

## Ableism's Impact on Body and Identity in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

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### Abstract

This study explores the link between ableism and identity formation through the discourse analysis of Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007). Set against the backdrop of a post-industrial disaster, the Bhopal gas tragedy in an Indian metropolis, the novel provides a powerful narrative about the marginalised. By analysing the social perceptions and structures that define ability, normalcy, and physical beauty, the study investigates how societal norms and cultural attitudes frame the protagonist's experiences of exclusion and identity crisis. The study further investigates how the novel critiques the broader social and cultural dimensions of ableism in post-colonial contexts, revealing the intersection of power, disability, and identity in the social fabric of Asian societies. Social constructionist perspectives provide a framework for comprehending the social construction of disability, stigma, othering of disabled bodies, and cultural norms of beauty, normalcy, ability, and identity. Subjective and objective realities are discussed around the character, Animal. The study findings reveal the profound personal consequence of ableism on the self-image, body image, and self-perception of individuals with disabilities, the dehumanisation, marginalisation, and ultimately, an identity crisis of disabled individuals.

### Keywords

Ableism and disability, ableness and normalcy, body image, identity crisis, self-image, social construction, dehumanisation and othering

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## Introduction

The connection between ableism and identity crises is a heated and widely debated subject both in the academic circle and in literature (Linton 10). It is critical to reconsider the connection between ableism and identity crisis in light of the former's detrimental effects on body image and self-perception. Identity is defined as "an abiding sense of the self and the relationship of the self to the world" (Northrup 55). It reflects how one perceives oneself and is perceived by others. This concept enables us to reflect on who we are and whom we identify with. Various factors, external or internal, shape our identity. Family, society, and culture are all determining factors. Everybody has 'self-identity' and 'social identity' (Sets and Burke 225). Ableism can significantly impact the identity and experience of people with physical disabilities. In *Animal's People* (2007), the British writer Indra Sinha offers a unique and intriguing perspective, forging a new connection between ableism and the identity of individuals with physical disabilities. Sinha's portrayal of the body shapes the identity of the novel's protagonist, inviting a fresh exploration of this complex topic. The fictional village of Khaufpur serves as the setting for the novel *Animal's People*. With an industrial catastrophe reminiscent of the Bhopal gas tragedy, the work deftly mixes themes of marginalisation, societal prejudice, identity crises, and the "quest for self-discovery" (Connolly 53). Through the perspective of Animal, the protagonist who experiences physical deformities due to the toxic aftermath of the accident, Sinha paints an affecting picture of a society grappling with the complexities of disability and the pervasive discrimination faced by those who are considered different.

The novel is a compelling narrative that delves into the intricate layers of identity struggles within the shadow of ableism. As "body image shapes self-image" (Pelican et al. 58), societal attitudes play a crucial role in forming self-identity. The novel explores the profound influence of societal attitudes and cultural prejudice on Animal's sense of self-identity. His hunched position forces him to walk on all fours, hence the moniker "Animal." This label and his physical condition underscore how societal attitudes towards disability influence his self-perception. The ableist prejudices ingrained in society remind him of his perceived limits and 'otherness.' The book explores the intricate relationships that form identity crises by examining the interactions between self-image, body image, and cultural attitudes. Through the theoretical framework of social constructionism, the study shows that the "able" is valued by society, whereas people with physical disabilities are viewed as "less human." Labelling results from this predilection for some abilities over others. Therefore, disabilities are identity labels and social constructs used to categorise and describe people who do not meet the standards of what constitutes a 'normal' human being on the mental and physical levels. Ability differences are a common occurrence in human life. However, for ableist societies, the ability to perform routine physical

tasks equates to being able-bodied. So, it is clear that ableism is an attitude in society that devalues and limits people with disabilities, their potentialities, hopes, and skills (Goodley, *Dis/ability Studies* 20). This study shows how ableism not only pushes people with disabilities into socially constructed identities but also isolates them from one another. Examining the existing literature on ableism, body image, and the social construction of reality is essential to comprehend their interconnections and impact on the protagonist's self and identity formation.

