

Crippling the Eco-Disaster: Imagining Disability Ecologies in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* and Veena Nagpal's *Radius 200*

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37536/ECOZONA.2026.17.2.6082>



Abstract

This essay situates eco-crip theory in a postcolonial context and argues that the Indian English novels *Animal's People* (2007) and *Radius 200* (2014) envision the eco-disaster in the so-called Global South as a site of emerging disability ecologies that inextricably entangle the human and the more-than-human in a web of mutual material-discursive enmeshments. I suggest that the novels imagine disability experiences in the Global South in the aftermath of disaster in manifold entangled relations with the more-than-human, thus destabilizing universalizing notions of disability. While Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* is a fictionalisation of the aftermath of the 1984 Bhopal Disaster in India, where a chemical gas leak in a pesticide factory killed thousands of people and animals as well as leaving thousands more chronically ill, Veena Nagpal's *Radius 200* is set in an India of a not-so-distant future, in which a rivalry over water resources between India and China results in a Chinese nuclear attack on the city of Allahabad, creating a 200 mile-radius Exclusion Zone in which a group of survivors is left to fend for itself. Reading these two Indian English novels together can shed light on eco-crip relations in India by centering the eco-crip within specific cultural, social, political and material contexts that make visible "the actual lived experience of disabled people in the Global South" (Krentz 5), and the manifold more-than-human enmeshments that shape experiences of disability. By thematically and aesthetically envisioning new forms of disability subjectivities that emerge as material-discursive entanglements between the human and the more-than-human in disaster-ridden environments, the novels can contribute to the production of knowledge about specific disability experiences in the Global South.

Keywords: Transcorporeality, disability ecology, Indian English fiction, eco-disaster, slow violence.

Resumen

Este ensayo sitúa la teoría *eco-crip* en un contexto poscolonial, y sostiene que las novelas en inglés de la India *Animal's People* (2007) y *Radius 200* (2014) conciben el desastre ecológico en el denominado Sur Global como un escenario de ecologías de la discapacidad emergentes que entrelazan inextricablemente lo humano y lo más-que-humano en una red de interdependencias materiales y discursivas mutuas. Sugiero que las novelas imaginan las experiencias de discapacidad en el Sur Global tras el desastre en múltiples relaciones entrelazadas con lo más-que-humano, desestabilizando así las nociones universalizadoras de la discapacidad. Mientras que *Animal's People*, de Indra Sinha, es una novelización de las secuelas del desastre de Bhopal de 1984 en la India—donde una fuga de gas químico en una fábrica de pesticidas mató a miles de personas y animales, además de dejar a otros miles con enfermedades crónicas—, *Radius 200*, de Veena Nagpal, se ambienta en una India de un futuro no muy lejano, en la que una rivalidad por los recursos hídricos entre la India y China da lugar a un ataque nuclear chino contra la ciudad de Allahabad, creando una zona de exclusión de 200 millas de radio en la que un grupo de supervivientes se ve obligado a valerse por sí mismo. La lectura conjunta de estas dos novelas indias escritas en inglés puede arrojar luz sobre las relaciones entre lo ecológico y lo discapacitado en la India, al situar lo ecológico y lo discapacitado en contextos culturales, sociales, políticos y materiales específicos que hacen visible "la experiencia real vivida por las personas con discapacidad en el Sur Global" (Krentz 5), así como los múltiples entrelazamientos más allá de lo humano que dan forma a las experiencias de la discapacidad. Al imaginar, desde un punto de vista temático y estético, nuevas formas de subjetividades de la discapacidad que surgen como

entrelazamientos materiales y discursivos entre lo humano y lo más que humano en entornos azotados por desastres, estas novelas pueden contribuir a la generación de conocimiento sobre experiencias específicas de discapacidad en el Sur Global.

Palabras clave: Transcorporalidad, ecología de la discapacidad, ficción en inglés de la India, eco-desastre, violencia lenta.

Introduction

India can be regarded as one of the countries that is most affected by the consequences of anthropogenic climate change. It is not surprising, therefore, that in recent years a growing body of fiction from the subcontinent has emerged that deals with environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, climate migration and speculative climate futures. Given the high rate of pollution and toxicity in India that are the results of neoliberal, neocolonial and capitalist practices, authors such as Indra Sinha and Veena Nagpal have paid attention to the calamitous consequences of eco-disasters in an Indian context as well as to their effects on human and more-than-human environments. Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007) is a fictionalization of the aftermath of the 1984 Bhopal Disaster in India, where a chemical gas leak in a pesticide factory killed thousands of people and animals as well as leaving thousands more chronically ill and disabled. Veena Nagpal's *Radius 200* (2014) is set in an India of a not-so-distant future, in which a rivalry over water resources between India and China results in a Chinese nuclear attack on the North Indian city of Allahabad (nowadays known as Prayagraj), creating a 200 mile-radius Exclusion Zone in which a group of survivors is left to fend for itself.

Both novels negotiate the emergence of disabled bodies and environments as a result of extractive neocolonial practices (*Animal's People*) and increasing geopolitical crises due to climate change (*Radius 200*).¹ This essay situates eco-crip theory in a postcolonial context and argues that the novels envision the eco-disaster in the so-called Global South as a site of emerging disability ecologies that inextricably entangle the human and the more-than-human in a web of material-discursive enmeshments. I suggest that the novels imagine disability experiences in the Global South in the aftermath of disaster in manifold entangled relations with the more-than-human, thus destabilizing universalizing notions of disability. While *Animal's People* has already garnered much scholarly attention in the environmental humanities, postcolonial studies and—increasingly—in disability studies, due to its championing of the disabled protagonist Animal and his unique narrative voice, *Radius 200* has not been the focus of much literary or cultural studies scholarship as of yet. The few articles that were published on this novel have dealt with the ramifications of the water crisis in India but have not addressed questions of disability (Rajbanshi and

¹ Snyder and Mitchell define disability as a “continuum of human embodiment” (5) and a “site of phenomenological value that is not purely synonymous with the processes of social disablement” (6).

