

REPRESENTATION OF MARGINALISED WOMEN IN RAJ KAMAL JHA'S NOVELS

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Abstract :

In India, Marginalized or Subaltern Studies came to light in the 1982's because of Ranajit Guha's meticulous and incessant efforts. It has given a distinct perspective on the history of the colonized from that of the colonizers. The subaltern sections which are always forced to remain mute and voiceless are now the subject to the activity of the modern Indian society even when they rebel and rebound. Family dysfunction is prominent in Raj Kamal Jha's novels as most of the female characters happen to be the easy victims of the male inflicted barbarity including the consanguineous ones as their tyrants. From ages women barring the age group, have been victimized physically, psychologically, mentally, socially and economically as well in the Indian historiography. Portrayal of such subjugated women is the commonest feature of Raj Kamal Jha's fictional works. The hair-raising realities of the Metro culture like those of Kolkata and Delhi are ample evidences of such barbaric, hideous and inhuman acts. Oppressed Femininity is seen as an innate practice of opprobrious treatment given to the women by one partner to another in an internal relationship such as marriage, family or cohabitation. Women the significant fraction of the subalterns are always the victims of such gruesome atrocities of their own kinsmen destroying their self-relying identity. Women's marginalization or subjugation has many forms including physical aggression or assault like sexual exploitation. Many of them are brutally raped, beaten thoroughly, frequently restrained, slapped whimsically, threatened time and again or even killed mercilessly to control or dominate others by the masculinity. This research paper is a sincere attempt to skim and scan the tinges of Subalternity as far as women characters in Raj Kamal Jha's novels are concerned. Jha's novels speak of the subalterns' realities in the form of oppression and suppression of women and even the minor girls.

Key-words : Subalternity, Subjugated, Opprobrious, Femininity, Marginality, Family Dysfucion,

Introductuon :

From ages women barring the age group, have been victimized physically, psychologically, mentally, socially and economically as well in the Indian historiography. In the post-modernist novels, so many controversial issues of typical Indian society have been discussed abundantly. In the first decade of 21st century, it is observed that the the

contemporary Indian novels in English are being remarkably considered to be the most authentic evidences of the lifelike or realistic testament of modern life. The spirit of reformation in Indian novels can never be underestimated or sidelined as an urge to vocalize the deeply rooted inequalities in the so called modernized India as observed in the recent past. What Raj Kamal Jha's novels present fore is the new social realism along with its subtle voicing offered to the peculiar strata of the subalterns dwelling in the New India through a materialist lens as a post modernistic trend. Portrayal of such subjugated women is the commonest feature of Raj Kamal Jha's fictional works. The hair-raising realities of the Metro culture like those of Kolkata and Delhi are ample evidences of such barbaric, hideous and inhuman acts. Oppressed Femininity is seen as a pattern of abusive behaviour with women by one partner to another in an intimate relationship such as marriage, family or cohabitation. Women the significant fraction of the subalterns are always the victims of such gruesome atrocities of their own kinsmen destroying their self-relying identity. Oppressed Femininity has many forms including physical aggression or assault like sexually exploiting, brutally raping, beating, restraining, slapping, threatening or even killing mercilessly to control or dominate others by the masculinity. 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. The highly thought-provoking and contemporary themes like incest, sexual abuse and violence against the female which are at the centre of attention find due exposure in the novels of Raj Kamal Jha underlining the peculiarities of the subalterns. His novels also portray extraordinarily the domestic violence, rural-urban divide, mass violence and communal tension.

Discussion :

There are various stories in Raj Kamal Jha's novels; stories within stories are like the pieces of jigsaw puzzle. The narrator in, *The Blue Bedspread* refers to the man beating his wife in the upstairs flat; in the story under the chapter heading „Cable Television“. Just like a post-modernist novelist, Raj Kamal Jha shows the insensitivity and possessiveness of the husband for his sister in this novel. Jha has beautifully presented the effect of inferiority complex on the growing children as a part of oppression. The macabre suicide epidemic and the situations arising in the aftermath give an indication of something sinister in the microscopic city of Kolkata. Raj Kamal Jha gives soft touches to melancholic scenario, in a fresh look, yet gently showcasing the immense, long-lasting impact of women subjugation in his novel, *The Blue Bedspread*. Jha has given prime attention to the numerous contemporary issues in his novel, but this fiction mainly focuses on the massive societal issues and the Indian contemporary society in which abject women have been at the focal point. Jha as a renowned journalist, has given due exposure to the deeply ingrained social issues. There are numerous aspects of modern Indian society in the form of violence against women, decayed urbanity, dysfunction of family relationships, urban-rural differences, alienation, mass violence and communal strife. Incest, child sexual abuse and sexual aberration also find sufficient space in this novel. Apprehensively, the novel projects a nameless narrator learning that his sister, whom he hasn't seen for countless years, has succumbed to death after giving birth to a baby girl.

