



# Ecological Concerns in Raj Kamal Jha's She will Build Him a City

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**Abstract--** Being a writer of modern era Raj Kamal Jha has penned three novels in quick succession: *The Blue Bedspread* (1999), *If You Are Afraid of Heights* (2003) and *Fireproof* (2006). His debut novel delineates the family secrets like incest, claustrophobia, extramarital affair and the like. After initial success he wrote *If You Are Afraid of Heights* which brought him the Hutchinson Prize. And then his sensational third and most famous novel *Fireproof* has brought him to the limelight due to his unique presentation of the Godhra Carnage story in fictionalized form where 'the dead decides to take the revenge'.

Moreover, his fourth novel *She Will Build Him A City* (2015) addresses the issues like urban pollution, global warming and environmental degradation. His intention is to link environment with society where each one of us will contribute something for posterity and preservation of nature and this ecosystem. In this novel he presents a cycle of events which deeply affect both society as well as people staying around.

Besides these distinctive qualities, Raj Kamal Jha is the chief Editor of the English daily *The Indian Express* and therefore he is known as the 'novelist of the newsroom'. Moreover he has written two more novels *The City and the Sea* (2019) and *The Patient in Bed Number 12* (2023) which tracks a viral hate video, a dying father in search of the living and a daughter who listens to her heart and soul.

The present paper is to relate his themes of ecological concerns, pollution, industrialization and environmental preservation to the society.

**Keywords--** degrading ecosystem, globalization, industrialisation, pollution, posterity

## I. INTRODUCTION

Ecology has become a matter of concern for all of us. And literature is the medium where we share our opinions. As far as Indian English Literature is concerned, there is a traditional reverence for nature in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938). It shows the face of declining nature. Industrialization and urbanization have been given ample space in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* (2011) sheds light over the declining face of forest. Ruskin Bond is also extremely concerned with nature. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) shows environmental justice. Man is an inseparable part of nature.

In this declining ecosystem we can't remain aloof without caring for nature. How we are connected with nature is revealed in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004). These authors address the impact of development on nature, ecological crisis and our deep-seated spiritual inclinations to the Mother Nature. If we want to survive in this nature we must pay attention to the sustainability of nature.

Author like Raja Rao shows how villagers have deep respect for rivers and divine nature. He also links ecology to spirituality. Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is a living example of the effect of industrialization on agriculture. Arundhati Roy is a little bit different here. She links declining environment to caste, creed, race and moral decay and beckons how development harasses the subaltern communities. Human encroachment has become a major cause of concern for animals as it is best described in Ruskin Bond's *No Room for a Leopard*. It is evident that ecology has become imbalanced now. In Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, plight of Sundarbans and fragile ecosystem is dexterously painted. Early fiction sheds light on reverence for nature, scenic rural life threatened by nature. Post Independence Fiction critiques modernization, progress in rural mentality and pollution on a large scale. Contemporary works dive deep into blue humanities, ecocriticism, and complex relationship between environmental and social concerns and plead for preserving nature. Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019) is worth mentioning here. This novel narrates the ecological factors that go beyond geographical boundaries delineated by human beings, as all of us know that this planet has come under threat because of our over-ambitious nature. While going through *Gun Island* I come to know that how humans and non-humans contribute equally to bring this planet under climate crisis. Ecological concerns in this novel seem most immediately with the protagonist's journey to Sundarbans where he comes to know that how ecosystem is being affected by climate change. The novelist shows how climate related issues and the sufferings of the people living in Sundarbans are unavoidable from social injustices. Ghosh clears in *The Nutmeg's Curse* (2021):



“Climate change is but one aspect of a much broader planetary crisis: it is not the prime cause of dislocation, but rather a cognate phenomenon. In this sense climate change, mass dislocations, pollution, environmental degradation, political breakdown, and the covid-19 pandemic are all cognate effects of the ever increasing acceleration of the last three decades.”<sup>1</sup>

Indian English Literature plays the role of cultural text using lively pictures to enhance eco-consciousness, boosts our courage to face anthropocentrism and paves the way for a harmonious relationship between man and nature. The fascination to explore the ecological themes in literature is not an event of modern age it has already been started since ancient times studying different cultures and periods. If we reflect over the periods of history human beings have been passionately engrossed to nature for its sustainability, knowledge and everlasting appeal. It is not surprising that there has been a deep understanding between human beings and ecology. At the dawn of 20<sup>th</sup> century we have grown more conscious towards declining environment due to a sudden surge in industries and technologies. A plethora of literary works have been produced regarding a conscious approach to nature. These literary works have raised our consciousness to the alter effect of human actions on nature.