Kumar; Degener). By juxtaposing the well-known *Animal's People* with the lesser-known *Radius 200*, this article moreover tries to broaden the discussion of literary negotiations of disability experiences in India and their different approaches to narration and aesthetics. While both novels are set in India, *Radius 200* takes place in a post-apocalyptic speculative future, and *Animal's People* is a fictionalisation of a real historical event that still has repercussions to this day. Yet in an eco-crip context, the two novels provide interesting parallels: Both novels take place in the aftermath of eco-disaster and negotiate questions of uncertain climate futures and living with disability in cities wrecked by eco-disasters that are propelled by neoliberal, neocolonial and geopolitical power structures, as well as address questions of mass disablement as consequence of such disasters.² Reading these two Indian English novels together can shed light on eco-crip relations in India by centering the eco-crip within specific cultural, social, political and material contexts that make visible “the actual lived experience of disabled people in the Global South” (Krentz 5), and the manifold more-than-human enmeshments that shape experiences of disability.³

The significance of zooming in on the eco-crip in a Global South context becomes evident through a postcolonial lens: In their influential article on the relationship between disability and postcolonialism, Clare Barker and Stuart Murray argue for a decolonization of disability studies that question the unreflected application of social models of disability in postcolonial contexts without regarding matters of colonial history and neocolonial practices.⁴ The need for analyses that take into account the “cultural locatedness” and particularity of disability experiences becomes more important than ever, such as attending to specific cultural beliefs about health and disability, as well as to colonial and neocolonial practices that engendered mass disablement in specific regions of the world (228–230). As Esme Cleall shows, about 80% out of the more than 1 billion disabled people around the world reside in the Global South (1), thereby highlighting the need for a reframing of disability experiences in different geographical and cultural contexts, in which disability is no longer the deviation from the norm. Moreover, Helen Meekosha pleads for a decolonization of disability studies, arguing that “critical disability studies itself needs to be re-formulated, to theorize relationships that have arisen from colonialism and postcolonial power,” and criticizing a universalizing tendency in disability studies that holds critical concepts from the Global North as standard (669). The importance of attending to disability when examining colonial and neocolonial relations also becomes evident when looking at colonial practices of othering the colonized body that informed notions of bodily normativity and ableism, such as in the

² Jina Kim has investigated the role of mass disablement and postcolonialism in *Animal's People* in her article “People of the Apokalis: Spatial Disability and the Bhopal Disaster” (2014).

³ I use the term more-than-human rather than non-human to point towards the various material enmeshments that the human is an inextricable part of and that relates both the human and the non-human in multiple creative ways.

⁴ I will use the terms Global North and Global South in the sense of unevenly distributed forms of inequality of regions around the world due to specific historical and geopolitical forces and developments.

hierarchization of bodily impairments during the slave trade and the projection of anxieties by colonizers on the bodies of colonized peoples (Grech 10–11). Combining a postcolonial lens with an eco-crip framework can thus be a fruitful merger of disciplinary perspectives with regard to examining literary articulations of disablement in the Global South in the wake of eco-disaster and the various material-discursive relationalities that emerge therewith.

Crip theory and the verb *cripping*, as McRuer argues, try to exceed the well-known and often criticized medical and social models of disability by highlighting the “materiality of embodiment” as well as how able-bodiedness and disability are binarized and brought into an oppositional and hierarchical relationship in specific public discourses (*Crip Times* 24).⁵ McRuer explains the necessity of *cripping* in destabilizing and “radically revisioning” ableist structures in all their forms (*Crip Times* 22). Moreover, in recent years, the environmental humanities and disability studies have mutually benefitted from each other, with scholars highlighting the interconnections between built environments and the privileging of certain bodies, as well as the influence of toxic environments on the physical and mental health of local populations (Ray and Sibara 2–3). Eco-crip theory has proposed new ways of thinking about the disabled body as contingent upon environmental accessibilities and inaccessibilities: New Materialist scholar Stacy Alaimo calls for a “cripping [of] environmental studies” and the addition of “multispecies perspectives” to disability studies (“Foreword” xi). By focusing on entangled, relational and embodied epistemologies, eco-crip theory can draw from Posthumanism(s), New Materialism(s) and other forms of relational Materialism(s), as well as on Indigenous epistemologies (Alaimo, “Foreword” xi–xii). Merging these interdisciplinary interests of the eco-crip can therefore highlight the limitations of social constructionist and medical models by foregrounding the interplay between particular material dimensions of bodies, their relationship with more-than-human environments, and political, cultural and social forces.

A renewed focus on the inextricability of material and social relations in eco-crip theory is highlighted by Kupetz who coined the term “disability ecology” (2019). He defines it as a conceptual framework that is “part of the broader rediscovery of the body as site, critical lens, and sensuous experience already occurring throughout the social sciences and humanities” (48), thereby trying to circumvent the limitations of social constructionist models. Drawing on new materialist thought, he argues that such an approach to disability makes visible the manifold enmeshments that structure the lives of disabled people, while also emphasizing the approach’s usefulness in propelling a reimagination of disability as a “material semiotic effect of the social relationships between embodied individual and a range of nonhuman

⁵ While medical models foreground disability as an individual bodily problem that needs to be cured and overcome, social approaches to disability disavow a pathologization of individuals while viewing disability as produced by systemic power structures and exclusionary practices (Marks 86–89), thereby disregarding the very materiality of physical or mental impairments, the possible pain that comes with that, as well as the wish for medical intervention by some individuals (Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* 7–8).

actors, including cultural practices, institutions, and technologies” (50).⁶ This intricate relationality between human and more-than-human agents and forces thus makes disability a “dynamic state of perpetual becoming, not a fixed condition with a stable meaning” (55). Accordingly, disability ecologies encompass both human and more-than-human forces that are in constant flux with each other, thereby destabilizing the notion of the boundedness of material human bodies and foregrounding the role of the more-than-human, such as toxins or other more-than-human substances and environments, in shaping disability experiences (48-49). Viewing disability through the lens of disability ecology can thus contribute to a destabilization of ableist, neoliberal and other forms of oppression against disabled people as well as to a reframing of looking at the disabled body in a continual process of emerging with the more-than-human.