### **Ableism, body image, and identity**

Ableism, according to Wolbring, is a system of ideas, customs, and procedures based on certain abilities (Wolbring1). It is especially relevant in the case of Animal, the protagonist in Sinha's *Animal's People*. Animal's lived experiences clearly show how ableism prioritises the abled-bodied and neglects and dehumanises the disabled. Disability, in its social context, shows how people with disabilities construct their identities in a culture where ability and physical competence are highly valued (Shakespeare 6). The majority of disabled people live in a social context where personal tragedy dominates the social context (Loja et al.192). A consideration of the social construction of ability follows naturally from the ableist tendencies implied by the social construction of disability. A culture or society that places high value on physical appearance creates "aesthetic" and "existential" anxiety in persons with disabilities (Hahn 39). Animal's physical deformities – hunched back and walking on all fours – made in him an existential and aesthetic anxiety. It is the constant exposure to ableist attitudes that makes him call himself "Animal." This feeling of aesthetic inadequacy prevents him from fully engaging in relationships.

Disabled people are struggling with their "corporeal identity" (Jenks 454) in society, which reduces them to abnormality, as medical models predominantly define (Hughes 678). Through the lens of social constructionism, the study argues that ableism is a "web of ideas that upholds the idealisation of 'ableness' and 'normalcy of able bodies' and marginalises people with disabilities" (Northouse et al. 44). With ableism and its connection to the ideal human body, the study also seeks to clarify how society constructs the perfect and ideal body image because the core of ableism is the body (Campbell, "Ableism" 5).

The broader social process of ableism shapes our "psyche" (Goodley, *Dis/ability Studies* 119). Consciously or unconsciously, we accept the principles of ableism, sustain its underlying logic, and actively participate in its reinforcement. Ableism or discrimination against individuals with disabilities gives preference to ability over disabilities. As Bogart and Dunn explain, ableism dehumanises and marginalises people with disabilities (651). The generative body is influenced by power dynamics and complex histories, understood through complex and interconnected subjectivities. In East's and Orchard's opinion, ableism and its influence on the self-image, body image, and identity of people with disabilities are a matter of study (560). Self-image and body image are social constructs rather

than psychological or biological ones (Goodley, *Dis/ability Studies* 3). Society gives much importance to “body image and physical beauty” in forming social identity (Bojorquez and Unikel 154). Those who deviate from this concept, who bear some physical deformity, a “social appearance anxiety” will grow within them, creating many problems in their physical and psychological well-being (Demirel 664). In *Animal*’s case, society’s prejudicial attitudes and ableist gaze forced him to internalise the label of 'Animal', which he resists and, at the same time, accepts as a coping mechanism.

The contrast between one’s current self-image and socially accepted ideal body creates a sense of dissatisfaction and leads to social appearance anxiety. According to Callero, the sociological approach to the self reflects new emphases on power, reflexivity, and social constructionism (8), which emphasises the significance of power in shaping the self. In the book, *The Disability Studies Reader*, Lennard J. Davis discusses how societal power structures intersect with the treatment of disabled individuals, often placing them in positions of extreme vulnerability. Campbell asserts that power dynamics and complex histories influence the generative body (Campbell 29). First and foremost, the self is a reflexive interaction process. Sets and Burke, in their work titled *Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory*, explain that an identity is formed through a process of self-categorisation or identification. Self-image and body image have a crucial role in framing one’s identity. Disability identity is formed as a part of the self-concept that develops from the disability-related self-definition, a process that, as Neiberding notes, is shaped by the sociological framework of Social Constructionism, which highlights the connection between society and self (Neiberding 321). This perspective is grounded in personal traits, including thought and self-concept, which are shaped by an individual’s interactions with society. Disability studies in the twentieth century talk about shifting the traditional understanding of disability as a personal tragedy to economic, social, cultural, and political registers (Goodley, “Dis/entangling” 2017). The marginalisation of disabled people is “culturally and contextually” determined (Chaturvedi 67). Goodley is very accurate in his opinion that our society and culture perceive disability as a problem of the body and mind that requires treatment and correction. This happens because the ableist thought of society that ability is the ideal mark of the successful citizen. The disabled body reveals the social construction of all bodies. Institutions and societal perceptions shape body image. This study explores the role of ableism in creating self-image, body image, and identity of people with disabilities. Sinha’s novel blends these themes and shows how disability is chained to that of otherness and animality and how people with special needs are viewed through the lens of ableism.

