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**From Tradition to Protest:  
Women, Words, and Resistance of Dowry Questioned in Maithili Literary  
Works.**

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**Abstract:**

This paper is subjected to examine the evolution of dowry in Mithila, in context with the narrative strategies of Maithili Fiction of the late 20th century. Literary criticism and cultural studies are referred to highlight how these regional novels, which are often overlooked, acts as a vehicle for critiquing the Maithili society during the period of 1970s to 1990s. This study marked the socio-historical context of Bihar during this era, where these rituals are deeply entrenched within the gendered power structures, contextualising the literary production, along with the legislative attempts in dealing the changing caste dynamics as well as the rise in grassroot movements of women. Focusing the renowned Maithili writers and the collection of seminal text revolving around the anxieties of dowry, this research encompasses the techniques like ritual studies, feminist critique and close reading of the text to either support or reinforce the legitimacy of expectations surrounding traditional culture motives of marital gift exchange.

The early period Maithili Novels are examined in the first part of the paper, where dowry appears as an act which is unavoidable. These early period texts are referred as passive critique of dowry. Here tradition is authentisized by the economic need, along with the honor of family. The plot analysis, the character-based critiques and tensions amidst the negotiation of bride family, revolving around the threat of marital annulment that seems justifying the patriarchal norms, even when they inadvertently expose the damages in the system. The second part of this paper explores the texts of mid-1980s, which shows symbolic resistance towards dowry. These texts are addressed as transitional texts in which the dowry extortion are resisted through subversive courtroom style debates and other symbolic actions. The narrative devices used by female protagonist are basically literary “ritual inversions”, which is temporarily discomfiting the ritual of dowry, which was earlier presumed sacred.

The last section of this paper explores the late 20th century novel, defined by the amalgamation of satire and solidarity. In these works, the contemporary Maithili writers dramatize the communal protest by employing the models of paradigmatic marriage, for instance companionate marriages, which is without dowry and the coral female groups show collective feminist voices as protest tool. Thus, through the trajectory of literature, this study documents, the evidence regarding the role of Maithili Fiction in not only mirroring but also actively contributing the grassroot protests by women's agency, cultural revival as well as legal reform. Ultimately, this paper emphasises on the critical role of literature in dealing with the ritual change. Revolving around Maithili novels as centre of cultural intervention, this paper enriches the study of Indian literature as well as ritual studies, depicting how these regional novels through rural storytelling can both mirror helplessness of social realities, as well as challenges enough for the possibilities of justice.

**Key Words-** Ritual Studies, Indian Literature, Dowry critique. Maithili Fiction, Feminist voices, Cultural reform, Late- 20th century.

### **Introduction**

Dowry related deaths are still thriving across the country . Recent reports say, woman in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh died due to regular assault for dowry, a hot iron rod was pressed against her body parts. Another woman was burnt alive after her family didn't meet the dowry demand. In Chandigarh, a bride suicide beca use of dowry harassment. In Tamil Nadu, Ponneri a bride suicide within 4 days of her marriage prevailing harassment by her in-laws for dowry. Another woman from Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu died by suicide just two months after her wedding and the reason was same . According to the reports of National Crime Records Bureau, during the period of 2017 to 2022, on an average 7000 deaths because of dowry harassment were report reported in India. To note that these were just reported cases, however, there must be many more that go unreported.

(The Hindu, July 17, 2025)

Be it any state or region, dowry is still openly practised across the Indian subcontinent as an unavoidable act.

“The gift of a girl” writes, Carolyne Henning Brown, refers the very core of narratives of dowry and the institution of marriage. In Mithila, the dowry narratives are linked with the cases where the castes are subdivided into different forms of hierarchial categories, for instance sub castes, clans, lineages or more amorphous units. Dowry in one way or other, is some kind of marital exchange relationship within such internal divisions. Critique often put forth the situation of “hypergamous” or “hypogamous”, while talking about dowry. To avoid prejudging the situation, a marriage should not be strictly labelled as “hypergamous” or “hypogamous” as it might mislead the actual social dynamics at play. For instance, it has been seen that even if a groom's family is only slightly higher in wealth and status still demand huge dowry as they associate dowry with the respect in society. Similar, instance says even when a bride's family is wealthier, but from a lower caste community, then also large dowry is expected to show the respect towards groom's family who hails from an

upper caste community. These exchanges are all about maintaining the fragile balances of reciprocity, obligation and honor.