Recently ecological concerns have become major themes of many modern novelists like Barbara Kingsolver, Margaret Atwood, Richard Powers, Raj Kamal Jha and many others. Their complex narratives go deep in the human psyche and delineate the inseparable relationship between human beings and the environment. These works force us to reflect over the effects of climate change, deforestation, pollution, dust storm, cyclone, melting of glaciers and many disturbing factors of environment. They awaken us from slumber and urge us for future action. Authors have started giving different shapes to literature studying blue humanities, anthropomorphism; the study of human characteristics to non-living things. They give life to all the concerning elements that affect nature on a large scale. Writers have created a different world where inanimate objects energize our brain and help us build a long lasting relationship with nature. This deeply studied technique makes the fiction lively in nature where natural elements become characters in fiction and have immense power to mould human actions. We develop empathy to our fragile environment and helpless ecosystem. This reminds us that we all are interconnected with nature and bound with inseparable umbilical cord.

“By utilizing anthropomorphism in ecological literature, authors not only make nature more relatable and engaging but also evoke a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards the environment.”<sup>2</sup>

Our actions will only save the other living beings which are also part and parcel of nature. We must develop a deep understanding of nature. By attributing human qualities to nature authors have shown a deep respect for nature. We have been inspired enough to forge a deep relation with nature and connect it to the society at large. Nature has always served a special purpose for authors to convey deeper meanings. They symbolize human actions to show human experience. Lively dialogues, vivid descriptions of nature, genuine characters and the like make the literature totally concerned to environmental issues. They make these elements tangible and unignorable. They take us to a different world where our actions speak louder than words. They make us realize that we are responsible for all the mishappenings that we encounter in our day to day life. These narratives evoke empathy to nature and make us realize the causes of this fragile ecosystem: deforestation, pollution and climate change. Ecological themes in literary works can be taken as a catalyst for natural phenomena.

Raj Kamal Jha, being a writer of Modern era paints dexterously the impact of declining environmental consciousness among the people living in urban areas. His early novels *The Blue Bedspread*, *If You Are Afraid of Heights* and *Fireproof* deal with the untold burning issues of contemporary society. But the fourth one “*She Will Build Him a City*” presents the true picture of urban decay due to global warming. This novel is set against the backdrop of a rapidly modernizing Delhi, where fragmented lives shape the novel. Pollution in urban areas has been brought forth through various instances in the novel. It reveals how social and cultural factors play a vital role in raising consciousness regarding ecosystem and makes us believe that ecology is an inseparable part of literature and has become an area of concern for all literature-loving people.

## II. LITERATURE AND ECOLOGY

Devotion to ecology is as much important as patriotism to our country. Literature is the platform where we depict different moods of nature. Since ancient times nature has been an inseparable part of society but our rapid growth has changed the nature a lot. Industries and technologies have shortened the space for natural phenomena which has resulted in destruction of life and property on a large scale. Modern society has brought a sea-change in every walk of life. Over-exploitation of nature is seen on a large scale. And many modern writers have shown these changes on a large scale. Global warming and depletion of natural resources have become a matter of concern for all of us.



Uncontrolled life style, less concern for nature, emission of harmful gases and the like have worsened the situation like never before.

*She Will Build Him a City: A Textual Analysis*

People living in India or abroad face the heat of global warming and other environmental issues. Population explosion, industrialisation, weather inconsistency, traffic jams and the like have become regular phenomena in the city. India is facing the severe impact of environmental issues. Untimely rain has caused a lot of damages to the harvesting and sowing crops. What we see today are totally two different things now. Contemporary India is a living example of high-rise buildings, deforestation, multiplexes, technological advancement, industrialization and many others. Being a writer of modern era Raj Kamal Jha has delineated these grave issues in his novel "She Will Build Him a City". His main focus is to draw our attention to the challenging issues which need a quick redressal. He is one of the best rated novelists who has explored a lot of grave issues plaguing Modern India. Ecological imbalances are the result of over-exploitation of nature. Globalisation, industrialization, urbanization and the consequences of these on the environment are Jha's deep concern in the novel. He shows concern for increase in temperature: "The night is so hot the moon shines like the sun" and "By night's end, this heat pushes the temperature to a few points above 40, the highest minimum in the city's recorded history." <sup>3</sup>

