

**"SHE WILL BUILD HIM A CITY": Novel Diffused with Subalternity.****By****Mr. Zanakraj Patthe**

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**Abstract:**

This piece of article is a sincere attempt to skim and scan the tinges of Subalternity in Raj Kamal Jha's novel, "She Will Build Him a City" (2015). In recent times, it is observed that the Anglophonic contemporary Indian novels are being remarkably estimated from the realistic point of view. The reformist zeal in Indian novels can never be overlooked as an impulse to lay bare the structural inequalities in global India as observed recently. What this novel, presents fore is the new social realism along with its injustice maintaining in commitment with the subaltern strata of New India through a materialist lens. This is nothing but an eschewing or transcending the familiar politics of visibility. Similarly, the major focus is on the approach of universal humanism which precedes modernity. The historiography is viewed as standing out supremely despite the differences of time, place, culture, gender and ethnicity. It has been tried to underline that there is no association between the victims moulded by way of a protest and social justice as it has always been an enormous issue of the subjugated ones. Diffusing Subalternity through literary analysis and theoretical writings envisages neo-colonial discourses to emphasize a feminist-marxist approach to post colonialism. Reconsidering the subaltern elements has led to subjugation where large number of people live, suffers, die and re-live without raising their voices. This novel precariously shows that women have been subjugated and treated unfairly by the discursive power of the so-called masculinity. To witness the hegemonic character reaffirming their false consciousness is absolutely dis-alarming as we consider the subalterns in general. The deprived and marginalized that they are supposed to be subordinate or unequal to others keep delving in the real world as well. Major characters in this novel are always seen to find out their nationhood among the socio-cultural and economic spaces keeping in pace with the realms of modernity. At times they seem staunchly to disagree with any type of orthodoxies and idealized identities which vainly poses their temporal reality. The leading post-colonial critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has previously projected the deconstruction of history emancipating the subaltern and asserting their legitimate liberation. The major focus of this paper then is to retrace the subalternity diffused within the text as Jha uses magic to illuminate poverty, violence, and loss as the deft concerns.

Key-words: Subalternity, Subjugated, Masculinity, Marginality, Diversification, Story-telling.

## Introduction

Raj Kamal Jha can rightly be called as a post-modern or contemporary Indian novelist. As a tremendous change in the characteristics of Indian writing in English has been observed, the novelist like Raj Kamal Jha has focused on the societal, familial, and individual subjects all combining the subaltern voices in his novels. His novels deal with contemporary themes like incest, abuse and violence against the female which are highly thought-provoking thereby underlining the peculiarities of the subalterns. His novels also portray the bunches of subalterns extraordinarily undergoing domestic violence, clutched among rural-urban divide, mass violence, magical, whimsical experiences, psychoanalytical distortions, and communal tension. The sacrosanct and hierarchical structure of the family and caste system also finds representation in his novels. His works also mark the "deafening silence that encases and protects the traditional Indian family where "modernity" has not come in.

In the recent times the concept of "subalternity" has occupied an amazingly significant space in the writings of the post-colonial literature. The relentless efforts made by The Subaltern Studies Group or Subaltern Studies Collective is a group known widely for the valued contribution in bringing forth the Subaltern Studies. This group of some eminent South Asian scholars have shown tremendous interest in the postcolonial societies and thereby paved a way to the upcoming writers on subalterns all over the world. As known basically the term "subalternity" is a postcolonial term which was coined by the Subaltern Studies Group. This group was much active and came forward for publishing the subaltern studies under the areas of the Oxford University Press at the University of Sussex in 1979 - 80. The word "subaltern" was used by the scholars of this group for the first time and held the attention of writers in this direction to raise the numerous issues of the subalterns in the world literature. Subaltern writing by Indian authors in English is being recognized all over the world and has duly been accepted as the major corpus of study. There has been a wide range of writers in this area where we find the writings of Salman Rushdie, Kamla Das, Imtiyaz Dharkar, Amitav Gosh, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Namita Gokhale and Raj Kamal Jha being accepted worldwide and receiving due acclaim. All of them appropriately give voices to such subalterns in their fictional works.