In this vein, disability ecologies shall provide the conceptual framework for my analysis of the eco-disasters in *Animal's People* and *Radius 200*. Anthony Carrigan has highlighted the relationship between eco-disasters, the emergence of disabilities in such disaster zones and the postcolonial state, claiming that representations of disability in postcolonial literature might help us to reframe conceptualisations of disability in a global context. He argues that “regional militarization and neocolonial power consolidation have combined to produce what can be viewed as a disabling environment, in which disability and disaster operate in processual terms”, which is why disability is a part of everyday life for many people in formerly colonized regions (255-256). The ethical dimension of living in post-disaster environments is foregrounded by Pramod K. Nayar, who coined the term *ecoprecarity* to delineate the interdependent forms of precarity the human and the more-than-human experience in the wake of disaster (7). Such interdependencies can create an “erosion of species boundaries and new forms of species alignment, about the nature of Nature and the nature of life in a world of potentially combinatory life forms” (11). A disability ecology lens on eco-disasters can thus foreground the various human and more-than-human enmeshments that exceed bounded and fixed notions of the disabled body and disabled environments. Accordingly, my analysis of *Animal's People* and *Radius 200* suggests that by crippling the eco-disaster in the Global South, normative frames of viewing disability are laid open and alternative disability subjectivities emerge as a relational process of material, social, political and cultural enmeshments that renegotiates the production and experience of disability in the Global South.

Crip(ping) Time in the (Post-)Apocalypse

As both novels are set in the aftermath of the ‘apocalyptic’ events of the disasters, the manifold temporal relations in the disaster-ridden environments and specific disabled subjectivities that emerge out of these settings shall provide the starting point of my analysis. Lawrence Buell describes the “[a]pocalypse is the single

⁶ New Materialists focus on the co-emergence of manifold and swarming materialities, situating the human within complex material flows with the more-than-human (Coole and Frost 7).

most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" (285), highlighting the ubiquity of this trope in cultural and literary discourses associated with suddenness and spectacularity. Yet the (post-)apocalypse in *Animal's People* and *Radius 200* reveals specific negotiations of crip(ped) time in disaster-ridden environments—on both narrative and thematic levels. Such temporal disability ecologies thus destabilize ableist and neoliberal notions of time associated with linearity and progress.

Sinha's work *Animal's People* is based on the 1984 biochemical disaster in Bhopal, India. On the night of December 2nd, 1984, methyl isocyanate began to leak from the factory into Bhopal, leaving more than three thousand people dead immediately, mostly people from the slums around the factory, as well as killing thousands of animals (Broughton 1–2). Thousands more died over the following years from cancer and other illnesses caused by gas leak (Kim n.p.). Sinha's *Animal's People* is set in the city of Khaufpur, a fictional stand-in for Bhopal, nineteen years after the disaster. The novel tells the story of Animal, a teenage boy whose spine was distorted during the night of the disaster, leaving him walking on both hands and feet and resulting in his name Animal.

Animal's People fruitfully subverts the spectacularity and suddenness of apocalyptic scenarios by a formulation of an apocalypse that is outside of the boundaries of linear human time. For the people of Khaufpur, the "Apokalis" is on their doorstep and has "started on that night in Khaufpur" (Sinha 63). As the French nun Ma Franci proclaims, "We are the people of the Apokalis" (63). She prophesies that "[t]error will return to this city. It began here, here it will end" (63–64). Yet to that, Animal sarcastically replies: "Fucking world didn't end. It's still suffering" (64). As a consequence of "that night" (1), the city is permeated by toxic matter, which calls to mind Rob Nixon's term of *slow violence*, namely "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). The novel is filled with characters who suffer from physical or mental impairments due to the gas leak, such as lung diseases and walking impairments, highlighting the massive scale of disablement that occurred during that night. The chemicals of the factory have created an active network of toxicity throughout the city that transcends corporeal boundaries and showcases the deep entanglement of the body with its environment: "[W]ells are full of poison. It's in the soil, water, in our blood, it's in our milk. Everything here is poisoned. If you stay here long enough, you will be too" (107–8). By materially intra-acting with the bodies of Khaufpuris, the chemicals and poisonous gases cause illness and death in the city over a prolonged period of time.⁷ Animal describes the people as "hav[ing] that look common among Khaufpuris, tiredness, sickness, futility, their faces drift and dissolve like pools of cloud" (235). The faces of

⁷ Barad defines intra-actions as "specific causal material enactments that may or may not involve 'humans'" (171). As such, these enactments are non-deterministic and in a constant processual becoming involving "relata [that] do not preexist relations" (140). Agents in material-discursive phenomena thus always come into existence in a relational emergence with other agents.

the Khaufpuris are here metaphorically equated with the poisonous gases that have brought the apocalypse upon them, recalling Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality", which she defines as a "new materialist and posthumanist sense of the human as substantially and perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of environments" ("States of Suspension" 476). Spectacular apocalyptic tropes are here subverted by renegotiating the apocalypse as a slow phenomenon that affects the Khaufpuris since the night of the disaster nineteen years ago and continues to create a stagnant existence for them. The more-than-human time scale of toxic chemicals that take effect over many years is here then enmeshed with a human scale temporality, as the poisoning of Khaufpur outlasts the lifespans of most of the people in the city. The slow violence of toxicity is crippled by the ongoing process of material-discursive intra-relations that affect the citizens of Khaufpur even after the initial event of disaster.

