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## Representation of Mithila Culture in *The Bride* by Harimohan Jha: A Critical Exploration

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**DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20099537>**

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### ARTICLE DETAILS

#### Research Paper

**Accepted:** 21-04-2026

**Published:** 10-05-2026

#### Keywords:

*Mithila Culture, Marriage Practices, Patriarchy, Tradition vs Modernity, Social Satire*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the representation of Mithila culture in *The Bride* (Kanyadan) by Harimohan Jha. This important work in Maithili literature provides a clear picture of early twentieth-century life in the Mithila region. The novel serves as a cultural record and a social critique. It offers detailed insights into traditional practices like arranged marriages, dowry negotiations, caste hierarchies, and gender roles. Through Buchia's story and her unsuitable marriage, Jha highlights the entrenched patriarchal norms that shape women's lives, often reducing them to passive roles within strict social systems. At the same time, the text portrays the richness of Mithila's cultural life, including rituals, language variety, and artistic traditions. This helps preserve its unique identity. The paper also looks at the conflict between tradition and modernity, seen in the different views of characters influenced by Western education and those tied to traditional customs. Jha uses humour and satire as effective tools to critique social hypocrisies, all without diminishing the cultural spirit of the region. By placing *The Bride* within a larger context of cultural and feminist discussions, this study shows how the novel balances preservation and change. Ultimately, it argues that Jha's work not only documents Mithila culture but also questions its oppressive elements, making it an important contribution to Indian



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**INTRODUCTION-**

Literature has always been a powerful way to represent, preserve, and critique the cultural life of a society. Regional literatures, in particular, play a vital role in documenting the experiences, traditions, and social realities of specific communities. In this context, *The Bride* (Kanyadan) by Harimohan Jha stands out as a significant work that offers a rich portrayal of Mithila culture. Written in Maithili during the early twentieth century, the novel captures a society deeply connected to tradition while subtly changing under the influence of modernity and colonial education.

Mithila, a culturally vibrant region in present-day Bihar and parts of Nepal, is known for its unique social customs, linguistic heritage, and artistic traditions. The identity of Mithila is shaped by its emphasis on rituals, strong adherence to caste hierarchies, and a patriarchal social structure. Marriage is particularly important in Mithila society. It operates not just as a personal union but as a social institution guided by strict norms and expectations. Practices like arranged marriages, dowry exchanges, and early marriages reflect the deeply rooted values that govern family and social relationships. Jha sets his narrative within this socio-cultural framework, making *The Bride* an important cultural document.

At the centre of the novel is the story of Buchia, a young girl whose life is influenced by her society's customs and expectations. Through her experience of an ill-matched marriage, Jha shows the limitations placed on women in a patriarchal system. The novel illustrates how women are often denied independence and are expected to fit into roles defined by tradition. Their identities are connected to family honour, marital status, and domestic duties. In this way, *The Bride* not only reflects Mithila's cultural practices but also reveals the gender inequalities ingrained within them. The conditions of women in the novel provide a way to understand the broader social structure.

One striking element of Jha's narrative is his use of humour and satire to critique social practices. Instead of directly condemning tradition, he uses irony and comic situations to expose the contradictions and absurdities of Mithila society. This approach engages readers while encouraging them to think critically. As a result, *The Bride* works on multiple levels: it celebrates cultural richness while critiquing social injustice. Jha's use of satire also sets his work apart from other reformist texts of the time, which often take a more serious or moralistic tone.

Another crucial aspect of the novel is its examination of the conflict between tradition and modernity. The early twentieth century was a time of significant change in Indian society, marked by the spread of



Western education and new social ideals. In *The Bride*, this tension is represented by the English-educated groom, whose expectations are influenced by modern values. His dissatisfaction with traditional practices reflects the rising influence of modernity, while his struggle to connect with his cultural roots reveals the complexities of this change. Jha does not present modernity as a complete answer; instead, he uncovers its limits and contradictions, suggesting that the conflict between tradition and change is both inevitable and unresolved.

The novel is also distinguished by its detailed portrayal of cultural practices, including wedding rituals, linguistic diversity, and artistic expressions. Jha integrates elements of Maithili language, together with Hindi, Sanskrit, and English, to reflect the multilingual character of Mithila society. Folk songs, proverbs, and rituals are interwoven into the narrative, adding authenticity and depth to the cultural representation. These elements not only improve the text's literary quality but also help preserve cultural heritage. Thus, *The Bride* serves as an archive of Mithila culture, capturing its nuances and complexities for future generations.

From a critical standpoint, *The Bride* can be viewed through various theoretical lenses, including cultural studies, feminism, and postcolonial theory. A feminist perspective reveals how patriarchal norms limit women's independence and reinforces gender inequality. Simultaneously, a cultural studies approach shows how the novel balances representation and critique, preserving tradition while calling for change. The text also reflects the impact of colonial modernity, seen in the evolving aspirations and values of its characters. These multiple angles highlight the richness of Jha's work and its relevance to modern discussions about culture and identity.