### **Social constructionism and identity**

Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge rooted in the idea that reality is constructed through social interactions and asserts that societal perception

shapes human identities and social realities (Burr 224). Social constructionism is highly relevant to *Animal's People* as it explores how societal attitudes and prejudices shape identity. The novel offers a critical lens through which readers can realise how social constructionism shapes identity and power relations, and marginalise people like Animal. Social constructionism's "objective and subjective realities" (Andrews 40) help one understand how Animal perceives himself, and society perceives him. From an objective standpoint, his physical deformity marginalises and socially isolates him; subjectively, his sense of self and identity is shaped by how others react to him. How Animal views himself and how he is viewed by others contributes to his identity confusion. In the novel, Animal is seen as less human due to his physical feature. Sinha emphasises through his novel how the social construction of reality can distort identity and create negative self-image and body image. Luckmann and Peter, in their work *The Social Construction of Reality*, state that "everyday life's reality is shared with others. Face-to-face interaction provides others their most significant experiences" (Luckmann and Peter 43). Ableism and its social expressions have been widely criticised, but limited attention has been paid to the exploration of how these concepts especially contribute to an identity crisis of characters in literary narratives. In addition, the application of social constructionism in analysing identity formation within an ableist context remains underdeveloped. Therefore, this study seeks to close this gap by examining Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* and uncover the significant role of ableism in shaping identity struggles.

### **The broken city and the broken body**

The Bhopal tragedy, the world's worst industrial disaster in history, marked its twentieth anniversary on December 3, 2024. The fictional village of Khaufpur, the setting of *Animal's People*, mirrors the real-life tragedy of the 1984 Bhopal catastrophe, which was caused by the disastrous leak of 27 tons of toxic gas from a Union Carbide factory, killing more than 3,800 people, leaving half a million more with lifelong health problems deformities, and social displacement (Broughton 1). Even after twenty years, Bhopal has not fully recovered. The victims have been battling the state bureaucracy for their claims for years without receiving sufficient healthcare or compensation (Rajagopalan 203). The survivors struggled for basic needs and lived in extreme poverty. Lack of clean water, healthcare, and government support, made the common people's lives miserable. As Animal laments, "Our water is poisonous. Each day we drink this poison, each day it kills us, little by little (Sinha 1), highlighting the post-Bhopal reality where people are forced to live with physical scars and traumatic experiences.

The fictional city of Khaufpur is a true reflection of "environmental injustice and corporate violence" (Krishna 102). Sinha portrays the abandoned Khaufpur, with its abandoned factories and ruined landscape, as a real presentation of Bhopal. In the novel, Bhopal's name is changed to Khaufpur,

which means the city of fear (Tresa and Ruby 183). People live in this city in the shadow of fear, loss, and hopelessness. The pain and sufferings Animal the protagonist experiences are not only his but that of the whole Khaufpuri that survives the disaster and the suffering of nature. In the novel, the environment and social catastrophe serve as a backdrop. Sinha successfully depicts a new connection between human and nonhuman realms in his novel (Cao 67). The representation of both body and environment are in a state of deformity, disability, vulnerability, and identity confusion. Animal's bent position and subsequent dehumanisation symbolise the crippled and dependent position of both the place and the company. The toxic environment causes serious defects that place the body in an inferior position. The body and environment are neglected and disrepair. They say, "This ground is cursed, Animal; it has been poisoned forever" (Sinha 157). Just as Animal's body is damaged and bent permanently, the environment is also rendered toxic, infertile, decayed, and abandoned. In Cao's view, the human body is fragile and vulnerable; the toxic environment produces severe defects that place the body in an inferior position.