"She Will Build Him a City" (2015) by Raj Kamal Jha is an amazing novel weaving together the stories of Man, Woman and Child. There is the projection of a mythology from the modern city of Delhi in which the marginalised, heedless and the deprived find due place. The temporary nomenclature of all these characters prevail the fragmented stories of the novel. The dismal character like 'Child' is an orphan boy who is accompanied by a loving nurse and a guardian dog. 'Woman' in the novel, is much worried and prays for her troubled daughter expected to return by retelling a historical account of their lives together. The character 'Man' himself identifies as a victimised entity by his own first victim as her ghost is prompting him to kill again. The lives of Man, Woman, and Child undoubtedly touch so many other lives and the story keeps expanding until the readers come to know that Jha has brought fine balance in depicting 'the troubled city of Delhi'.

The novel has emphatically succeeded in showing magic, both whimsical and malicious. The appearance of a 12-foot-tall lady who strides through 'Woman's' house, brings either comfort or death perhaps the both. The underestimated Toddlers come together on the newly installed mall at night and are seen passing through the glass doors into air-conditioned and comfortable area. One more nominal character like 'Orphan' rides his custodian dog towards a way to a sanctuary. The reincarnation of the boy is represented as a cockroach at the same time his mother desperately prays for him to stay on their family farm and keep himself away from tormenting experiences. The young 'Balloon Girl's' ghost with a red balloon whisper in the ear of a serial killer and he therefore delivers horrible realities of the subjugated who remain as the representatives of the capital city.

In "She Will Build Him a City", the characters are delineated as living entities but under tremendous strain or many at times dealing with irretrievable loss. Even they find themselves deprived of their own names and become simply "Man", "Woman", "Orphan", "Taxi Driver" or "Balloon Girl". Undoubtedly there are their own split and uneven narratives and with a constant paradigm shift in their relationship with the outer world is hardly recognisable. They are presented with their own version of events and are diversified as well. With a handful of characters in this novel are seemingly allowed to keep their titular individualities. Substantially their lives are jeopardised and they must undergo sudden and undesirable distraction.

The numerous characters in this novel hold their own group and one of them is Kalyani Das who renders her services as a trainee nurse at Delhi's Little House, a home for orphaned and destitute children. Here she finds on a scorching night, a woman leaving a baby boy wrapped in a blood-red towel who is merely witnessed by a black-and-white dog named Bhow. She takes the responsibility of the Orphan's night-time care and she uses the time when he is asleep to concentrate on study as her ultimate desire is to make it possible to go to America, as she explains in the novel to Dr Chatterjee:

"I will clean up, give pills on time, do the laundry, scrub the floor, work 12, 14, 16 hours, and I will smile all those hours. Sir, it doesn't matter if I do this here or in America because shit, piss, sweat, blood, they all look and smell the same wherever you are, whoever you are. So why not work where I make more money?" (Jha 21-22).

Kalyani's plans are turned futile by abrupt serious ailment which she develops and at this point she needs nursing care herself as well as prohibitively some expensive fresh food which is difficult for her. This is quite impossible for her family as they have migrated to metro city from a remote village in West Bengal and now shares single room in an overcrowded and threadbare slum area. The slum is the destined dwelling place for the marginalized in the metro cities of India boasting of prime amenities. The daily pathetic narrative of every family member continues to be shared each night. The sister in the family is asked to wait outside the restaurant as the family she works for eat dinner and show their insensitivity for the deprived. Similarly the brother is assigned the work of picking insects off the trees in the grounds of a luxurious apartment complex. What more can be so unfortunate about different family members living in the rampant slum area of the