This paper with the reference of seminal texts by Maithili writers brings into account the psychological paradigm for analysing the abuse connected with the dowry. This system dowry and the violence as well as the abuses linked with it are complex phenomena. The Role of women in propagating dowry and oppressing other woman is often ignored in our society. This document brings into account the contemporary legal and historical issues in relation to dowry.

Wedding preparation in Mithila, specially in villages and small towns are flooded with vibrant art, rituals, colour and familial pride. Yet, there is some silent negotiations behind these loud ceremonies: the marital exchanges often referred as dowry. However, it is described in society as blessings of elders for the goodwill of newlywed couple, but it carries the implications that is far beyond the gesture of goodwill and festivity. From Jewellery to cash, vehicles, furniture, utensils and even parcels of land over time become the markers of societal status. These exchanges are often compared with the worth of bride. While Indian law states the practice of dowry as illegal ever since 1961, yet the people in rural areas are either not aware of this or didn't trust the legal authority for help.

The Postcolonial era in Mithila sees significant transformations towards the socio-economic landscape. Land reforms, urbanization and print culture resulted in the rise of new professional classes that brings these public discourses on social reform agenda. These transitions and transformations coincided with the increasing debates on gender equality and equity both. It also argues societal and familial ethics because both the reformist and nationalist movements demands critical reassessment of these inherited rituals and customs. These broader cultural, social and historical surroundings shaped the Maithili writers of that time and it gave them an emergent platform to convey their thoughts on dowry. Unlike some forceful writings, the novels of this time create a softer space to dramatize the situation of people who feel and struggle these long-standing traditions like dowry. These novels reveal the conflict that arises when these customary practices collide with the changing mindsets about moral and economical expectations. This period shows diverse literary approaches, for instance Satire, lyrical introspection and realism. Dowry locally termed as 'dahej' is used as a lens to represent gender roles, economic pressures and familial expectations that reflect the patriarchy in Mithila, yet evolving society.

Satire was one significant attempt in which the author employs wit in critiquing the dowry's dominance in the society. Hari Mohan Jha, a prominent writer, also known as the "saviour of modern Maithili" used humour to portray the absurdity behind dowry negotiations. He shows how groom's family represents the calculating bargainers who ultimately commodified the sacred bond of marriage. He mimicked the real life discourses

in his novels, to expose the moral bankruptcy of such traditional practices. The urban readers coincided with this approach by using laughter and humour in provoking reflection on societal traditions.

### **Realist Narratives**

Realism is one of the significant tools of the writers for expressing the ground realities of dowry in short stories and novels. The writers focused the setting of dowry negotiations to rural Mithila region. Famous authors like Upendra Nath Jha 'Vyas' has portrayed the realities of dowry in his works where the negotiations of dowry have been depicted as tense ritualistic exchanges that strained the bonds between families. These narratives are centred around the struggles of bride's family in dealing with the demands of dowry by using various description of village life and their household dynamics to highlight the economic toll. Through realism writers mirror the live experiences of rural Maithil audience fostering a sense of empathy and critique. Likewise, poetry portrayed a more introspective approach, the renowned poets like Vidyapati and his modern successors have viewed the practice of dowry into lyrical critiques. Their verses used metaphors of burden and sacrifice to depict the plight of bride and her family. For example, the poems of Somdev portrayed the emotional weight of dowry in 1980s by employing the Maithili melodic rhythm, showing it as a chain that binds families to tradition forcefully. Through lyrical style, the poet appealed the reader's emotions and blend the pride of culture with critical demand for reformation. There are experimental approaches as well, where fragmented narratives are used to examine the psychological strain caused by negotiations of dowry. The Maithili writers have also employed the technique of stream of consciousness to capture the internal turmoil of characters stuck in expectations of society, thus portraying a modernist critique of traditions and customs of Mithila. However, this approach is not easily accessible as it pushes the literary boundaries and demand intellectual audiences and thus refers a shift towards the literary trends on ground global level. This diverse literary approach enrich Maithili literature and involves readers not only from Mithila, but beyond the regional constrains.

### **Portrayal of Women and Societal Attitudes**

The attitude of society towards women remain judgemental. They expect submission over rebel, yet in the Maithili Novels women are portrayed as often standing at the border of social expectation and tradition. Women experiences illuminates collective ways of thinking toward gender and family obligations. The authors didn't just depicted women as helpless victims or paragons of virtue, instead they reveal multilayered people, specifically women who have their own personal aspirations, yet pressurised with obligations and expectations imposed by society. This approach depicted women as humans who are navigating the conflicting demand of society.