Sinha connects the chemical disaster in Khaufpur to the protagonist's struggle with identity confusion. The community in Khaufpur alienates and labels Animal due to his physical change. He is forced to embrace the dehumanised label "Animal." The novel draws a clear parallel between physical disability and environmental destruction and metaphorically connects the body and environment in the representation of Animal. Just as an Animal's body is damaged and bent permanently, the environment is also rendered toxic, infertile, decayed, and abandoned (Odysseos 19). Khaufpur, a place of romantic and splendid beauty, where the 'khalay' and 'ghazal' flourished, was spoiled and poisoned and lost their past glory (Tresa and Ruby 184). The khalay and ghazal reflect the city's cultural glory. Khalay, which means imagination or thoughts in Urdu, is a classical vocal music associated with artistic sophistication, nobility, and intellectual refinement that allows artists to explore emotion and melody freely. Ghazal is a poetic form, and the musical genre is known for its emotional depth and lyrical beauty. The decline of Khalay and Ghazal, celebrated for their lyrical beauty and emotional depth, reflects not only the physical decay of the city but also the erosion of its artistic essence and cultural vibrancy.

The novel draws a clear parallel between physical disability and environmental destruction and metaphorically connects the body and environment in the representation of Animal. Khaufpur is abandoned and alienated just like Animal is alienated from society. The company that is responsible for the destruction neglected Khaufpur's people and denied justice and basic needs. Through the dual portrayal of the damaged Khaufpur and the disabled body of an Animal, Sinha could successfully convey a powerful and eye-opening message that man-made disasters do not just destroy the identity of the land but fundamentally alter human lives and identities. Animal's rejection by

society is a metaphor for the marginalisation of Bhopal by the corporate and the political systems that abandoned them after the tragedy (Odysseos 21). Through the dual portrayal of the damaged Khaufpur and the disabled body of Animal, Sinha could successfully convey a powerful and eye-opening message that man-made disasters do not just destroy land but fundamentally alter human lives and identities. Animal's deformed body and his self-identification as an animal reflect how marginalised individuals are dehumanised.

Zafar, the central character, is a dedicated leader in Khaufpuri's fight for justice. His leadership united the victims and gave them a collective voice. His selfless commitment inspires many, even Animal, to engage in the protest. Zafar's fight for justice highlights the real-world battle for justice the survivors face. *Animal's People* is an allegory for the ongoing trauma and activism surrounding the Bhopal gas tragedy (Shoba 12), using Khaufpur and characters like Zafar to symbolically reflect the real-world struggle for justice and accountability. The novel ultimately shows the ableist power dynamics in the Company's attitudes of greed and negligence (Friedman and Clarke). The people of Khaufpur suffered a lot due to Kampani's negligence in providing safety measures. Although Elli, the American doctor, has pure intentions, the community's collective trauma prevents external entities from considering it as another attempt at exploitation. The initial boycott of Elli's clinic, despite its promise of free care, reflects the deep-seated trauma and distrust of Khaufpuri against Kampani. It results from years of exploitation, neglect, and vain promises by the company and the government (Taylor 180). Sinha presents ableism and its function in power, horror, and violence of the disaster through Animal, a deformed teenager. Khaufpur's physical destruction and identity erasure due to the Bhopal Gas Tragedy parallels the identity struggles of Animal with his disfigured body.

### **Body image and identity: Animal's struggle with body image**

The body is a significant factor to consider because it is an essential characteristic of the protagonist's recurring challenges throughout the book. Animal's identity struggle is intricately related to his body image and his socially constructed label "Animal." It is because of the body deformity that people name him Animal. As he states in the story:

I was six when the pain began, plus the burning in my neck and across the shoulders. Nothing else I remember from that time; my first memory is that fire. It was so bad I could not lift my head. I just couldn't lift it. The pain gripped my neck and forced it down. I had to stare at my feet while a devil rode my back and chafed me with red hot tongs. The burning in the muscle became a fever, and when the fever got bad, I was taken to the hospital, they gave me an injection. It did no good. After

that, my back began to twist. It was agony, I couldn't straight up. (Sinha 39).

It raises the question of what defines a human being. Disability often appears in our cultural psyche as a bodily or mental issue or as an object of rehabilitative or curative intervention. Ability is upheld as an idealist marker of successful citizenship. This perspective is consistent with social constructionism as it frames disability not as an inherent flaw but as a socially constructed deviation.