Raj Kamal Jha's second novel *If You Are Afraid of Heights* contemplates on women's marginality through the screen of repressed memory, but it is more self-consciously allegorical. Jha peeps into the teeming throng of humanity with an omniscient eye, carefully selecting his female protagonists, intersecting the details of their lives, then merging into the unknowable. Memory mixes flawlessly with reality in this cautionary fable, where innocence is captured in the form of a young girl in red dress, crying softly, poised on a precipice of poverty, fear and fate. The main characters Rima and Amir in the novel *If You Are Afraid of Heights* are not only individuals but also representative of any man or woman in the city. Oppression of Female characters is indicative of 'fear' one lives with while being the part of the city life which is suggested through the *Crow Man's* utterances. The fear is sometimes of heights, brothers, sisters or fathers. The mother of the eleven or twelve year old girl, who is badly shaken by the suicide spree in her neighborhood, tries to allay the fears of her daughter by explaining. "People kill themselves when they are very sad". But the girl on the contrary feels her fears growing, for her house has the, "looks like a crying face someone sad, someone very old", which leaves behind the tinges of violence.

In *Fireproof*, the third novel by Raj Kamal Jha, we come across numerous incidents about parents being forced to watch their children being mutilated. Even the children are asked to swallow kerosene before being burnt down and "blasted apart". The heinous act of gang rapes, pregnant women eviscerated, and countless people burned alive showcases the horrendous experiences of members of one community including women as well. Women are supposed to face atrocities at every level and everywhere marking their marginalized status as the novel primarily deals with communal strife at the backdrop of Gujrat riot in 2002..Women are treated as the secondary with their fellow members in family, community, society or country. The imprints of torments on the part of the women in communal violence cannot be erased from their psyche. Ithim, the new born child with physical deformities is the symbol of ghastly outcome of violence inflicted upon women. Raj Kamal Jha has presented through the inhuman, cruel and worst acts of violence that left scores of dead bodies which were scattered here and there including women and children. In the next episode the rioters are not ready to respond to the repeated pleadings of Abba that they should not harm people senselessly and soon after they barbarically, one by one, rape his Daughter-in-law who was pregnant with her five months baby and then strangle her with a towel, slit her throat and wait for death in an insane manner. Finally in the most merciless manner they slit her stomach and take her unborn baby out and throw it up. In the first attachment of the message, one more incident of Tariq finds space in this novel as he sees that before his eyes the four attackers A, B, C and D have not only threatened but also torn his mother's sari that "sound like a paper being ripped, shredded in the middle of the night" (175). Those attackers laugh in such a filthy and awful manner as if they have been enjoying something unachievable. The gruesome act goes on like "Her head snapping back, A is pulling her hair so hard that it leaves her forehead bare, washes by yellow light" (175). Tariq, the sole witness of the incident, watches the barbaric act helplessly: "There is a noise his mother makes when she is dragged along the street. It's the sound of her skin scrapping, being peeled off. It's the sound of her legs against the tar, of her sari against the tar, of one hand, which flaps to one side, against the tar" (176). Here Jha has put forth the bare and barbaric reality of the pathetic women during the horrendous attacks at

the time of 2002 communal riot where humanity eclipses and women are victimized, similarly, the four attackers have entered into Shabnam's house: "Father went down onto his knees, Father was praying . . . they asked him to undress, . . . open his mouth and hold his tongue with his left hand...they brought the knife...Shabnam standing in the room . . . crying . . . shivering as if she was sick . . . Mother screaming . . . they told mother to do that, too, to undress and to show her tongue." (342). They pissed into the mouths of both of her parents and forced Shabnam to look at her parents, thus opening up the plethora of their sufferings as subjugated ones treated in such heinous manner.