Such material-discursive and trans-corporeal relations between the human and the more-than-human are moreover emphasised when Animal imaginatively takes the reader on a tour around the abandoned factory. He addresses the reader with "Eyes, I wish you could come with me into the factory. Step through one of these holes, you're into another world. [...]. Listen, how quiet it's. No bird song. No hoppers in the grass. [...]. Insects can't survive here. [...]" (29). Animal introduces the factory as a spectral world in which the effects of the toxins kill the local fauna and the ghosts of the deceased "shriek [...] up and down the empty pipes" (32). The slow violence of the chemicals that have changed Animal's body now allows him to access the poisoned environment as a "four-foot creature climbing in the trees and pipes" (32) and "[p]erched like a monkey on top of this poison-khana" (32). Yet while the factory is a spectral place, Animal points out an ensuing green life that sprouts through the abandoned interior: "Look inside, you see something strange, a forest is growing, tall grasses, bushes, trees, creepers that shoot sprays of flowers like fireworks" (29). The abandoned factory shows clear signs of life that are trying to make their way through the industrial waste. He moreover notices that within the factory compound

a silent war is being waged. Mother Nature's trying to take back the land. [...]. Under the poison house trees are growing up through the pipework. Creepers...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 Kampani made. (31)

The sprouting green life within the factory stands in stark contrast to the eerie silence in and around the factory. The creepers try to tear down the factory and its cruel legacy, thereby highlighting the vitality and agentic materiality of the natural environment in and around the area. The factory is thus at once breeding ground for death and life and nature here arguably takes back its claim, yet it is still deeply interwoven with the industrial human-made grounds of the factory and its discursive ramifications.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's plea for a recognition of the inextricability of human historical time and the vast geological temporalities of more-than-human "deep time and deep history" (8) illuminate the enmeshment of the human within vaster human

historical and more-than-human timescales in *Animal's* factory tour. This view disavows notions of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism by embedding humans within a timescale that far exceeds human evolution. In a similar manner, Paul Huebener calls for an “untangling [of] the complexities of time in its many cultural and ecological forms” (11). This is why the image of the clock is ill-suited to vouch for the various social, individual, and ecological temporal interlacements and thus for the various temporal levels at work on earth (20). The “nother world” (Sinha 2) of the factory becomes a disabled space in which the spectacularity of apocalypse is here again crippled by locating the eco-disaster within various intra-relating human and more-than-human temporalities that exceed and undermine ableist notions of time.

Not only does the nonlinear trajectory of apocalypse foreground the emergence of disabled bodies and environments as always already trans-corporeally and temporally enmeshed with each other and other discursive forces, it also suggests specific notions of crip time experienced by the protagonist *Animal*. While Alison Kafer argues that crip time must exceed formulations of time tied to ableist and capitalist notions of productivity and profitable outcomes (“After Crip, Crip Afters” 420–21), Brad Bierdz is more radical in his conceptualisation of crip time: “Crip time must remain within notions of nonsense and indeterminability—outside the determinations of time as an organizing apparatus that is maintained in order to understand inter-subjective experience” (565). For *Animal*, time ceases to be progressive, as for him it is “Now o'clock, always now o'clock. In the Kingdom of the Poor, time doesn't exist” (Sinha 185). His description of “now o'clock” is contradictory in ableist terms, negating progressive notions of time, while describing time with temporal indicators such as ‘o'clock’ or ‘always’. Time in Khaufpur is non-existent and does not order experience but encompasses it. It is, as Bierdz suggests, an “immanence” that evades binary notions of temporality and atemporality (560). The slowness of disaster renders time neither ongoing nor stagnant, but rather as a continual negotiation of something that moves outside of and between temporal parameters. *Animal's* embodied experience of time suggests a living with and outside of ableist and progressive notions of time itself. While he as a narrator and focalizer directly speaks to the reader and tries to put his experience into words, the specific experience of “now o'clock” evades the reader. Like the chemical gas leak that disabled the city, *Animal's* immanent experience of crip time leaks out of the pages and can never be fully captured in normative terms.

This notion of nonnormative crip time experienced by *Animal* is further corroborated at the end of the novel, when he flees into a nearby forest to commit suicide by an overdose of datura pills and has a near-death experience:

There are animals of every kind, leopards and deer and horses and elephants, there's a tiger and a rhino, among them are small figures on two legs, except some have horns some have tails they are neither men nor animals, or else they are both, then I know that I have found my kind, plus this place will be my everlasting home, I have found it at last, this is the deep time when there was no difference between anything when separation did not exist when all things were together, one and whole before humans set themselves apart and became clever and made cities and kampanis and factories.

Time in paradise is like in the Nutcracker, it ceases to have meaning, suns and moons migrate into the sky and tumble into the west. Days pass, or maybe it's just one, or years, or thousands of years, I am immortal. (352)

Animal imagines an Edenic paradise in which earth's more-than-human deep time is here collapsed with his experience of crip time in the disaster-ridden city. It is a relational and simultaneously non-relational notion of time that materially enmeshes human with the more-than-human disabled bodies and that dissolves notions of progressivity and linearity associated with capitalist and neoliberal temporal logic. This paradise, in which time does not follow linear patterns, becomes a place in which so-called animals like him can thrive. In this imagination, disabled people are no longer framed by exclusionary ableist, neoliberal and neocolonial structures that render people like him invisible and disposable. Thus, disability is reframed as processual becoming that is not stable and clearly definable and always already entangled with more-than-human agents in complex and nonnormative temporal relations.