Body image is closely linked to behavioural, cognitive, and subjective aspects. The cognitive aspect of body image is associated with perceptions of physical attributes such as body weight, size, and shape. The subjective dimensions focus on physical appearance, and the behavioural aspect is related to anxiety and depression. (Ferreira et al. 328)

Neiberding emphasises the significance of self-concept and identity and their relation to society and says it is a subject that needs serious study (321). A sociological framework, especially social constructionism, provides a profound perspective on the relationship between society, self-concept, and identity. According to social constructionism, "self-concept and identity are not inherent but constructed through social interactions, and knowledge is sustained by social processes" (McGee and Warms 47). Animal's identity as Animal is not his choice, but it is imposed on him by societal perceptions of his physical deformity. The toxic disaster robs his previous identity as a human and forces him to put on a new label, Animal. In their ground-breaking work, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann argues that all human knowledge is created, transmitted, and maintained in social contexts; the sociology of knowledge must attempt to comprehend the process by which this is done in a way that creates a "taken-for-granted reality" (Luckmann and Peter 143) which refers to those aspects of our knowledge that, due to their found societal entanglement, appear normal, undeniable, and self-evident. Common beliefs, conventions, and values stem from these accepted realities within a community. It can be concluded that the sociology of knowledge is centred on the study of how reality is socially constructed. (Luckmann and Peter 18). This suggests that reality is not only interpreted as the product of individual cognitive processes but also heavily influenced by the social context in which it emerges, is transmitted, and is sustained through a social context, and that affects how people perceive and comprehend the world. As stated, reality is not a fixed, objective concept but a product of collective interpretations and meanings within a society

Within the framework of social constructionism, the concept of ableism adds to our comprehension of how cultural norms and practices impacts the lives of individuals with disabilities. Ableism, discrimination, and prejudice towards people with disabilities can indeed cause an identity crisis for those who

experience it. Individuals develop their self-concept and identity based on social interactions, cultural norms, and societal expectations. According to social constructionism, knowledge is not a direct reflection of reality. As a culture or society, we construct “our versions of reality” (McGee and Warms 6). Animal is fully conscious of it. He says, “People see the outside, but it’s inside where the real things happen; no one looks in there; maybe they don’t dare. I really think this is why people have faces, to hide their souls”. (Sinha 33). The world must be a pleasant and satisfying place for attractive people. “What is beautiful is good” is Walster's opinion on these effects (Dion et al. 285). The correlation between body image and self-image is pivotal in understanding how individuals evaluate themselves and how this evaluation leads to self-worth or identity confusion. Negative self-image contributes anxiety about one’s appearance in social settings (Göbel, Pinar et al. 26). Animal’s social appearance anxiety is the real cause of his rejection of the surgery offered to him by Elly. It is not that he does not want to be cured; rather, it is a result of his anxiety over the procedure’s outcome.

When individuals see their identity diminished to something inhuman – an object of hatred and disgust growing within them – they, in turn, begin to perceive themselves as less than human. So, the protagonist introduces himself as an animal to the journalist, “Salaam Jarnalis, it’s me, Animal” (Sinha 3). Distinction and categorisation push disabled people to be marginalised and othered. This confinement of disability leads to an identity crisis. The ableist culture marks the bodily forms of disabled people as an aesthetic unruliness. Individuals with significant disabilities are viewed as non-persons or sub-human. This dehumanisation generates several complications and setbacks with regard to the self-image and identity of people with disabilities. Animal is the victim, the disabling ableist effect of “that night.” Attractiveness is an essential determinant of popularity, acceptance, and self-dignity (Webster) for those with ableist attitudes. That is why Animal has no place in the world; he does not even have a name as his identity. After the chemical disaster, at the age of nine, Animal’s back started to twist, causing him to walk on all fours. He is disfigured and walks on all fours, earning him the nickname “Janvaar,” which means animal. All bodies are shaped by the preconception of society. Thus, Animal’s body, the marker of toxic violence with its twisted spine, is ridiculed as *janvaar*. Too often throughout the book, Animal rejects his humanity and seeks refuge in a community within four feet of the world (Taylor 178). His name, Animal, is a constant reminder of his ‘otherness’ in society. Social views determine the meaning of names. More than an arbitrary symbol, a name signifies status, accomplishment, and prestige. As Leslie and Skipper (273) note, there are many different interpretations of the meaning of the name, and all the interpretations have socially constructed meanings. Sinha uses Animal's perspectives to highlight the prejudice he faces because of his body image, putting it in the circle of discussion of social constructionism with respect to othering.