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A significant social realist novel *Bidagari* by Pandit Chandranath Mishra, has shown the female character Sunita as one-dimensional “victim” of customs and traditions. It portrays how Sunita accepts the decisions of her family and internalizes their hopes yet the novel also signifies the glimpses of silent resistance of character. In her inner thoughts she wonders why her value is measured with the amount of clothes, jewellery, cash and other items she will be carrying to her marital home. She often wanted to question, why her parents need to make sacrifices for securing her marriage. However, these are silent questions, but it does matter a lot. It depicts that the story is not just about dowry negotiations but about a woman's silent resistance and recognizing the injustices thrown upon them. Such layered depiction echoed across the other symbolic resistance of the period where the women cannot openly confront against dowry demand. However, she subtly repositions herself by displaying the symbols of authority and respect during wedding rituals. These unspoken protests unsettle the “natural order” hinting that woman can take stand for their dignity even when words are not possible. These examples portray us the attitude of society, where women are depicted as neither static nor monolithic in nature.

### **Literature Review**

The discussion of dowry in Maithili fiction, specifically during 1960s to 1990s unfolds the slow conventional developments. Initially it started as pathetic instances which later developed into acute, societal critique and ultimately into communal resistance. The research works as well as the creative work during this period, not only documented the change in narrative strategies but also the shift in societal imagination. Now caste prides, rituals and families are not just background rather they are contested sites for the obligation of gift and honor. The authors constantly worked on these to realistically reveal the human toll of dowry. The Maithili texts gathered and tabulated in the author's project offer a handy template to follow that evolution and to set literary techniques against immediate historical pressures.

The first cluster of research and original works addresses dowry as a normalized constraint, an anticipation embedded in daily ritual and exchange of marriage. The early novels and fictions employ realism to mark suffering of brides' families and they are made to negotiate, suffer, and compromise but the narrative structure tends to signify such compromises as necessities. These literary stances are sympathetic but resolutely conservative in terms of suggested solutions that operates historically as documentation. It registers the fiscal and affective costs imposed on women without disrupting social structures. These kinds of texts are significant because they conserve vernacular reactions to dowry at a time when legal and activist avenues were feeble or developing, and they provide a measure against which subsequent, more combative writings can be seen.

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Since the mid-1980s, a noticeable change is apparent. Authors started to politicize ritual rhetoric and courtroom tropes, what used to be dramatized as interior grief is transformed into public arenas of ethical controversy. The invention of pseudo-trials, courtroom oratory within domestic spaces, and the performance of ritual "inversions" (conscious subversions of sacred tradition) signal a formal innovation with genre as well as with the social role of literature. Instead of merely expressing social pressure, these works utilize narrative as intervention, trying to rescript dowry as a public rather than private injustice to be explained, questioned, and responded to. The archive overviews home, particularly on this mid-period repurposing of narrative strategy and its alignment with larger social mobilizations.

The second overarching theme in the literature is the relationship between dowry and caste claims. Dowry is not treated in Maithili texts as a discrete patriarchal technology, but as something that is most often tied to caste status and the reproduction of local hierarchies. The insistence of upper-caste families on costly transfers is represented as both economic flaunting and symbolic display, an investment in social standing that reproduces disparity. Literary critics reading these works through a caste perspective highlight that dowry is ritualized money as it makes alliances and marks honor while creating long-term debt and gendered exposure. Analyses such as these move beyond a strictly gendered interpretation to compel the insistence on dowry's situatedness in a web of caste politics and ritual obligation.

Another line of scholarship involves narrative voice and the shifting of agency. While previous narratives tended to place women in passive suffering mediated by male narrative voices or patriarchal family structures, subsequent Maithili fiction plays with women's collective voices, choral narrators, active feminine tellers of tales, and community-based forms of protest. This reconfiguration is important as it does not simply alter point of view rather it relocates ethical accountability from individuated grief to a public issue that can be named, contested, and fought against. Critics who are sensitive to narrative form observe that these choral techniques imitate the social modes of resistance in the world outside the text. Women's groups, street theatre, and local movements are indicating literature's vulnerability to performative and activist action.

Satire and irony become key resources in the 1990s. As much as realism and courtroom drama had attempted to bring institutional focus to dowry's harms, satire takes up ridicule as corrective measures exaggerating ostentation or representing gruesome ritual excess, authors invited readers to behold the system's absurdity and cruelty. Satirical stories usually reinterpret suffering as farce, thus making the complicit social scripts that make dowry both ordinary and atrocity visible. This verbal transformation is very significant because it magnifies the range of resistance in literature. Humor, ridicule as well as moral

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indignations are engaged, as satire holds the power to transcend social classes, thus making it easily accessible and difficult to neglect as upper class.