megacities? The lavish complex with authenticity is called Apartment Complex, and is the resident of the novel's unnamed character called 'Man'. Here he is accompanied by his most disturbing situations which he cannot face properly and cuts himself off from the complex. Some traumatic event and its repercussion have thoroughly disintegrated the 'Man' in the novel. As a result, he feels isolated in his well-off surroundings and is prone to frequent unbearable mental states which neither he nor the readers are sure of what the reality is. After bringing the Balloon Girl and her Mother to his Apartment Complex in New City, the 'Man' offers them a chance to have a shower in his splendid bathroom. Here neither the mother nor child is able to utter a single word. The minute observations keep on pacing as the 'Man' makes some delicious food items available for them. They are also allowed by the Man to use his air conditioned guest room for spending the night there. What catches the attention of the readers is the watchful eyes capturing them sleeping and examining silently their heels soled with cracks. Jha has extensively projected the thinnest line of subalternity here as he weaves the saga of ethos and pathos of human life in contrast to the modernity which is yet to usher in social stability. The Taxi Driver is paid some tip by the 'Man' as he brings the Balloon Girl and Mother to his apartment. The Taxi Driver is paid extra and keeps mum "for not speaking throughout the ride, for not asking any questions". At the end of the novel the readers come to know that there is a woman character called Kahini at the focal point of the three stories comprising - daughter to Woman, former lover to Man, and mother to aborted Orphan/Child. Kahini, the woman's name reminds us of the Hindi word Kahaani i.e. story. She, thus becomes an enabler of the stories not spoken of at all. Jha has consciously provided potential voices to the marginals as he presents finally the elite Babu body. He shows that the Babu's body fails to speak the violence it enacts and it also stands subject to critique. Having committed the unspeakable rape and murder of the Balloon Girl-child, Man's body misconceives him with its surface level inflexibilities. The subaltern's space is finely relocated by Jha here as he starkly brings the realities fore as they are faced with several situational obstacles like those of time, place, exposure and opportunities.

It is conveyed through one of the stories that on one such bizarre night, the 'Man' conducts an invalid activity of abducting and persuading a homeless woman and her hapless daughter who is complete with red balloon. They are apparently supposed to accompany him to the apartment complex where he orders them to bathe, also feeding them, allows them to sleep and then returns them to the outer side of the local hospital. After committing such a heinous act, the 'Man' is constantly haunted by the girl and her balloon both spoiling his dreams. Thereafter he swerves between conceiving of the girl as a kind of protective familiar and fearing that he has done some horrendous damage to her and her mother. We may remain here convinced of the uncertainty about the character's deadlier nature, his alienation from his environment and others who share same fate with him in contrast. He is that type of person who objectifies the women and exploits the subordinate men. He appears throughout the narrative as a damaged and damaging soul. He is made more potent by the increasing alteration of the society in which he lives. Jha has succeeded in giving due recognition to the subalterns who are able to hold maximum attention of the critics as well.

The subalterns in the New City of India, contains scores of people who form the core of Indian society. Journalist and novelist Raj Kamal Jha reflects on the metro city through three leading characters with temporal names like Woman, Man and Child, whose contrasting stories lay the foundation of narratives. The subsequent tension between the rich and poor is also played out again and again. These underrated characters are most probably sharing the huge portion of metro city census. A comprehensive contrast is observed through the incident where the 'Man' and his driver are stuck on the freeway as police use water cannons to disperse Old City protestors who had no basic facilities of water or electricity for several days. An exquisite example of subaltern living in metropolis is of the "quota" medical school student who finds beloved girlfriend objecting the presence of lower castes candidate on campus. The 'Woman' is the first character whom the readers meet and she recalls the past to her grown daughter likewise the home after a long time away. 'Woman' appears to draw readers close with her gorgeous language:

"And, thus assured, you run away, leaving a hole in the air, shimmering,  
through which the afternoon leaks away and evening drips in, mixes,  
dissolves the scents you leave behind." (Jha 37)

As the story runs further on the next page, the same tone is turned into menace as we meet 'Man' a wealthy loner. He is a super subtle rogue who never hesitates exploiting men of familiarity and harasses women or girls in the most beguile way but ultimately suffer acute mental distortions of his own. His dilapidated situation is worth mentioning:

"He is going to kill and he is going to die. That's all we know for now,  
let's see what happens in between." (Jha 38)

In sequence, the third character 'Child' is an abandoned and forlorn one who is officially named as "Orphan" by a media-savvy administrator of an orphanage. Every character's story is driven forward by fear and mystery. This is possibly the greatest mystery Jha has brought forth and has systematically connected the stories and characters together. Ultimately, the character who links the three is named but never given much of a voice. Jha has the keenness to underline the ethos and pathos of the socially, economically, and psychologically unprivileged strata of New Indian Society.