He craves love and connection, but the protagonist's appearance hinders him. Even Nisha, the girl he admires most, sometimes perceives him as abnormal. Animal rejects the binary opposition between humans and non-humans and accepts his identity. He understands the best solution is not to comply with a normative concept of human perception based on physical ability. He exists in a liminal space between two categories where he can be unique. He asserts: "I would be one of the millions, not even a healthy one that stays four. I am the one and only Animal" (Sinha 366). How a person feels about his body, or his body image, can significantly affect his feelings. The protagonist probably struggles with body image because of personal perceptions, cultural expectations, and possibly outside factors that skew their self-perception. He experiences internal conflict and existential doubt due to the discrepancy between how he sees himself and how he feels others should perceive him. The novel probably examines the profound effects on individual's sense of self that can result from internalised messages about appearance, personal perceptions, and societal expectations. People with disabilities are not self-sufficient or independent. Most of the time, they need help from others. So, Animal is not fully human in an ableist look.

### **Bending body and broken identity**

Ableism profoundly influences the protagonist's social identity. He is dehumanised and compelled to live an animal's life. The story explores the nuances of identity formation, self-acceptance, and the pursuit of authenticity in the face of social pressures through the protagonist's journey. This is the centre of ableism. This affirms the principle of social constructionism, which states that society constructs reality far from reality (Luckmann and Peter 15). This widespread focus on the self has led to a question about the identity of people with disabilities. Foucault, the theorist, had a comprehensive understanding of the self. Foucault views the self as a direct consequence of power, shaped by a historically specific discourse system (Callero 4). However, Stuart Hall argues that there is no authentic self-hiding inside or behind the artificial or superficial because self and identity are constructed within, not outside discourse (Brubaker and Cooper 24-41). The complex interplay between social interaction and pre-existing qualities shapes the self. Society has a great influence on this process.

On my hands, I learned to walk, and my legs grew feeble. My arms, hands, and chest are strong. The upper half of my body is like a bodybuilder's. I walk and run by throwing my weight into my hands, hauling my feet forward in a hop. It took a long time to master this new way of getting about. Maybe it was months, a year. When I could, I ran away because the teasing had begun. (Sinha 40)

The passage's reference to 'teasing' illustrates the cruelty that can result from ignorance and prejudice, and the choice to flee could be interpreted as the character's attempt to escape from this harsh criticism and find acceptance

elsewhere. In Dan Goodley's words, "disability must be understood as an identity position, often a negative, marked and stigmatised social position" (Goodley, *Dis/ability Studies* 11). A thorough and fundamental knowledge of the interaction between bodies and social life can explain how ableist conceptions of the body develop identity crises. The "agentic body" and the "symbolic body" represent two theoretical methods of understanding the relationship between the body and society (Reischer and Koo 307). Each body offers a unique perspective on how society views the human body. Sinha successfully presents both of these notions in *Animal*. By utilising the "symbolic and agentic" body (Reischer and Koo 300) perspectives in the context of impairments, these frameworks provide valuable insight into the experiences, agency, and representations of individuals with disabilities in social settings. Sometimes, the readers may feel that *Animal* is exempted from the responsibilities of the world by accepting himself as an animal; this is very clear from Zafar's words:

You keep saying that you're an animal to get out of your human responsibilities, Farouq continues. I'm not kidding, darling. Because you always complain, you go berserk, do absurd things, and escape. I am an animal, truly, I am. (Sinha 29)

However, *Animal* reveals that the cruel attitudes of society make his stand:

I have to accept that I am abnormal and wrong-shaped to accept that I am a human being. However, if I were an animal with four feet and freedom, known as a quatre pattes, I would be whole and in proper shape—just not the same as Jara, a cow, or a camel. (Sinha 28)