Degrading nature is the recurrent theme which has resulted from the grievous short-comings of contemporary Indian society. Electronic items have also contributed a lot in green-house gas effect, global warming and urban heat:

"-----Metro stations where, if they are lucky, they catch whatever they can of the air-conditioned draught that escapes from inside a coach when its door open, when a train stops" and even "At nine the next morning, by which time the temperature has already touched 45". <sup>4</sup>

Jha signals for the present and cautions for the forthcoming challenges and problems. The time has come now as the modern technologies have started shaping us. And these technologies have started moulding the ecosystem also. Being ignorant is the root cause of all this. Time and again we come across happenings in cities but still the people are not concerned for this.

"At least five construction workers have been killed and ten are feared trapped when a building they were working in the centre of the city collapsed in the storm. Local residents say the disaster could have been averted but builders violated the construction plan cleared by the municipal corporation. Four floors were approved but workers were building a fifth floor." <sup>5</sup>

Global reality also doesn't remain untouched as the hostile environment and its consequences draw our attention here. Jha's novel forces us to reflect over the current scenario and seeks urgent action from our part. These rampant constructions (legally or illegally) have caused a great damage on ecological health.

As the novel narrates: "----One of the five hundred farmers who have to sell their land to developers to make way for the club and nearby Apartment Complex" <sup>6</sup>

Unavailability of water also beckons the inequalities of Indian social system. In the novel, a very humble background nurse, Kalyani Das says: "-----We all have to wake up when it's still dark. That is the only time when there is no crowd at the community tap where we live, when we can bathe and fill our buckets before anyone comes." <sup>7</sup>

Water which is our utter need is also not easily available. For this we need to be fully alert. This suggests existential crisis in contemporary India. The novelist has showed the resemblance of present condition: "Sir, there is no water, there is no power in their old city for three days, they say they don't have to drink, they are protesting, they are waiting for the local MLA or MP to come, give them assurance that power and water will be back by this evening." <sup>8</sup>

Struggle for water is deeply felt concern for all of us in the coming days. In small cities also, there is no hand pumps which has been source of clean drinking water. In contemporary Indian society, we experience the similar pictures. Well-being of society and environment can only be achieved if there are proper sanitation, clean water, and sewage system and there must be a limit for construction work.

The root cause of climate change is deforestation. This has not only lessened the beauty of nature but also destroyed the natural habitat of many birds. Many birds have come on the verge of extinction. Even we people will become homeless if we don't plant trees and preserve nature. It is urgent on our part to take corrective measures: "where have these birds come from? There are no trees along the highway all the way up to the airport; all were cut, so where do these birds live?" <sup>9</sup>

In Bihar recently peasants had to face damage to their paddy crops and destroyed the sowing of wheat due to untimely torrential rain. This untimely rain has not only destroyed the hope of millions of people but also cautioned about the impending risk. Time and again we come across unbearable dust storm in metropolitan cities. This is all because of climate change and global warming as in the novel a similar incident is portrayed realistically.



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“The dust storm we have seen in the capital today was very much in the forecast for the last two days, not just here for Delhi but for Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh as well as Rajasthan. But when it hit today, it surprised even the Met office which says that the wind speed and severity of the storm were much stronger than anticipated.”<sup>10</sup>

### III. CONCLUSION

The environment we are living in has become toxic now and has brought us on threatening levels. New India has been plagued by degrading ecosystem. Many eminent writers have shown concern for this upcoming threat and tried to bring forth the challenges through literature. This genre has capacity to instil consciousness among us and make us more prompt to nature. Literature is the best medium where share our experiences and helps us find corrective measures to mitigate the impending problems and combat the threat. Raj Kamal Jha has tried to bring forth the environmental issues and challenges through his novel and correlate with society at large.

He has given ample space to the causes and consequences of climate change. Imbalances in nature due to deforestation are many and countless but it is urgent on our part to take corrective measures. He ignites our inner consciousness regarding ecological concerns. He suggests sundry measures to tackle those impending problems.

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