profits. In the Symbiocene, the government should be in the hands of Symbiocrats who are aware of the totality of the ecosystem in order to be just in the distributing of resources. In addition, Symbiocrats are required to arm their subjects with the necessary tools to

make them capable to help Earth others. In *Animal's People*, the Symbiocrats are outsiders and insiders: outsiders like Ma Franci, Elli and Zafar. Ma Franci is a French nun who brought the orphaned Animal up and who still refuses to leave India back to France even if this means putting her own life at risk. Ma is also an outsider who is there to help those in need, accordingly, she is fully embraced by the community. She behaves like a Khaufpuri despite being a Westerner of a different religion, language, and culture. She is another victim of that night and has experienced their anguish with them. Elli, the American doctor who comes to help alleviate the pain of the victims of the disaster and whose trust she gradually gains. Initially, the Khaufpuris do not accept Elli because they believe she is a Westerner coming to “clean up” the mess the kampani caused. However, Elli's is as resolved to care for the sick in her clinic, as Ma is adamant about staying in Khaufpur. The third outsider is Zafar who is an Indian but not from Khaufpur and who is also willing to give his life by going on a hunger strike for the goal of holding the kampani accountable. If we are to notice anything, it is the common goal among the three of them; namely, public good. The insiders are Somraj, Nisha's father, Nisha, Animal and his friend Farouq. The latter joins Zafar in his hunger strike in a token of solidarity with the means he can afford. Animal, after experiencing the love, acceptance and support of the group, now works for the benefit of everyone instead of only concentrating on himself. He starts to change from a willful outsider to someone who belongs at this point. One of the key feelings that bonded Animal to the group was trust: “Zafar was always giving me chances to prove what a good-hearted trustworthy guy I was. It had turned into a kind of contest” (83). Initially, the more trust Zafar places in Animal, the more lightly and contemptuous of the tasks Animal becomes. However, eventually, Zafar wins the “contest” and Animal abandons his violent animosity towards life and surrenders to feelings of gratitude to such trust. In other words, Animal is taken over by our innate humane human nature.

The initial misunderstandings and disharmony among this group of insiders and outsiders eventually turns into an exemplary social cell to be copied elsewhere all over the planet. Animal, an outcast insider, and Elli, an unwanted outsider, start to feel accepted by and develop a level of intimacy with the others. Somraj's demonstration of support for Elli builds a bridge between them and paves the way for the community to welcome her. Additionally, Animal develops a deeper intimacy with those around him. Farouq physically puts himself at risk to save Animal's life, and Zafar and Elli's decision to forbid him from taking part in the fire

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walk is an act of protection. Even while Animal does not yet appear to understand the complexity of these bonds, it becomes increasingly obvious how much his people love him. Through his hunger strike, Zafar contrasts corrupt Khaufpuri politicians and the Kampani. The Khaufpuri people view him as a hero because of his selflessness.

As mentioned before, Symbiocrats are to render the creatures they govern capable. In this vein, Animal is able to release the Khã-in-the-jar (friend-in-the-jar) out of pure willpower. The Khã-in-the-jar is an aborted fetus due to the gas disaster kept for study, a disfigured embryo with two heads who kept begging Animal to set him free. The Khã-in-the-jar is neither human nor animal, neither living nor dead. Thus, humans (outsiders and insiders) help animals (Animal) who in turn help earth others (Khã-in-the-jar). It is like a chain of power that would not be kept in the hands of the few. Instead of a vertical hierarchy of power, in a Symbiocracy, the power chain will flow horizontally, enabling all creatures, humans or non-humans to care for and nurture each other. Additionally, the membership in such a chain is not exclusive to living creatures because, symbolically when Animal sets the Khã-in-the-jar free, he is enabling a liminal creature who is “not yet living” (Chen, 2012) to roam in Earth and do whatever Gaian function is ascribed to him/her. In this Deleuzian assemblages, every element in the system (human or non-human; living or non-living) has a role to play and a hand to lend to fellow elements.

The power of nature

Animal's relationship with nature is complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, he is alienated from nature by the gas leak, which has left him physically and emotionally scarred. On the other hand, he finds comfort and healing in nature. He spends his days wandering through the ruins of Khaufpur, and he finds companionship in the animals that have also been displaced by the disaster. Nothing is excluded in this dynamic, relational Gaian world depicted by Sinha; not in the least is nature. Sinha uses nature as a metaphor for the human condition. The gas leak is a symbol of the destructive power of human industry, and it has caused widespread suffering and death. However, nature also represents hope and resilience. The animals of Khaufpur are survivors, and they remind Animal that life can still be found even in the midst of devastation. The power of nature can be felt throughout the novel in the form of nature, in the very beginning, trying to take over and claim back the land poisoned by the kampani:

Mother Nature's trying to take back the land. Wild Sandalwood trees have arrived, who knows how, must be their seeds were shat by overflying birds. Creepers brown and thick as my wrist, have climbed all the way to the top, tightly they've wrapped wooden knuckles round pipes and ladders, like they want to rip down everything the company made. (35)

Nature is helping, together with humans, in redeeming the land in order to be habitable again. The forest and the rain help Animal in the process of transformation into a compassionate human being. In the most desperate moment of remorse over what he did to Zafar, Animal sits under a Frangipani tree and, in a suicidal attempt, swallows the left-over pills that he used to give to Zafar. He falls into a hallucinatory condition where he imagines ghosts and demons talking to him. Then comes the rains that put an end to Nautapa, the hottest time of the year, and bring about Animals' salvation and revelation. When he learns about the previous days' events—of Zafar and Farouq using their influence to thwart the Kampani's deal and of Ma's brave, self-sacrificing death—the rain that washes his body as he emerges from his hallucinogenic trip is symbolic of his rebirth. He finally expresses his emotions openly before breaking down in tears. He gives himself permission to completely comprehend the depths of human emotion. The trip to the forest is a cleansing one to Animal; it helps him look at his neighboring humans and environmental surroundings with compassion, care and love.

From Anthropocene to Symbiocene: Gaian Dynamics in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

Conclusion

Our planet is suffering as a result of our anthropocentric worldview. We have seen ourselves as separate from nature and have exploited it for our own benefit. However, new theories are emerging that suggest we need to shift to a more symbiotic worldview. This means seeing ourselves as part of nature, not separate from it. We need to value our connection with nature and work to protect it. The Gaia theory suggests that the Earth is a living organism and that all living things on Earth are interconnected, thus, each one of us plays a role in maintaining the health of the planet. The paper used Albrecht's notion of the Symbiocene, a view that asserts the urgency of the need to move from the Anthropocene to a more symbiotic era. In the Symbiocene, humans and nature would live in harmony, working together to create a sustainable future. Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* provides a fictional example of a more symbiotic society where humans and animals live together in harmony, working together to rebuild their community after a devastating industrial disaster. The novel suggests that it is possible to create a more sustainable and just society if we shift to a more symbiotic worldview. However, it will require a major change in our thinking and behavior, in short, in our culture. We need to start seeing ourselves as part of nature, not separate from it. We need to value our connection with nature and work to protect it. If we can do this, we can create a more sustainable and just future for ourselves and for generations to come.

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