In *She Will Build Him a City*, fourth novel by Raj Kamal Jha, human beings under immense strain of facing irrevocable loss find themselves deprived even of their names. They have been simply coming forth as Man, Woman, Orphan, Taxi Driver or Balloon Girl or some one else. Here we come across their immaculate narratives in fragmented form and also with a constant shift in relationship to any reliable or recognizable series of events, are inserted in between with a handful of characters allowed to keep their nominal identities- although their lives, too, are subject to a sudden and unwelcome upheaval, thus underlining the realities of today's urban Indian society. The subalterns as envisaged by Jha bring forth an image of docile, vulnerable, subordinate, inferior, utterly powerless and mostly silenced woman and girl in the novel, *She Will Build Him a City*. The institution of animosity, 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 mega-cities, 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 especially 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 aptly and picturized at greater extent by Jha in this novel.

Jha, in his fifth novel, *The City and the Sea* makes it visible that it belongs to the genre of a different kind or consolation wherein voices to the female victims are often given or opening our eyes to what we would rather not see. This novel is seemingly the re-imagination of the Nirbhaya tragedy which happened in December 2012, capturing the universal modern human predicament of a no-exit situation in a prison of our own making. This one is a novel that raises the question why some people simply turn into the devil and how our society finds it comfortable in this injustice especially when crimes against women are floating up. No doubt Jha's novel is a blatant exploration of darkness and deafness in the way our culture deals with violence against women, as he duly gives space to one of the most brutal cases of rape that shook not just the entire nation but the world, the *Nirbhaya* case. Here, the narrative is absolutely evocative and heart wrenching as women are, now a days as if commoditised, with stunning imagery just as to treat them subjugated or completely marginalized. The novel shines with the absolute brilliance of the parallel voices of its characters, the little boy and the woman,

the city and the sea, respectively. As the novel keeps on progressing, it raises important questions pertinent about the morbidity that has seeped into masculinity today and leaves one questioning: What kind of men are our boys growing up to be? Are merely they made to subdue the female voices by inflicting atrocities and exploiting them? There is anger and anguish and the readers found in it an echo of what we hear too often in our public discourse these days. In a deeply unequal society as in the urbanized India it's very tempting to demonize the accused, to blame everyone except ourselves for what goes wrong. So is the chorus like voices appear for the time being in support of the victims but becomes deaf and dumb to vocalize their pain and agonies. Merely talking about toughening the law, locking up the perpetrator, throwing the keys away, fast-forwarding the trial and the conviction, onward march to the gallows can never be the solace of the marginalized strata of our society as women and minor girls keep on suffering endlessly. If this happens then we can live happily ever after.

The Patient in Bed Number 12, Jha's latest novel primarily focuses on the social, economic, and cultural issues of the recent past. No doubt, these aspects have smeared our lives in the form of a series of stories woven one after another. These numerous stories primarily deal with the devastating impacts of COVID-19 pandemic. The novel projects issues like the massive mental, emotional and physical turbulence, loss of countless lives, the banishing lockdown, staggering unemployment, large-scale migration of workers, the peddlers and workers traveling home on foot and their tragedies, people bound in isolation camps, and the traumatic as well as psychological disruption of patients crowding in hospitals. Similarly some of the stories capture the equally dangerous man-made virus of communal strife and mass killing. Jha tells them very clinically, cryptically, and economically through fragmented narrations of the subalterns. There are the hidden identities of most of the characters presented by Raj Kamal Jha in this novel. The beginning of the novel is marked by Jha with the story of a well-versed Sanskrit scholar admitted in the ICU at a COVID-19 hospital. He is in utter unfortunate circumstances as he had lost his wife earlier and is survived with his only daughter namely Nisha and she is married to a Muslim boy which is too much against his expectations. Incapacitated and isolated, he longs for meeting his daughter anyhow. He corresponds with her through a letter and informs that he is left with much less time and that he is not least hesitant about telling people around him that Nisha Kumar Rahman is none other than his daughter his daughter. Nisha, in reply responds positively and sends him a photograph of her daughter named as Una. he can not hide fatherly love and keeps the photograph relatively close to him. Being infected by the deadly virus, the scholar wants to maintains distance with his granddaughter and stays away from her. The women rather female characters in this novel experience the utmost marginalized status of their own. There is one more story is of mathematics teacher whose school is not functional due to COVID-19 effect, and he is a jobless fellow now. For his survival he tries his luck to get a job of a security guard. He succeeds in getting that job along with the the condition that he must maintain distance from the women and if not he would be behind the bars. He comes across is a woman who works in his nearby surrounding area. Being a security guard, one day, he is taken aghast as the woman is seen weeping. He is inclined to provide her some solace but controls himself remembering the warning. He then comes the fact by his colleague that the lady has lost her mother recently. Though he is willing to help that woman to pick the ice- cream boxes up which she is unable