Comparative methods enhance our comprehension of Maithili reactions by placing them in conjunction with other provincial literatures. When placed in relation to Hindi or Tamil works, Maithili fiction's specific focus on ritual detail and rural performance becomes readable. North Indian (Hindi) literature tends to draw from urban legal language and policy debates. For example, Tamil writings may place concern with intersections of caste and religion within various idiomatic frameworks. Maithili's contribution lies in its granular engagement with local ceremonial life, wedding rites, caste honor and village-level economies, making its narratives particularly instructive for scholars interested in the cultural embeddedness of dowry practices. Comparative criticism highlights both convergences (shared feminist concerns) and divergences (differences in aesthetic strategy and social terrain). An important methodological thread in the reviewed work connects literature to performance and extra-textual action.

Many of these books do not just tell but inspire, they are connected historically to street theater, women's group organizing and a developing public lexicon of dowry violence. Authors who map these connections suggest that Maithili fiction contributed to the rhetorical and affective resources of mobilization, script, metaphors, and dramatizations that could be repurposed for public protest. This scholarship highlights an interdependence, activism is informed by fiction (themes, urgencies) and fiction provides imagery and narrative tactics to activism. Such enmeshment makes it difficult to make easy distinctions between social change and aesthetic production.

A third body of commentary is devoted to the legal literary intersection. The occurrence of courtroom imagery in fiction and the recording of legal cases in modern sources, indicates that Maithili authors were not averse to law rather they confronted it, reworded its terminology, and frequently lampooned its ineffectiveness. Literature thus becomes a place both of legal imagination and legal critique, encompassing not only crime and punishment but also the moral expectations that law cannot fulfil. Legal critics concerned with law and literature in the Maithili context warn against over optimism, narrative can unmask injustice and galvanize opinion, but textual critique is no automatic guarantee of enforceable remedies. Nevertheless, following this literary legal conversation, it is necessary to determine how cultural evolution is sown and why law occasionally falls behind ethical evolution. Combining the literature covered here in traces a consistent thread of Maithili literature transitioned from recording despair to producing protest, from personal complaint to public denunciation, from personal ritual to public spectacle.

The primary works and critical reactions embodied within the project demonstrate the ways of narrative form, for example- realism, courtroom allegory, ritual inversion,

satire was strategically marshaled to destabilize dowry as cultural common sense. This collection of works highlights also the co-constitutive relationship between literature and social practice. The texts do not simply reflect change but also assist in imagining and occasionally triggering it.

### **Research Gap**

In spite of the substantial descriptive and interpretive scholarship on Maithili fiction's dealings with dowry, there are well-defined and consequential gaps, gaps whose filling would significantly enhance both scholarly insight and practical action. These gaps are empirical, methodological, theoretical, and translational in nature.

**Empirical silences:** Most existing attention focuses upon a very few celebrated novels and short-story collections of urban-educated writers or of canonized authors. Attention to these excludes a number of significant voices: lower-caste or Adivasi Maithili writers, orally circulated folk stories, and unpublished or locally circulating writing (pamphlets, community theatre plays, and recorded oral histories). Such genres can capture conflicting logics: e.g., dowry practice as mediated by agrarian economies, debt relations, or non-Hindu ritual forms. Systematic recovery and documentation of these more opaque texts would redress the sampling bias towards published work and would make visible how the cultural grammar of dowry differs in terms of caste, landholding configurations, and religious practice. The corpus thus far therefore runs the risk of over-representing some classed and caste-based views and under-representing others.

**Temporal and geographic limits.** The literature under review tends to concentrate on a few decades (roughly 1960s–1990s) and on specific districts or literary centers. There is a pressing need for longitudinal studies that extend the analysis into the 21st century, examining how neoliberal economic shifts, migration, and the penetration of media and social platforms have transformed dowry practices and their literary representation. Also, intra-region diversity in Mithila (east/west, upland/lowland, trans-border Maithili-speaking regions) remains unexplored; spatially sensitive research might illustrate how local economies and migratory circuits influence dowry's forms and the stories about it. Research combining demographic and economic information with literary analysis would be particularly fruitful in such cases.