Society shapes and influences individuals in several ways. Social interaction with disabled people instils in their minds the ableist concept of the perfect body. It causes mental and psychological distraction. Along with the shame and anxiety, it reinforces fear about their bodylines. Anxiety about one's appearance in social situations has been linked to several ideas, particularly self-esteem and body image. Social appearance anxiety is the term used to describe people's fear or apprehension about how other people see them physically. People with disabilities may experience social appearance anxiety due to various factors, and these concerns can impact their overall well-being and social interactions. Because their differences are easily observed, people with visible disabilities may be more susceptible to social appearance anxiety. This could include physical impairments, facial differences, or the use of mobility aids. Individuals with disabilities may experience pressure to meet societal beauty standards, which prioritise specific physical attributes. This pressure can result in anxiety about their perceived appearance to others. The animal is fully aware, so he tells the journalist, "The human world is intended to be viewed from eye level" (Sinha 17). *Animal* draws attention to the physical and symbolic ways in which he is excluded from the normative human experiences.

The ableist culture marks the bodily forms of disabled people as an aesthetic unruliness (Hughes). Animal is the best example of the visible and invisible operations of ableism and its social, political, and cultural impacts. Animal has thinking capacity, intelligence, and reflexiveness but is locked in his body, which is seriously affected. Animal remembers his first experience of considering him as a human being. It was from Nisha. A hundred times, she narrated how she found the Animal.

Despite his bodily differences, Nisha considers him a human being. To Nisha, we can also see a change in Animal's attitude; he exhibits all his human nature here, feels love and lust for Nisha, and feels wanted, which forces him to live rather than die. For her, Animal is only a name, nothing else. Nisha's love and care ignite in him the sense of humanness he suppressed. With a painful heart, Animal reveals that Nisha was the only person who treated him as usual. Here, the question remains whether humanness is determined by ability and appearance. Humanness, from a decolonial perspective, views and embraces every individual as fully human in all their diversity (Dunford). Animal, in his impairment, is dehumanised, undervalued, and discriminated against, and he struggles against the label imposed on him by the dominant society. Developing a positive disability identity and the opportunity for social exchange opened up many possibilities for Animal. He often avoided isolation and crisis by engaging in political and social issues with Safar and Nisha. Animal's decision to live with his given name and take on a new identity symbolises his refusal to live up to the expectations and constraints that others have put on him. Ultimately, Animal's identity crises provide a moving examination of the human condition that prompts readers to consider issues of ableism.

## **Conclusion**

Ableism can result in the social exclusion of individuals with disabilities. A deeper insight into how disability is formed and how ableism implies a preference for ability over disability is made possible by the notions of ableism and body corporeality. It is reflected in society's tendency to uphold normalcy by enforcing conformity and devaluing differences. What it means to disabled people is that they are expected to reject their bodies and adjust to the carnal norms of nondisabled people. Distinction and categorisation push disabled people to be marginalised. This confinement of disability leads to an identity crisis. This study has examined ableism and its effect on the identity formation of people with disabilities through the lived experience of the protagonist, Animal. Ableism places great importance on the perfect physique, and ableist ideas of normalcy and ableness would indeed cause mental struggle and an identity crisis. The prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory practices prevent people with disabilities from becoming fully functioning members of society. Societies' attitudes are essential in maintaining the mental health of people with disabilities. The novel

critiques the societal tendency to dehumanise those who fall outside conventional norms of normalcy. Animal struggles with self-identity, social identity, and body image highlight the tension between personal self-worth and societal judgments. To live in society to cope with the ableist normality, disabled people have to make a constant struggle. Their struggle is not just internal but against the deeply ingrained tendency of civilisation to marginalise disability.

The research findings from the discourse analysis revealed that ableism and its constant negative effects lead to negative self-concept and body image in people with disabilities. The study concludes that ableism leads to dehumanisation, marginalisation, and identity confusion. Indra Sinha highlights the importance of challenging ableist beliefs and standing up for the dignity and rights of people with disabilities through his narrative. Focusing on disability, especially the ableist attitudes toward disability and how it leads to an identity crisis, mainly allowed us to explore our basic assumptions on disability, our definition of the citizen, and our foundational understanding of the citizen's body. The novel ultimately challenges readers to reconsider the social frameworks perpetuating dehumanisation and calls for a broader, more inclusive understanding of humanity.

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