Animal narrates the story in episodic cassette tapes, which he records for an Australian journalist who intends to write a book about life in post-disaster Khaufpur. As some critics have argued, the novel follows the conventions of the picaresque novel, which had its beginnings in 16th-century Spain as a "countergenre" that reacted against the Spanish aristocracy and aristocratic language as well as "classical literary forms" (Nixon 56). With regard to the structure of *Animal's People*, Stacey Balkan moreover argues, "[t]he novel parodies representational strategies that augment the project of global capitalism—specifically, the liberal narrative of development—through its episodic form, and with a narrator whose mutilated body illustrates the toxic underside of industrial progress" (116–17). The novel's episodic structure moreover reinforces the complex notion of crip(ped) time as a time that works outside of normative frameworks. Animal's tapes are fairly disconnected from each other, telling different episodes of his life in Khaufpur, such as his quest of winning the love of the local girl Nisha, or spying on the American doctor Elli Barber. This also ties in with his establishment of an absolute narrative authority over the story by emphasizing that "If you want my story, you'll have to put up with how I tell it" (Sinha 2). Animal's narrative authority thereby sets up a challenge to experiencing time in normative manners. The episodic structure of the novel borrowed from the picaresque, thus defies linear neoliberal narratives that view perpetual societal and economic 'progress' as the ultimate goal of humanity.

Similar to *Animal's People*, Veena Nagpal's *Radius 200* imagines the slow violence of the (post-)apocalypse in a nonlinear and speculative manner. The novel takes place in India in the year 2040, in which India and China are at war with each other due to severe droughts and a lack of water resources. Both nations fight for access to the river Brahmaputra, which runs through both Southwestern China and a good part of India, and constitutes an integral part of India's water distribution system. When China erects an immense hydroelectrical dam on the Chinese part of the river that diverts much of the water's flow to China and leaves India's agricultural

sector with severe water deficiencies, the Indian government decides to respond with an attack on the dam, propelling both nations into a geopolitical war. China thus responds with a nuclear attack on Northern India, turning the city of Allahabad “120 kilometres from the epicentre” (Nagpal 262) and the surrounding area into an Exclusion Zone that is prohibited to enter from the outside. The novel traces the stories of the journalist Kyra who searches for her lover Om Prakash, whom she believes to be lost in the Exclusion Zone, as well as of a group of survivors within the radiated region navigating survival after the nuclear attack. The escalations of geopolitical power struggles for natural resources leave human and more-than-human bodies and the more-than-human cityscape severely vulnerable and in precarious conditions.

While *Animal's People* draws on real events, *Radius 200* can be regarded as speculative climate fiction that negotiates possible Indian futures in the wake of climate crisis and geopolitical wars. The apocalypse in the novel exceeds the initial events of the nuclear attack by unfolding in the ongoing radiation and environmental degradation in the Exclusion Zone. Like *Animal's People*, *Radius 200* in its very narrative structure already does not follow a linear logic: dispersed with multiple point of views, both from within and from outside the Exclusion Zone, the temporal organization of the story manifests itself in a slow unravelling of the events that led to the nuclear attack, with a nonlinear back and forth between the diegetic present in the aftermath of disaster and multiple interspersed flashbacks, experienced through the eyes of the survivors and through the eyes of Kyra and the scientist Arjun who embark on a search mission for the survivors. In a flashback, Jiji, one of the survivors, recounts her memories of that fateful night: “*Just a mangled mass. Burning. Tentage cloth, poles. Melting plastic chairs. Humans on fire. Running. Flame chased, succumbing. [...]. A woman holding a baby at her breast—his head a mangled mass of blood and bones, his insides leaking out of his stomach*” (22, emphasis in original). By the use of gerunds and ellipses, the text evokes gruesome yet dynamic images of a nuclear disaster that initially does conjure the spectularity of apocalypse and disaster. The environmental destruction and disablement here emerge due to an entanglement of the material agency of the nuclear bomb and the geopolitical conflict between India and China.

Yet the spectularity of the initial attack and ensuing destruction gives way to an ongoing sense of apocalyptic disaster that is slowly unfolding and does not follow a sense of linearity and teleology. The group of survivors takes refuge in the underground ruins of the Allahabad Fort that has served as a military base. In the nuclear aftermath, Allahabad has the appearance of a “ghost town of broken walls, collapsed roofs, twisted metal rods sticking out at impossible angles” (43). The almost gothic aesthetics foreground the disabled, spectral and almost uncanny architectural environment that emphasises the longevity of radiation and the ubiquity of death and decay in the Exclusion Zone. The very material consequences of the nuclear attack initiated by the discursive forces of geopolitical crisis create a nonlinear sense of time in the Exclusion Zone that oscillates between the atemporality and finality of death

and linear processes of ageing in life. Crip(ped) time in the novel, I further suggest, is negotiated through the hydrological scarcity produced by the acceleration of the climate crisis and the consequences of the nuclear attack. In the Exclusion Zone, potable water is extremely scarce, as there is only a small well in which the water is still uncontaminated. Yet even the well is slowly running out of water, forcing the survivors to ration their water portions by two glasses per day (35). Regular search groups, led by Jiji's son Chief are moreover sent out to search for uncontaminated water sources, yet the missions prove to be unsuccessful. The living reality of the survivors does not follow the normative temporalities of neoliberal, capitalist or ableist systems, but is rather defined by a relentless waiting: "The heat was oppressive. [...] Everyone had been driven under cover, lying around listlessly, waiting for the sun to go down, waiting for the next dose of water to wet their lips" (137). Time in the Exclusion Zone does not manifest itself through a linear line but rather through an endless cycle of waiting out the scorching heat and waiting for the next drops of water to consume, evoking a pattern of seemingly never-ending repetition.