**Intersectional intricacies:** When gender and caste are examined, less consideration has been devoted to the intersections of class, sexuality, disability, and religion in dowry discourses. How do dowry negotiations change for working-class individuals, for disabled populations, or for religious minorities across the Maithili region? Do queer relationship representations complicate or reinforce dowry logics? Intersectional approaches attuned to more than one axis of identity would produce a more nuanced explanation of who is being harmed, how, and with what social impact. The current literature's habit of placing gender

and caste in the foreground without incorporating other axes threatens to erase the lived complexity of experience.

**Reception and readership studies:** A lot of criticism presumes that texts affect social practice and has anecdotal connections to performance and activism; however, empirical research on readership, circulation, and reception is rare. Who reads these Maithili texts (gender, class, rural/urban divides)? How are stories translated when performed or staged? Does reading have any correspondence with shifts in opinion, policy, or behavior at the village level? Ethnographic studies of the consumption of literature: book lending, oral recitation, stage adaptation would illuminate the processes where by narrative could spark change. In the absence of these, claims regarding the social effectiveness of literature are possible but under-documented.

**Methodological extension:** Most current analyses are based on close reading and conventional literary-historical techniques. Though invaluable, these methodologies need to be complemented with archival excavation (private papers, judicial records, NGO archives), oral history projects, and digital humanities methods (textual corpora analysis, mapping of literary networks). For example, building a Maithili wedding story corpus and performing contrastive textual analyses could open up common metaphors and changes in affect over time and place. Innovative methodological combinations would advance the discipline to more systemic explanations from isolated readings of texts.

**Translation and accessibility:** Most Maithili texts are untranslated or badly accessible to readers not speaking Maithili. This restricts comparative scholarship and limits the capacity of researchers to link local discourses to national and transnational ones regarding dowry and gender violence. A concerted translation effort, attentive critically and annotated for context would unlock the field for comparative examination and possibly impact policy discourse by making local stories readable to broader publics. Translating oral scripts and performance texts into scholarly forms would also save ephemeral protest cultures.

**Law-literature impact analysis:** Whereas a few texts nod toward the nexus of narrative and law, comprehensive studies tracking legal developments alongside literary currents do not exist. Do peaks in critical writing lead or lag enforcement changes? Are certain narrative tactics linked to quantifiable policy changes or NGO actions? Constructing datasets with cross-references between publication dates, cases, and campaigns might subject assertions about literature's causal influence on social change to test. Such work would also tell us at which level narrative intervention best works, either at the level of consciousness-raising, policy advocacy, or community mobilization.

Digital-age changes: Lastly, the explosion of social media, mobile telephony, and internet organizing post-2000s poses new questions: how have digital media reshaped dowry talk? Are novel Maithili voices bloggers, video-makers, social-media campaigners are crafting opinion in new ways compared to the print age? Studies mapping digital stories and comparing them with printed fiction might shed light on ruptures and continuities of rhetoric, affect, and mobilization tactics.

Filling these gaps would not only enlarge the archive; it would hone the field's analytical instruments and more firmly anchor literary analysis in social practice. By broadening sources, methodologies, and orders of analysis, future scholarship can more accurately record how cultural texts become part of, challenge, and sometimes rewrite the structural forces that underwrite dowry. The project outlined in the presentation establishes important foundations charting literary strategies and their social resonances but now the research community must extend both the empirical foundation and methodological tool kit to make claims that are more inclusive, more evidence-grounded, and more actionable.

### **Research Questions**

Any study of dowry in Mithila needs to acknowledge that it is not merely an economic issue, but also involves cultural ceremonies, gender roles, and social relations of power. Texts and oral histories from the region give a glimpse into how communities think about women, family reputation, and what marriage means. In order to form a study that is both situated and critical, the following research questions are suggested.

1. In what ways do Maithili literary works and oral traditions represent women in the context of dowry?

This question places the portrayal of women at its core. Instead of merely explaining the dowry system, it inquires about the portrayal of women in narratives, novels, and plays are they passive victims, silent sufferers, or active resisters? It further questions whether their depiction evolves over time or differs according to genre. This enables us to witness whether literature reflects actual oppression or resists it by empowering women through voice.

2. What cultural attitudes toward dowry are expressed in Maithili stories, and how do these attitudes support or challenge the practice?

Here the focus shifts to the broader community. Dowry is sustained not just by individual families but by shared social beliefs. By examining how characters speak about dowry whether as duty, prestige, or burden, we can uncover the “moral common sense” of the time. This question is crucial to understand how culture normalizes or contests the practice.