The subalterns as envisaged by Jha bring forth an image of docile, vulnerable, subordinate, inferior, powerless and silenced woman and girl in the novel, "She Will Build Him a City". The institution of atrocity and dominance is not a new arena for the writers in fact this one is universal. Depicting the common interests of situations, conditions and stress-oriented realities about women dwelling in the megacities, have been focused worldwide. They are at the centre and debated enormously in recent times. Every story of this novel is filled with unexpected turns and twists which shows different ways to react and reach a consensus. There have been ample contrasts and comparisons in Subaltern writings showing differences between masculine and feminine, tradition and modernity, illusion and reality as



well. Many women, girls and even men have been victimized in the so-called developing Indian society. Moreover, they are so humbled that cannot deviate from the set norms, values and traditions of the Indian society. The Indian subalterns specially women are seen to combat the problems of masculine dominance and patriarchal hegemony due to cultural diversification. The harsh and devastating tendencies have been voiced and picturized by Jha in this novel.

This novel "She Will Build Him a City" can be viewed as a subtle parable of the New India that flashes between the stories of varied citizens like news anchor, child-laborer and enigmatic cinema goblin too. Depictions of the most confrontational events centres on encounters between elite Indians and presumed subalterns like 'Man' and 'Balloon Girl' respectively. It is in an early scene of the novel conveyed that 'Man' has perhaps brutally raped and killed the Balloon Girl. The parenthetic question remains unsolved on the part of the readers that the same 'Man' is unable to recall whether he himself is responsible indeed for committing this sort of heinous crimes though they had met initially. He only comes to know about the precarious incident on television only. As he happens to come across the horrid news-clip, there is a monologue on his part merging in his own doubtfulness. It is tuned with the news ticker, flying off the TV screen, into the air, and onto his skin as well reminding the horrible consequences of his own horrendous and hateful crimes. Jha has brought out the stark realities of the subalterns exposing through so many fragmented stories. The weird portrayal goes on like:

"CHILD RAPED, KILLED, MOTHER SEVERELY ASSAULTED . . . IF HE DOES RAPE HER, IF HE DOES KILL HER, HOW DOES HE RAPE HER? . . . HE DOES NOT USE A GUN BECAUSE HE DOES NOT HAVE ONE DOES HE STRANGLE HER? . . . SHE WILL BITE, SHE WILL SCRATCH, BUT THEN WHERE ARE THE MARKS, THE CUTS AND THE BRUISES?" (Jha186-188)

The bizarre description on the readers' parts put forth the assumption and sympathy for the victimized framing the Subaltern narratives. In fact, there is no end to the sufferings, exploitations and atrocities of the marginals in various pieces of writings. It is captured in the portrayal such as:

"IF THIS ACTUALLY HAPPENED ... HE SHOULD HAVE SIGNS, SYMPTOMS ON HIS BODY ... TRACES OF HER BLOOD ... TISSUE UNDER HIS NAILS ... " (Jha187).

### Conclusion:

Jha's "She Will Build Him a City" is an authentic but ironic attempt to ask question how the life of the subaltern fare in urban India. They have been and must continue to be at the centre of debate of the South Asian literary sphere. There is constant attempt by Jha to validate the viable truths of the subalterns. They are not even able to identify themselves with the masses. Here Jha has presented penetrating and rare shades as well as tints of their life particularly in the modern Indian society. The author of this novel maintains a kind of poet's sensitivity to delineate their pathos to which they are destined or forcibly undergoing. The

narrative continuously moves forward through a sequence of flashback and forth. The different characters leave different impressions on the readers. Through this novel, Jha has regenerated history past and present through his unique mixture of fact and fantasy of the modern Indian society wherein the subjugated suffer and undergo acute pain and trauma. He makes use of facts from contemporary Indian society in order to form the nexus of his fictional world.

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