do. But he is also unable to come out of the radius of 3 meters where he is appointed as a security guard. One more story comes fore and that is of a mother and her son. The mother is isolated as she is also affected by COVID-19 and subsequently unable to see her son. As a result, she communicated with him on the telephone. What is devastating about the mother is that she succumbs to the deadly virus and dies there in the hospital. So to follow the protocol of the hospital, her dead body is wrapped in a plastic bag and transported to the crematory ground for the last rituals. Her son is deprived to see his mother's dead body. Here also Jha has delineated the unfortunate women of marginal strata who are supposed to face pathetic, incapacitated and unnoticeable situations.

Conclusion :

Raj Kamal Jha has immensely presented the images of the subjugated or marginalized women in his several novels. These subjugated and marginalized women capture the attention of the readers as Raj Kamal Jha has been devoted to the portrayal of this specific strata of the Indian society. His novels appear with prime focus on men's undue pride, antagonistic marriages ending in disaster and rigid traditional norms of patriarchal behaviour in our social system. As Jha recounts, these are the cumulative forces of the extreme oppression and perpetual exploitation of women at the hands of male counterparts. Truly Raj Kamal Jha's novels reflect a slice of urbanized life. His novels are the realistic observations of an intimate side of the so called city-bred women's lives and also open up their ill-treated conditions in today's society. It is an undeniable fact that women from ages are often victimized and subjugated by the male-dominated society at every avenue and Jha has presented the same commonplace pictures of the marginalized women in his novels. They have been considered always as the subordinate sex and they are forced to adapt to male standards now and then. In most of his novels, Raj Kamal Jha has adeptly focused on the segregated marginalization of women in the modern Indian society. He makes us to peep into the horrifying feminine world wherein our attention is frequently held by women's harassment, exploitation, discrimination and commodification as well. The women in his novels are treated with double standards. Subjugation and marginalization are the vital factors in their lives and they have never been regarded as autonomous beings. One more significant aspect in Raj Kamal Jha's many other novels is to be noted in particular is that of the role played by a woman in the oppression and suffering of her fellow woman. Jha underlines the bare realities of our society where malicious women ill-treat and exploit other women instead of showing love, respect and understanding for their own sex. As a matter of fact, Raj Kamal Jha has successfully brought out the universal psychological truth that the woman is the enemy of the woman. Jha's novels which speak of the subalterns' realities in the form of oppression and suppression of women and even of the minor girls have with no exception traced out the sordid and stressful situations of female characters both in inner and outer world of the major characters. It is a complex and multifaceted issue that has been explored by many Indian novelists where the marginalization and subjugation of women in Indian society in turn is a multi-layered and dubious practice. Jha, through his novels has unflinchingly given voice to many of the unspoken social ills of contemporary Indian society to bring forth the subalterns in the limelight. It has been attempted hereby to examine how women are at larger scale marginalized and subjugated in Indian society, and how this has been portrayed with diverse estimation in Indian novels. The female

characters in Jha's novels are sheer victims of many factors that contribute to their subtle marginalization and subjugation in the stereotypical Indian society. The overpowering of patriarchal system is one of the most important and solidifying factors. It is usual to observe that in a patriarchal system, men have always been superior to women, and women are considered distinctively subordinate to men. This peculiar system of Indian society finds its multidimensional reflection in many spheres like law, culture, religion and so on.

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