Next to the devastated cityscape and the ensuing dangers that come from outside the Fort, the radiated environment has moreover rendered multiple human bodies wounded, impaired or chronically ill. Jiji develops a penetrant cough in the course of the twenty years in the Exclusion Zone and at one point loses her left hand, leaving her with only a stump (32). Most children in the Exclusion Zone are affected by the consequences of the nuclear attack: Jiji becomes a mother of two sons, one named Club Foot and the other named Chief. As his name already indicates, Club Foot walks around with a wooden pole and has a "useless right leg" with which he is born (33). Moreover, Shanno, one of the group elders, laments the pain of his two children, with the older one "lying limp on the floor. His huge head perched on tiny shoulders—it... it's so full of festering sores. The younger one... his fragile legs and arms turned into impossible contortions, it's just... I know he's in terrible pain. Little kids born to pain, dying such horrible deaths!" (19–20). Additionally, the city's desolated and ruined buildings are metaphorically equated with disabled bodies: "Past buildings pockmarked the way erupting heat boils had once marked everyone's bodies, oozing yellow pus, then drying out into dark scabs" (285–286). This equation of the human and the more-than-human renegotiates them as materially but also discursively enmeshed within a larger network of geopolitical power struggles that render human bodies and more-than-human environments as collateral damage in the wake of climate crisis management. Like in *Animal's People*, slow violence is crippled through the various trans-corporeal relationalities that engender the disabled body in the aftermath of disaster within vaster more-than-human temporalities, as seen in the following passages: "Shadowy ruins leapt up, as the light of the rising sun seeped through the eerie haze picking out desolate, devastated streets, a charred amusement park, a forever immobilised Ferris wheel..." (Nagpal 312). Like the factory in *Animal's People*, the Exclusion Zone is a spectral place that simultaneously evokes the suddenness of disaster but also highlights the slow violence of radiation and decay that slowly but surely erodes the city buildings and renders its surroundings as no

more than “barren, white, sandy landscape broken by patchy vegetation” (286). The toxins and the radiation released in the suddenness of the nuclear attack will remain in the buildings and the soil of the region much longer than an individual human lifespan and will continue to produce disabled bodies in the Exclusion Zone, thereby enmeshing both human and more-than-human in distinct material and temporal relationalities. Pain and the ubiquity of death thus become the new normal for the survivors as a result of what Mbembe has named *necropolitics*, a form of governance, in which “weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead” (40). Normative frames of time are undermined, as the haunting presence of death co-exists with the lives of the disabled characters in the wake of eco-disaster.

On a narrative level, notions of crip time are negotiated by the focalization of General Om Prakash, Kyra’s lover who has been stranded in the Exclusion Zone during the disaster due to a plane accident. He is tended to by Jiji as his walking impairment progressively worsens by the year and his strength weakens, eventually leaving him in a comatose state. Om Prakash’s consciousness is narratively filtered through intermittent streams of consciousness, such as in the following example: “Can’t...Goddamit I can’t move! I’m trapped inside an immobile body and my mind...*The images begin to blur...* no! Please don’t disappear! I need to remember. Help! Someone please help! Unscreamed screams resounding against my ribs. Who am I? Why am I here, trapped in this immobile body? Why?” (Nagpal 40, emphasis in original). His narration and focalization, which is the only first-person narration in the novel evokes the notion that “[c]rip time is time travel. Disability and illness have the power to extract us from linear, progressive time with its normative life stages and cast us into a wormhole of backward and forward acceleration, jerky stops and starts, tedious intervals and abrupt endings” (Samuels, n.p.). Between shambled streams of consciousness and free indirect discourse in which he remembers the events leading to the nuclear attack, the constant narrative oscillation between elliptic and frantic sentences in his impaired condition and the clear and concise flashback narrations of his time as an able-bodied officer complicate linear and clearly progressive notions of ableist time.

Crip time in the disaster zones is thus presented as jumbled and in a process of constant negotiation with different human and more-than-human temporalities. By crippling time in the (post-)apocalypse, both *Animal's People* and *Radius 200* negotiate differential frames of temporality that destabilize neoliberal and ableist notions of time associated with linearity and progressivity. Through the various material-semiotic and narrative intra-relations, the novels suggest temporal disability ecologies and thus distinctive experiences of crip time in disaster-ridden environments in India.

Negotiating the Disabled Body and Generative More-Than-Human Agency in the Post-Disaster Cityscape

Next to crip(ped) time, *Animal's People* and *Radius 200* negotiate discursive forms of violence that lay open naturalizing assumptions about normate bodies and environments in a post-disaster context in the Global South, while suggesting disability ecologies that promote alternative forms of embodied knowledge and generative more-than-human agency which emerge through various creative enmeshments. Animal opens his narrative with the provocative words "I used to be human once. So I'm told. I don't remember it myself, but people who knew me when I was small say I walked on two feet just like a human being" (Sinha 1). Animal's narrative begins with the poignant statement that he used to be human a long time ago, thereby questioning seemingly stable definitions of the human. He insinuates here that being human is something that one can lay down and that it is a category that is subject to change. Due to his own bodily posture, Animal cannot tell the story from the perspective of an upright 'human': For him it is a "[w]hole nother world [...], below the waist" (2). For Animal, the world of humans is not attainable due to his posture, which is why the furthest he can see is into someone's lower abdomen. His 'nother world' is accessible only to him and his understanding of the human thus becomes completely decoupled from bodily posture. Animal's bodily 'deviance' ties to historical notions of viewing the disabled body as spectacle and abject, such as in freak shows).⁸ His body painfully changes when he is six years old due to his exposure to the gas leak, making him feel like "a devil rode [his] back and chafed [him] with red hot tongs" and generating a "smelting in [his] spine" (15). Justin Omar Johnston argues that Animal's body is not situated inside the hot and steamy interior of the factory, but the factory's industrial tools can now be found inside the body, changing it genetically (119). In fact, Animal's language about the tools inscribes his trans-corporeality: Materially, the gases have changed his body, while discursively the very industrial language he uses to describe the pain already hints at a global network of capitalism and neoliberal notions of progress that renders bodies and the environments in the Global South as disposable. Animal's body can thereby be literally seen as the abject residual of the industrial forces that re-formed his body during the night of the disaster. Yet while his body is inflicted by pain, he uses it to his advantage and develops a strong chest and strong arms due to being forced to walk on his hands and feet (Sinha 15). Animal's bodily form and unique spatial mobility enables him to gain news about the happenings in the city, and especially about news of the American Kampani (27). In this sense, Animal's trans-corporeality negotiates what it means to be human in a complex world where more-than-human and human materialities constantly converge and come into contact with each other. His provocative narrative voice and highly idiosyncratic bodily experience of the world thus undermines notions of bodily normalcy.

