
ANIMAL OR HUMAN? THE ENDLESS DEBATE IN *ANIMAL'S PEOPLE*

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One of the most interesting and unique features of Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People* is the constant debate that we find throughout the novel about Animal's condition: is he human or an animal as he constantly declares? With what intention does he use his physical disability?

Firstly, it is important to discuss the manner in which Animal describes himself from the very beginning to the end of the story. As the reader can tell, Animal is a character who indeed goes through an extensive psychological evolution. Thus, it is necessary to analyse the first explanations that we get from him. In the very first line of the novel, Animal asserts the following: "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 2007: 1). As we can see, what we learn from Animal's first intervention is his explanation on why he is not human, and the only justification he gives is related to his physical traits: he walks on four feet and not two as human beings do.

In the novel we get to know Animal's story, which is certainly dramatic and very moving. As he himself explains, the only person he has really had is Ma Franci, the nun who has taken care of him since he was a little child and lost his parents. However, later on there is going to be a turning point in Animal's life: he starts changing because he meets new people in his life. While knowing them, Animal's starts revealing his true nature to the reader, which is nothing but human. The three people that create a major impact on his life are indeed Zafar, who shows him what believing in certain values really mean, Nisha,

who shows him the meaning of love and Elli the doctor, who shows him what real friendship feels like. The reader can easily tell how Animal starts developing and improving himself as a human being simply because some people have started to show him kindness and sympathy, which leads us to believe that one of the possible reasons why Animal is constantly claiming himself as non-human is because of this lack of love, affection and social relationships with others. We can find a very accurate example of this when Zafar gives Animal some money to deliver it to a family. Amazed by this situation, Animal asks: "You trust me? I could run away." while Zafar responds: "It's you who must learn to trust." (Sinha 2007: 39). Thereby, this is precisely the moment in which Animal is going to take on an adventure of self-discovery and human growth that will change him forever as we will be able to see further on.

As the novel progresses, we keep on seeing that Animal's evolution takes a little step further every time. When discussing the relationship between his body and his mind, there are different stages in which his development can be clearly seen. Especially at the beginning, Animal insists on the fact that he is an animal because of his back deformation. Nevertheless, towards the end of the novel it looks like Animal goes through some kind of evolution when it comes to that matter. Apparently, the child suffers some type of identity crisis in which he no longer recognises himself either as an animal or as a human being: "for neither Christian am I nor Hindu nor Muslim, not Brahmin now Sufi nor saint, neither man am I nor beast" (Sinha 2007: 313). In this manner, Animal is placing himself outside the limits of society by not feeling identified with any type of religion; that is to say, human traditions or conventions. In addition, he is also declaring for the very first time that he is "neither a man nor a beast" so as we can see, there is a moment in the story in which Animal, lost in an identity crisis, does not know how to label himself anymore.

Despite this, we finally discover towards the end of the novel Animal's real reasons why he cannot identify himself as human. Leaving his physical disability aside and maybe

declaring that he may have used it as some type of excuse, Animal finally makes a very powerful statement that will ultimately let us see right through him: "I am filled with revulsion for human life and human society. I want no more of it." (Sinha 2007: 341). At last, Animal comes clear about this constant duality that has been taking place throughout the novel. It is not because Animal does not want to but because he cannot identify himself as human due to, unfortunately, several reasons. When he was a very small child, Animal lost his parents and has always lived a life in extreme conditions (poverty and hunger among others). Apart from that, he has been constantly mocked because of his back deformity which was caused by an environmental catastrophe caused by an American company in his own hometown. Sadly, Animal has experienced nothing but cruelty and brutality from human beings, which makes him simply unable to identify himself as human.

The final argument that demonstrates this whole theory takes place at the end of the novel when Animal is having a dream about a lizard. Animal, having broken the lizard's rib because he wanted to eat it, apologises when the lizard immediately replies: "'A broken rib may mend' says the lizard 'but your nature you can never change. You are human, if you were an animal you would have eaten me.'" (Sinha 2007: 346).

Apart from these arguments, we can also see Animal experience new emotions for him such as falling in love for the first time. Moreover, when trying to poison Zafar, the man who is dating his beloved Nisha, we can see how in the end he feels remorse and apologises about his terrible decision. Another important factor to consider is the role that sex plays in the novel. The reader may be tricked about Animal's constant desire and almost obsession about having sex with someone. However, it is important to bear in mind that besides being a human necessity, we are facing a text which is a constant stream of consciousness, that is to say, we have the opportunity to get into Animal's immediate and spontaneous thoughts.

In addition to this, our protagonist is a teenager who has not experienced sex yet so as a result, he feels curiosity and a physical necessity of relieving his desire. Interestingly enough, it is essential to mention Animal's first chance to have sex in order to discuss this animal and human duality once again. If one keeps believing Animal's statements about his nature, the scene in which he refuses to sleep with Anjali is indeed a mismatch between reality and what he claims to be. Moreover, Animal is also able to give a very romantic and delicate description about Anjali's body which would not be the one expected if it came from an "animal":

How delicate the skin is, of such softness, threaded with tiny veins, like you find in leaves or petals, really it is most like a flower and reminds me of the hibiscus at the base of whose petals is a tube filled with liquid, you pick a flower and suck, it's joyous as honey. (Sinha 2007: 243).

To sum up, we can finally agree that Animal really uses his physical disability in order to protect himself and as a tool to keep on moving with his life. He accepts his disability and uses it to depict himself as an animal and also displace himself from the terrible experiences he has had with human beings. Nevertheless, and not even on purpose, Animal fails to fully portray himself as an animal because of his evolution and growth as an individual, a journey in which he experiences remorse, love, friendship and affection. It is undeniable, however, that this happens to be one of the charms of our protagonist, which invites the reader to deeply know him and finally discover that, despite his several attempts, he simply is another hurt human being who is capable of growing as a person because of the affection that he has finally obtained from others.

WORKS CITED

INDRA, SINHA (2007). *Animal's People*, London: Simon&Schuster.

PAOLA NICOLÁS FLORES is currently in her last year at university as a student of English Studies at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. She chose to specialize in literature and is at the moment writing her BA dissertation on Victorian literature, specifically on Margaret Oliphant's *Hester*. Her professional life is also linked to the English language as she has been teaching it for five years now to native Spanish speakers of different ages.