The goal of this paper is to critically analyse how Mithila culture is represented in *The Bride*, focusing on key aspects like marriage customs, gender roles, caste dynamics, and the relationship between tradition and modernity. By exploring these themes, the study aims to demonstrate how Jha's novel acts as both a cultural document and a reformist text. It seeks to uncover how literature can reflect and challenge social realities, offering insights into the complexities of cultural life.

*The Bride* is an important contribution to Indian regional literature, providing a detailed and critical depiction of Mithila society. Its relevance goes beyond its historical context, as the issues it raises—such as gender inequality, social hierarchy, and the tension between tradition and change—remain relevant today. Through its rich narrative and thoughtful critique, the novel invites readers to engage with the cultural practices it presents, fostering a deeper understanding of both their significance and limitations.



## CRITICAL REPRESENTATION OF MITHILA CULTURE: TRADITION, PATRIARCHY, AND SOCIAL CHANGE-

The depiction of Mithila culture in *The Bride* (Kanyadan) by Harimohan Jha is intricate, layered, and often contradictory. The novel neither fully praises tradition nor completely dismisses it; rather, it provides a detailed view where cultural practices are both upheld and questioned. This section examines the main themes—marriage practices, gender roles, caste structure, and the clash between tradition and modernity—to see how Mithila culture is portrayed and critiqued in the text.

One of the most prominent aspects of Mithila culture shown in the novel is the institution of marriage. Marriage is not presented as a personal or emotional connection but as a strict social arrangement influenced by caste, financial factors, and family reputation. The practice of arranged marriage, often involving very young girls, highlights the lack of individual choice. Buchia's marriage serves as a key example of this system, where compatibility and consent take a backseat to social expectations. Jha's narrative reveals the flaws in such arrangements, especially when marriages are "ill-matched," leading to emotional distress and social issues. Through satire, the author highlights the absurdity of treating marriage as a transactional matter rather than a human relationship. This critique aligns with broader reformist themes in early Indian literature, where writers questioned oppressive customs while staying connected to their cultural backgrounds.

Closely related to marriage practices is the issue of patriarchy and the role of women. The novel depicts a society where women are limited to domestic roles and lack autonomy. Their identities are defined by their positions as daughters, wives, and mothers, leaving little room for individuality. Buchia's character is particularly important in this context. She does not openly resist her situation, but her silent suffering comments powerfully on the limitations placed on women. The narrative suggests that women's oppression is normalized within the cultural framework, making it hard to challenge. From a feminist viewpoint, the novel shows how patriarchy operates not only through direct control but also through internalized norms that women often feel obliged to accept. However, Jha's portrayal is not entirely one-dimensional; moments of strength and adaptability appear, suggesting that women navigate their roles within existing constraints.

Another key element of Mithila culture in the novel is the caste system. The story reflects a highly hierarchical society where caste shapes social status, relationships, and chances. Brahminical dominance is clear, and the focus on maintaining caste purity affects choices related to marriage and social interactions. However, Jha does not present this system without critique. Using humor and irony, he



reveals the hypocrisy of those who claim moral superiority based on caste while engaging in unethical behavior. This dual representation highlights the contradictions within Mithila society, where strict social tiers coexist with moral inconsistencies. The novel invites readers to question the validity of caste-based discrimination while recognizing its deep-rooted existence in cultural life.

The conflict between tradition and modernity is another important theme that influences the discussion of Mithila culture in *The Bride*. The early twentieth century was a time of change, marked by the impact of Western education and evolving social values. This transition is embodied in the character of the groom, who symbolizes modern aspirations. His expectations for an ideal partner are shaped by his exposure to English education, creating a gap between his wishes and the traditional realities of Mithila society. This clash highlights the difficulty of merging new ideas with long-standing customs. Importantly, Jha does not glorify modernity; instead, he depicts it as equally flawed, often superficial and disconnected from local realities. The groom's dissatisfaction ultimately shows that modern education alone cannot solve deeper social problems. The novel thus portrays tradition and modernity as competing yet incomplete frameworks, suggesting the need for a more balanced approach.

Language and cultural expression also play an essential role in shaping the representation of Mithila culture. The use of Maithili, along with languages like Hindi, Sanskrit, and English, captures the multilingual character of the region. This linguistic variety enhances the narrative's authenticity and roots it firmly within its cultural context. Additionally, the inclusion of folk songs, proverbs, and rituals enriches the text, offering insights into daily life in Mithila. These elements serve as markers of cultural identity, preserving traditions even as the novel critiques them. The description of rituals, especially those linked to marriage, demonstrates how culture is manifested and sustained through shared practices.