3. How do caste, class, and regional traditions influence the depiction of dowry in Maithili literature?

Dowry is not usually uniform. Its meanings and expectations vary in relation to caste hierarchy, landholding, migration status, and ritual obligation. This question asks the researcher to consider the intersection of social structures with literary form. It also resists a flat reading of dowry as a "universal evil" by illustrating how it is imagined differently in different contexts.

4. In what ways have Maithili writers employed literary devices like realism, satire, or dramatization in the context of a courtroom to criticize dowry systems?

This question is an example of form and strategy. While literature is certainly concerned with content, the form that it is presented in determines its social effect. By looking at the tools used by authors, we are able to observe how they translate personal suffering into public critique, and how satire or performance can make resistance available.

5. What continuities and changes can be found in the representation of dowry from the older Maithili works (1960s–1980s) to the newer ones (1990s–2000s)?

Literature evolves in tandem with society. This diachronic query invites tracing patterns: older works might have been resigned, whereas newer ones more confrontational or satirical. Tracing such changes illustrates how cultural criticism evolves over time.

6. How far do Maithili dowry stories intersect with women's own tactics of negotiation, resistance, or survival in daily life?

Lastly, this brings text and lived reality together. It recognizes that literature is not independent but connected to performance, oral culture, and grass-root activism. Posing this question extends research from text to community life, demonstrating how social action nourishes tales.

Why these questions matter,

Together, they form an even-handed matrix: they examine women's representation, cultural attitudes, intersectional factors, literary devices, historical developments, and connections to lived experience. They are not yes/no questions but rather open invitations to subtle analysis. Better still, they ensure the research does not end with decrying dowry, but also questions the cultural motors that drive it and literary means by which literature resists those motors.

**Discussion**

Dowry in Mithila is not a mere economic transaction but an institution intertwining honor, caste, and ritual. Through studying Maithili novels and short stories from the 1960s to the 1990s, we are able to follow how literary voices changed from resigned complaint to express open rebellion. These stories not only reveal women's suffering but reinterpret cultural symbols, presenting a changing critique of patriarchy. The subsequent discussion delves into the research questions based on the literary periods and novels provided in those period.

**1. Portrayal of Women in Dowry Fiction**

Women in early novels such as Chandranath Mishra Amar's *Bidagari* (1963) are shown mostly as helpless sufferers in the dowry machinery. Their intense emotional suffering is expressed in the narrative, however situated in the terms of patriarchal orders. Amar's women are obedient daughters and self-sacrificing brides, passively shouldering the suffocating burden of negotiations exercised by male seniors. It is shown that sympathy might be created, but can't create action. In this story women is depicted as the moral conscious who point out injustices through their suffering instead of being rebellious. Moving forward into 1970s, Ekta Akash by Binod Bihari Verma brings sophistication into literary resistance of dowry. The short stories by him depicted the visions that are female centered. In these stories, though women are not able to show happiness at times, yet they critique their conditions through their hearts. Now the silence of bride as portrayed in Amar's work is starting to change in Verma's narratives. Here, characters start questioning, why the worth of woman is compared with wealth, why marriage has to be dependent on material exchange and most importantly why society expects silence and submission from woman. Though, still there is quite resistance only, yet questioning the female subjectivity has been started.

Stepping towards 1980s, Maithili Fiction like *Ee Bataha Sansar* by Sudhansu Shekhar Choudhary and Ramashankar Jha's *Adalati Gatha* shows women's suffering in the form of staged protest in context with courtroom narratives, in which the private shame is now converted into public accusation. This change in representation is depicted by transition from victimised objects to subjective witness, whose experiences acts as grounds for moral judgement.

Finally during 1990s, the Maithili Fiction by Binod Bihari Verma *Balanak Bonihar O Pallavi* portrays women not just as sufferers but also as strong voices of resistance. The narratives conjure them as tellers, protesters, even chorus-like characters who voice their communities. Women are no longer relegated to suffering alone rather they create solidarities that reflect the emergence of women's organizations in Bihar. Their depiction indicates that literature had already come to see women as critics and agents of change

## 2. Societal Attitudes As Reflected in Literature

The early books describe society as very complicit in dowry. Family reputation and caste pride reign supreme in *Bidagari*, so dowry appears more of an obligation. Even when the story goes against the bride's family, the groom's side is presented as "browbeaten" by societal pressure. This is how society justifies injustice not greed but necessity. In Verma's *Ekta-Akash*, the society still finds dowry as natural, but dissatisfaction arises in silence. The bride's kin is usually powerless, but there exists awareness that social standing is attached to conformity. These beliefs support dowry as ritualized coercion with limited space for dissenting families.