His ability to move around on both hands and feet, and thus his animal-like perspective also give him other views of the city that not even the people of Khaufpur

⁸ For example, see Garland-Thomson's work *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997) and her discussion of disability and the social forces that historically contributed to a marking of certain bodies as deviant from a perceived understanding of bodily normalcy.

can access: "How well I know this city's zameen, its ground, from an altitude of two feet, this is my home earth, discarded things are my city's treasures, [...]" (272). Animal's bent body thus gives him the ability to see the city from an "altitude of two feet," which is a view denied to adult humans, making him appreciate the dirt under his hands and feet as well as "discarded things." In a normative world, such things are considered waste, thereby creating a parallel between the abject materiality of waste and his material body, and once more enunciating the ecological destruction and social marginalisation by multinational corporations under the guise of supposed development and progress. So, Animal's very subjectivity as a narrator and focalizer and his experience of the city through his bodily materiality and walking pace thereby allows for a specific and intimate view of the disaster-ridden city that cannot be encompassed by an able-bodied perspective. This is further foregrounded when he adopts a bird-perspective of the city:

Bird that I am sees all, white palace of gone rulers on hill, lake looks pale green from up here, eye slides along a road lined with dirty buildings, snarling away in dust and truck smoke, till it reaches a place where the city's turned to jungle, railway tracks come running up and vanish, beyond is terrain harder to interpret, mottling of brown, a pimpliness which on looking closer resolves to the innumerable roofs of the very poor. (133)

Animal adopts a double perspective as he sees the world from above while viewing himself in it. He observes the cityscape, laid out like a map and overhung by an almost imperceptible fog that continues to poison the city. From this vantage point, Animal-as-bird sees the parts of the city are already taken back by more-than-human forms, such as the abandoned railway tracks, emphasising that in Khaufpur there are no clear distinctions anymore between human and more-than-human spaces. Having Animal adopt a more-than-human perspective from above thus foregrounds the inextricable trans-corporeal relationship between the individual human or more-than-human body and larger material-discursive forces that have shaped the city. His bodily impairment allows him to experience the disaster-ridden city in ways that normate bodies cannot and thus proposes alternative ways of knowing the city.

Animal's bodily and non-normative knowledge of the city is moreover emphasised when he takes the reader on a tour around the factory. He guides the reader to the abandoned factory grounds from where the poisons leaked, which for most Khaufpuris is a "shunned place, where better for an animal to make its lair?" (29). For Animal, the poisoned factory is his "kingdom, in here [he] [is] the boss" (30). Subverting his self-perceived victimhood, the factory becomes an Other world where the socially outcast Animal feels right at home and the place that painfully changed his body becomes the place where he is now the most comfortable. As Jina Kim argues in the context of the novel, "[a]bility emerges as a socio-spatial experience, and because he can easily access and navigate Khaufpur's terrain, his body is no longer legible as disabled" (n.p.). Animal's multiple spatial perspectives of the city, from the earthy city ground to the sky above, thus highlights his trans-corporeal relationship with the more-than-human environment that structure his disabled subjectivity.

Animal in the end rejects being cured, as he would then lose his unique way of mobility and his status as 'animal,' claiming that "I might have a wheelchair, but how far will that get me in the gullies of Khaufpur? Right now I can run and hop and carry kids on my back, I can climb hard trees, I've gone up mountains, roamed in jungles. Is life so bad?" (366). As Eli Clare argues, the notion of cure is always bound up with "eradication and the many kinds of violence that accompany it" (26). While medical and technological developments and interventions can help with the alleviation of chronic illnesses or painful impairments and thus should not solely be viewed as negative, such notions of eradication can become harmful if they are directed toward specific groups of people that in turn reinforces an objectification of such groups and a reinscription of a normative status quo (26-28). Animal refuses to be defined as human, as he would lose his unique way of mobility in and around the city, which helps his fellow people in Khaufpur and with which he can do more good than being upright. As Kim argues, Animal's decision "disallows narrative closure—we cannot contain his story within the narrative arc of recovery. His story is in excess of the teleology of healing, spilling outward from the narrative framework of containment" (n.p.). In this way, Animal's story does not conform to narrative boundaries that promote a stable cure for the disabled individual at the end of the story and his reincorporation into an able-bodied society. Animal's supposed animality thus negotiates what it means to be human in a complex world where more-than-human and human materialities constantly converge and come into contact. His idiosyncratic narrative voice thus highlights his own unique subjectivity, while managing to encompass the experiences of other disabled voices in the post-disaster cityscape.

Insofar as *Animal's People* considers disability through an individual narrative voice *Radius 200* lays open the normative institutional frames through which the disabled body is viewed. The Indian government has not issued any search and rescue attempts for possible survivors in the Exclusion Zone in the twenty years since the attack, which makes the survivors wonder "[w]hy did no one ever come to look for us? In all these years—not even once!" (Nagpal 72). The search for possible survivors is only initiated by Kyra, who hopes to find her love, Om Prakash. Jiji reflections lead her to assume the following: "'But this was India!' she whispered hoarsely. 'We believe those who die will be reborn. Inevitably. So years before Fukushima, we left Bhopal victims to fend for themselves. Our beliefs—you understand how it becomes so easy to abandon the dying?'" (72-73). Jiji refers to the Hindu beliefs of reincarnation and karma to justify the Indian government's decision to leave the survivors to their fate with a dominant religious discourse in the country. This discourse vocalizes a double entendre of how disability in the wake of eco-disaster is framed. It simultaneously points to the ongoing disablement of people in disaster-ridden regions and the ensuing binarization of able-bodied and disabled bodies by normative discourses, while foregrounding a specific postcolonial perspective: While victims of Fukushima in Japan, usually considered part of the Global North, victims of disasters such as Bhopal or Allahabad in India, usually considered part of the Global South, are left to fend for themselves. Questions of reconstruction are thus tied to a discursive form of

violence that dictates which lives are deemed grievable and which are not, as disabled bodies in the novel here do not fall into the dominant frames of recognition set up by hegemonic state and institutional powers in India itself and beyond.