A unique aspect of Jha's approach is his use of humor and satire as tools for cultural critique. Instead of adopting a confrontational tone, he uses wit and irony to illuminate the contradictions within society. This method allows him to tackle sensitive topics—such as gender inequality and caste discrimination—without alienating his readers. Satire engages readers, prompting them to reflect on their beliefs and practices. It also softens the critique, making it more approachable while retaining its critical nature. Therefore, humor is not merely a decorative element but vital to the novel's thematic structure.

From a broader critical perspective, *The Bride* can be viewed as a text that balances representation and reform. It documents Mithila's cultural practices in remarkable detail, preserving them for literary and historical analysis. At the same time, it questions the ethical implications of these practices, particularly those that continue inequality and suffering. This dual role makes the novel significant in cultural studies,



where literature is seen as both a reflection of and a commentary on its context. A feminist interpretation emphasizes the need to reevaluate traditional norms that limit women's agency, while a postcolonial viewpoint underscores the effects of colonial modernity on indigenous cultures.

However, the novel has its limitations. The narrative primarily reflects a male viewpoint, and the inner lives of female characters are not fully explored. This absence may reflect the broader social structure, where women's voices were often sidelined. Nonetheless, the text succeeds in highlighting their situation, even if indirectly.

Therefore, the exploration of Mithila culture in *The Bride* reveals a dynamic interaction between tradition, power, and change. Jha's portrayal is neither fully critical nor completely celebratory; instead, it captures the complexities of a society in transition. By addressing issues like marriage practices, patriarchy, caste hierarchy, and modernity, the novel provides a comprehensive view of Mithila culture. Its use of satire and rich cultural representation ensures that it remains both engaging and thought-provoking. Ultimately, *The Bride* is a significant literary work that not only reflects cultural realities but also encourages critical reflection on them.

## CONCLUSION-

This paper has tried to look at how Mithila culture shows up in Harimohan Jha's *The Bride*, or *Kanyadan*, and it seems like the novel works in two ways at once, kind of like a record of the culture and also a way to point out problems in society. The way it describes all those social habits, rituals, and daily stuff gives a real sense of what life was like in Mithila back in the early 1900s. But then it also makes you think about whether those practices are right, especially when it comes to things like inequality between men and women, the caste system, and how marriages are so strictly controlled.

Marriage in the book is not just about two people falling in love or something personal. It is more like this big social rule that everyone has to follow. The arranged marriages, often between people who do not really match, show how personal wants get pushed aside for what society expects. Take Buchia, for example, her story really brings out how bad it can be, women especially lose any say in their own lives and just go along with whatever is decided for them.

Gender roles come up a lot too, and it feels like the society in the novel is really set up for men to be in charge. Women mostly stay at home, following all these strict rules on how to act. Their whole sense of self ties into family duties, not much space for being individuals or expressing themselves freely. It is



however, not all one sided, the book shows women finding little ways to handle their situations, pushing back in small ways.

‘Caste stuff’ adds another layer, making the culture seem even more complicated. The book shows this strict system where everyone stays in their place to keep things pure and ordered. Jha uses satire to poke at it though, showing how people who act superior break their own rules in shady ways. That hypocrisy makes you wonder if the whole hierarchy is as solid as it looks. It pushes readers to think if caste discrimination really makes sense, and maybe imagine a society that is fairer for everyone.

Then there is this whole thing with tradition clashing against new ideas from the modern world. Early 1900s was a time when things were changing, and the novel catches that tension pretty well. The groom who is educated in English represents the modern side, but his ideas do not fit with Mithila life, leading to conflicts. Jha does not make modernity sound perfect either, he shows its flaws, like how it can be shallow. So, both sides have issues, and real change probably needs looking at them critically. The book captures how culture shifts in messy ways, without easy answers on inequality.

The novel packs in a lot of cultural details too, like rituals and folk traditions, plus different ways of speaking. That makes it feel real, and helps keep Mithila heritage alive on the page. Culture is not frozen, it is something people live through their habits and beliefs every day. Jha writing it all down means even as things change, that identity gets preserved somehow.

Humour and satire stand out as well, making the book different from just straight criticism. Instead of being too serious or preachy, Jha uses jokes and irony to highlight society’s contradictions. It keeps readers hooked, letting them think about heavy topics without turning away. Satire like that can shake up old beliefs, getting people to look at themselves. Thus, the novel does not just show culture, it kind of helps change it by making you reflect.

Putting it in bigger terms, *The Bride* fits into cultural studies and feminist ideas, where books mirror society but also question it. It balances showing the culture with pointing out flaws, good for getting into regional identities in India. Literature becomes a place to work through preserving old ways versus pushing for reform.

One thing though, the story mostly comes from a man’s view, and women’s inner thoughts are not dug into much. That reflects how women’s voices got sidelined back then. Still, it does spotlight their situations and calls for something better.



Therefore, Jha's novel gives a full, critical take on Mithila culture. Marriage customs, gender stuff, castes, tradition versus modern pulls, all that offers real looks into the era. The satire and cultural bits keep it lively and worth reading today.

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