By the 1980s, symbolic protests within Chaudhary and Jha's novels indicate cracks in this consensus. *Adalati Gatha* especially dramatizes dowry conflict as trials, turning the community itself into witness to its hypocrisy. The excuses of society are ridiculed now, and ritual sanctity is romanticized through "ritual inversion" with this brides started refusing dowry right in the wedding ceremonies, for example, the community spectacle is converted into criticism now. This represents the growing challenges to wards societal attitudes in Mithila, where women's groups and activists began challenging such customs openly.

The 1990s shows major shift in narrative strategies. For instance, in *Balanak Bonihar O Pallavi*, the author satirise the exchange of material wealth in marriage negotiations. The villagers who were defending dowry earlier are now depicted either as morally questionable or comical. In such situations, literature portrays the realistic picture and influences the shift from tolerance to communal mockery. The attitudes are now criticized in a very socially intelligible manner.

## 3. Caste, Class, and Local Customs in Shaping Dowry

Dowry practice in Mithila is linked with caste pride. In *Bidagari*, the author portrays the dowry extraction by upper caste families to highlight their status and chastity in society. It shows that as the hierarchy of caste increases the demand of dowry also increases simultaneously indicating the symbolic honor attached with dowry. It thus neglects the representation of dowry as economic necessity.

Likewise, in Verma's short stories, the economic dynamics can be seen at the crossroads of caste pride. Middle Class families, even having less wealth, try to copy upper caste ways because they see this as a method of ascending the social ladder in society. This unfolds the depiction of dowry not only as a traditional ritual but also as aspiration for attaining dignity in society.

Maithili Fiction of 1980s, for instance *Ee Bataha Sansar* depicted how families are trapped in wedding and caste rigidities. This story gives the proof of how the suffering of woman runs parallel with the intersection of caste and patriarchy. The bride who hails from lower caste has to face more judgement and the dowry talks in such cases become more severe.

In 1990s, Verma documents the reality of rural area, portraying the mental and emotional damage with dowry's weight to labourers, farmers and even non petty bourgeoisie in society. Portraying this practice through both caste and class lines, the author demonstrate that the shape of dowry can be different, but the damaging effect caused by it are same everywhere. To be precise, it is the caste which dictates the amount of demand, on the other hand class defines the destruction caused by it.

#### **4. Literary Forms: From Realism to Satire**

The changes in literary form cause the evolution of dowry stories of Mithila. *Bidagiri* employs, sentimental storytelling and realism to evoke sympathy towards the bride's family, yet the radicals were provided no alternative. *Ekta Akash* depicted the closeness of short stories, portraying the insight of women's inner uncertainty. Likewise, *Ee Bataha Sansar* gives way to symbolism, through which dowry is deployed as a metaphor for corruption of society.

Courtroom allegory was used in *Adalati Gatha*, where dowry is dramatized as trial, not only of people but of whole conscience of society. The application of legal metaphors through experiments like this, converted the agony of society into mannered moral discourse. Similarly, the novel *Balanak Bonihar O Pallavi* works on the lines of irony and satire. presenting dowry demands as grotesque and ridiculous. The dowry's order of tradition was shaken by satire and ridicule of societal greed. These transcending methods are demonstrated in literature as dynamic instead of passive, thus finding ways that can disrupt the social consensus. This shift from realism to satire depicted authors attempt in moving the reader's sympathy into action.

#### **5. Continuities and Shifts Across Decades**

Moving forward into the period of 1960s to 1970s. It can be seen that literature though documented suffering but did not question the societal structure. Dowry is depicted as something which cannot be avoided even if it is burden for the family both morally as well as economically.

By 1980s, authors started using symbolic resistance from courtrooms, they shifted to imagery and ritual inversion. Now, literature becomes the platform for debate and argumentation instead of just resignation.

With the advent of 1990s, tonal shift can be seen in literature. This shift promotes unapologetic satire and collective voices. By this time, dowry get satirized in literature and now it started imagining solidarity and also reflecting the spirit of that time.

This evolution mirrors broader social changes: the emergence of women's organizations in Bihar, growing prominence of legal language, and rural mobilization on caste politics. Literature both records and helps shape these changes, so it is a historical actor in its own right.

### **6. Literature and Lived Resistance**

The last research question, how texts intersect with lived strategies compels us to read literature not only as reflection but as cultural intervention.