Similar to *Animal's People*, the novel *Radius 200* emphasizes the notion of mass disablement in countries such as India via the double role of nuclear disaster and the acceleration of the water crisis. Because of the rapidly changing climate conditions, rain becomes a rare phenomenon in the weather patterns within and outside of the Exclusion Zone: "freaky [...] these days, a shower is just a blink-and-you-miss-it-affair" (14). Moreover, even before the Chinese nuclear attack, water and rain was scarce: In a flashback, Jiji reflects on the Kumbh mela celebrations on the day of the attack, remarking that "[w]hat fair could you hold to celebrate the holy Ganga, when it had dwindled almost into non-existence?" (73). With the rivers Ganga and Brahmaputra almost gone and the temperatures rising at a rapid level, the country faces a severe water crisis that is already at a critical level. As McRuer argues, "it's clear that we're inescapably haunted by the disability to come" (*Crip Theory* 207), which highlights a haunting aspect of disability that is ever-present with able-bodied people, thus highlighting disability as a continuum that is dependent on material-discursive human and more-than-human relations. The precarious state of India's water resources and its discursive ramifications in climate change and the geopolitical conflict with China not only affects the people in the Exclusion Zone but also the people outside of it, making visible a mutual, yet differently distributed precarity that "emerges over time as well, as the consequence of processes and practices" (Nayar 9). The novel's speculative form thus hints here at such "disabilit[ies] to come" (McRuer 207) that are not just limited to the effects of eco-disaster but at the worsening climate conditions that are already present for many people in countries such as India.

While *Radius 200* arguably does not promote alternative forms of embodied knowledge and living with disability on the site of the individual human body in the way that *Animal's People* does, I suggest that it hints at a generative more-than-human reconstruction in the wake of eco-disaster with the storyline surrounding the search for the mythical river Saraswati. Arjun Sharma, "Vice Chief of the Saraswati Research Centre" (Nagpal 2), and trained geologist, has worked for over twenty-five years in the Saraswati Project, searching for the river. According to Tiwari et al., "[i]n the realm of Hindu mythology and ancient Indian texts, [the] Vedic River Saraswati's (VRS) holds a revered position as one of the most sacred rivers" (n.p.). The Saraswati River is mentioned several times in the oldest texts of Hindu mythology, such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Rigveda*, being described as 'Best of Mothers, Best of Rivers, Best of Goddesses' (*Rigveda*, 2.41.16 qtd. in Tiwari et al. n.p.). Next to its mythological and cultural significance in India, scientific and archeological research into the origins of the river has generated a wide consensus that the river did indeed exist (Tiwari et al. n.p.). In the novel, Arjun suspects that the Saraswati runs underneath the Allahabad Fort in the desolated cityscape of Allahabad. At the novel's climax, the group is saved by the sound of "[f]lowing water! Rushing out of the heart of the earth! Endless. It's never going to stop!" (Nagpal 307) and Kyra's and Arjun's rescue mission find the

survivors just in time. It is revealed that the communal well is the gateway to the mythical river that runs underneath it and Arjun plans to design a new water distribution system with the Saraswati as source. Possible reconstruction in the wake of disaster is here negotiated through the material agency of the mythical river that can potentially bring an end to the water crisis in India and to the suffering of the population. Yet it is noticeable that this source of potential recovery originates in the disabled environment of the Exclusion Zone, thus complicating stable notions of health and sickness within disaster-ridden environments. Violent notions of cure and eradication are here countered by a co-constitution of more-than-human and human agencies.

Human and more-than-human enmeshments in the novels not only lay open normative and discursive frameworks of viewing the disabled body in the Global South, they also imagine nonnormative ways of living with disability and disabled more-than-human environments as generative sites of reconstruction. In this vein, disability ecologies that posit material-semiotic entanglements between the human and the more-than-human can help reframe discourses of healthy and sick bodies and environments in post-disaster contexts.

Conclusion

To conclude, both *Radius 200* and *Animal's People* situate the eco-disaster in India as the site of various disability ecologies that foreground the material-discursive enmeshments between the human and the more-than-human. Disabled bodies and environments emerge as part of political, social, economic and material more-than-human enmeshments that shape specific disability experiences and subjectivities in the Global South and thereby articulate alternative embodied forms of understanding disability outside of dominant and universalizing frameworks from the Global North. The spectularity of disaster in the novels is subverted through the crip(ped) intersection of manifold human and more-than-human temporalities and nonlinear narrative strategies that defy normative notions of linear and progressive time. Moreover, the novels suggest nonnormative ways of living with disability in the aftermath of disaster while imagining more-than-human forms of generative reconstruction. By engaging with historical fictionalizations of eco-disaster (*Animal's People*) and speculative future disasters in the wake of climate change (*Radius 200*) the novels negotiate eco-crip relations in a Global South where “the effects of the climate crisis are felt not in the distant future but are visible in the numerous forms of vulnerability and precarity that millions of people encounter on a daily basis” (Rajbanshi and Kumar 136). The imagination of disability ecologies in fiction from India can thus foreground how disability is differentially and unevenly produced through specific cultural, political and material emergences in countries of the Global South while challenging universalizing notions of disability through attention to material-discursive enmeshments. Crippling the eco-disaster in Indian English fiction can thereby not only contribute to a decolonization of disability experiences and

subjectivities that are still very much tied to the Global North but also to ethical reformulations of human and more-than-human relations in times of increasing geopolitical and socio-ecological crises. Fiction from India can play an important part in the future in negotiating and producing new and alternative forms of disability knowledge(s), as fiction is not only a site of knowledge production but also a site of witnessing.

Submission received 13 January 2026

Revised version accepted 27 October 2026

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