In Amar's initial work, literature provided solace but not direction. By Verma's era, stories had started disseminating criticisms among communities, sowing seeds of skepticism. By the 1980s and 1990s, literature engaged activism directly: courtroom-style narratives and ritual inversions paralleled real practice by women's protest groups, who performed plays and songs condemning dowry.

Street theater, spurred by fiction, took these critiques out of the airwaves into the streets. The 1994 fiction of Binod Bihari Verma has "chorus of women", which is reminiscent depicting the women in Mahila Mandals, how they shout slogans, coordinated in groups and performs the symbolic rituals to bring injustice into mainstream. These fiction no more only reflect the social protest rather the resistance movements are afforded by fiction through language and imagery.

From the past few decades, Maithili literature plays a very significant role in converting dowry, from an unchallenged ritual to an active ground of resistance. The representations of women are also changed from unheard sufferers to competing voices. The chronology of resistance proceed as first attitude of society are documented, then it is questioned, mocked and later the loopholes of caste and class were revealed. The literary devices were also transformed into satire from realism. This process brings into light not only the literary developments but also the struggles of society, in which the role of literature was not only to reflect suffering rather literature also act as a significant weapon of protest.

### **Conclusion**

The evolution of dowry in Mithila during late twentieth century signifies a major shift in the narrative tone, as well as in the cultural imagination of resistance. These protests started in the early decades as a mere presentation of suffering which later increasingly evolved into effervescent satire, public protest, and literary refiguring of

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justice. It can be seen that during the period of 1960s to 1990s, authors not only protested against the social, political and legal ups and downs of their day, but also highlighted new methods to communities for considering marriage and the dignity of women.

The initial period in this paper is highlighted through Chandranath Mishra Amar's *Bidagari* (1963), in which the stories did not portray the resistance against dowry, rather it showed the suffering of woman and the emotional impact caused by it. Authors have portrayed women in these works as silent sufferers, who were burdened with family honor and expectations of society. The novels of this period created a feeling of moral discomfort among readers. Though the stories did not portray open rebel against dowry yet it refrain people from making it as an unthinking celebration. It encouraged people to critically think before blindly performing these traditions

During 1970s, Binod Bihari Verma's *Ekta-Akash* shifted the focus of resistance against dowry. By this time priorities were set for women's voices, their inner conflict and resistance against oppressive rituals. Although dowry was still continuing as a necessity in society, yet these stories demonstrated that literature could question though, not fully rebellious but express doubt openly. This period sets the platform for literature to act as rebel.

The period of 1980s depicts the experimental resistance. Sudhanshu Shekhar Chaudhary's *Ee Bataha Sansar* and Ramashankar Jha's *Adalati Gatha* bring forth new resistance techniques into Maithili prose. Literary page become the stage of moral conflict and metaphors from courtrooms, symbolic protests and ritual inversions are brought into picture. For the first time, this period portrayed the public questioning of dowry inside the literary fiction page. With this technique, the missing legal justice was compromised with the radical narrative strategies, openly demonstrating the failure of government as well as equipped the readers with prominent vocabulary of resistance.

The arrival of 1990s brought optimistic appeal in this circle. As the authors by this time started embracing satire and collective women's voices. For instance, Verma's *Balanak Bonihar O Pallavi* (1994) has changed the narrative tone from tragic resignation to critical ridicule. The authors have started using irony, humour and rural realism to break this societal honor attached with dowry. Instead, dowry was depicted as something which is distorted, ugly and morally repulsive. The authors of this time stopped portraying women as isolated sufferers, instead they started recognizing collective agency of woman. These women are also represented as politically awakened, who showed their action and strength while facing difficulties, thus exemplifying the resilience. Thus, literature both mirrored and propelled the feminist movements of Bihar, where street theatre and women's collectives act as pivotal instruments for fight against dowry.

Now, collectively analysing these decades, it can be seen that the novels during these periods, documents the evolution of Maithili literature in fight against dowry. A significant shift can be seen where the narrative emerges from silence to satire, as well as from sympathy to solidarity. These narratives portrayed us that literature is not only about passive critic but also acts as active player in cultural protest. When the judiciary was ineffective in taking any action against such practices and even government machinery was also reluctant in action, then it was fiction, which become court of conscience, a theatre of protest and a source of collective voices.

Thus, clear conclusion cannot be seen as of now, as the dowry practice in Mithila was neither purely economic nor ritualistic. It was about comparing and calculating the value of women to protect the prestige of family. Maithili authors reframe these stories to create a symbolic battleground for justice. Their narratives depict the current arguments reflecting the role of literature against oppression and now gradually it became become a vehicle for change.

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