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## MANJUSHA- THE LOST SAGA

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**Abstract-** Manjusha painting, a traditional art form from Bihar is known for its vibrant colors, intricate designs and rich cultural symbolism, often depicting folklore, mythology and spiritual themes. The craft is based on a popular folktale of Sati Bihula Devi Bishahari which dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. Despite its historical and cultural significance, the awareness and recognition of this unique art appears to be limited, particularly outside its native region. Through this study, the level of public awareness will be assessed, throwing light on factors that affect the visibility and appreciation of the art form. An in-depth exploration will document the traditional methods, motifs and themes used in this artform, emphasizing its unique storytelling aspect. During the study a contemporized collection will be designed for working women using Computer-Aided Design (CAD) and AI technology. This integration of digital tools with traditional techniques will not only preserve the essence of Manjusha art but also open up new avenues for its application in contemporary design contexts. Ultimately, this research strives to bridge the gap between traditional craftsmanship and modern technology, ensuring its continued relevance and growth in the digital age.

**Key Words-** Folk-Tale, Storytelling, Craft Preservation, Religious Art, Motif Development, Women's Wear, Business Casual, 3D Garment visualization.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Manjusha painting, a traditional narrative art form from Bihar, represents one of India's culturally richest yet least-explored visual traditions. Rooted deeply in folklore and ritual practices, this artform stands apart due to its distinctive linearity, symbolic storytelling, and vibrant color usage.

#### Historical and Cultural Context

Manjusha art traces its origins to the Bihulā-Bisaharī cult, which is worshipped in the Bhagalpur area and the surrounding regions. *This* folklore is believed to date back to the 7th century CE. [Shakil Sadia, 2025]. The art form evolved as a visual storytelling medium, capturing themes of devotion, struggle, and divine power.

Traditionally these paintings were made on *Manjusha*, which is a Sanskrit word that means ‘box’ or ‘sandook’. The word is used for the ceremonial temple-shaped bamboo, jute straw and paper boxes used by devotees to store items for Bishahari Puja. These paintings use the theme of Bihula-Bishahari story, its different characters along with the flora and fauna of the region. Apart from Manjushas, these paintings are also done over the earthen pots, ceremonial artifacts and on walls (known as *bhitta chitra* or murals). Manjusha bhitta chitra was done on three areas of homes—the outer walls, the place of worship and the newlyweds’ room.

Traditionally, Manjusha art was practiced exclusively within two artisan communities—the Kumbhakars and the Malakars. The Kumbhakar community specialized in crafting earthen pots that served as surfaces for Manjusha paintings and were later used in the rituals of the Bishahari Puja. The Malakar community, on the other hand, was responsible for creating the ritual boxes known as *manjusha* and decorating them with stylized depictions and symbolic representations inspired by the Bihula–Bishahari narrative [Pandit Manoj, Bhagalpur, Bihar @ Folkartopedia]

However, despite its deep historic roots and cultural symbolism, Manjusha painting has remained overshadowed by other folk arts, receiving limited national visibility and academic attention.

### Traditional Techniques and Materials

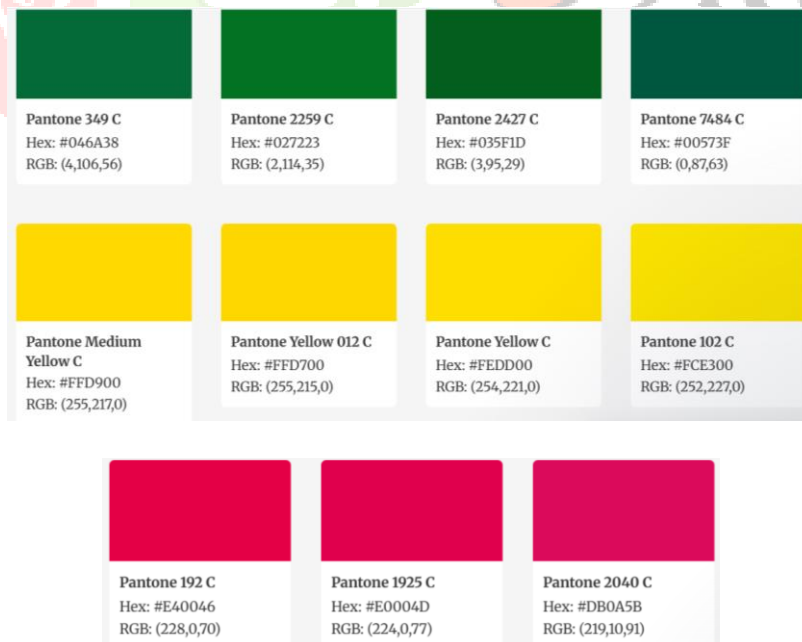
Traditional Manjusha paintings were created using natural materials available locally. Artisans prepared handmade paper or surfaces from jute, bamboo structures, and *manjusha* boxes. Natural dyes extracted from flowers, leaves, and minerals were commonly used.

### Designs and Motifs

The painting process follows ritual procedures, and every element is placed with symbolic intent. This makes Manjusha not merely decorative but deeply spiritual and culturally codified.

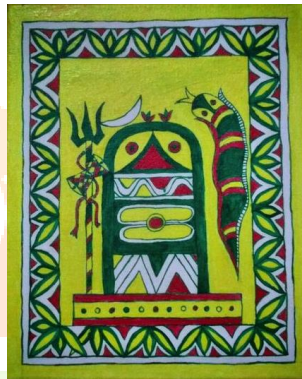
The painting process begins with drawing the outline, traditionally in green, though many artists today prefer black. Earlier, artisans avoided using rulers or tools, believing that natural irregularities enhanced the authenticity of the art.

Three colours are traditionally used- pink, green, yellow [Impart, 2022]. Black is used for the outlines.



Motifs in Manjusha painting revolve heavily around the *Bihula-Bishahari* tale. Key motifs include:

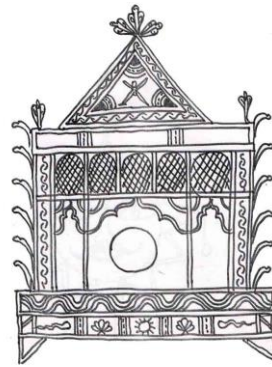
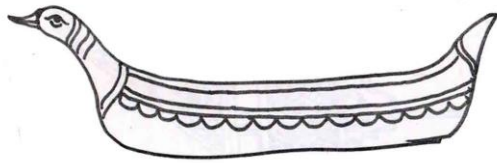
- **Serpents**, symbolizing the protective power of Bishahari:
  - Snakes
  - Sarp Ladi
  - Fish
- **Bihula, Chando Saudagar and Bala Lakhendra**, representing the central characters of the legend
- **Celestial Motifs:** Sun and Moon
- **Flowers:** Champa flower, Lotus flowers
- **Animal and Bird Motifs:** Mynah, mongoose, Fish, elephant, horse, peacock
- Lord Shiva (often represented as **Shivalinga**)
- **Human Figure Representation:** Human figures are stylized in the shape of the alphabet “X” with raised limbs. Characters typically have large expressive eyes but no ears.



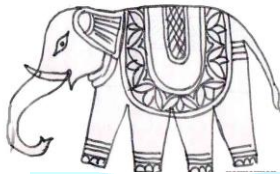
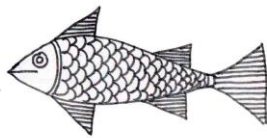
*Shivalinga Motif*



*Champa Flower Motif, Sun Motif*



*Ship/ boat Motif, Manjusha/ Sandook Motif*



*Elephant, Fish, Serpent Motif*



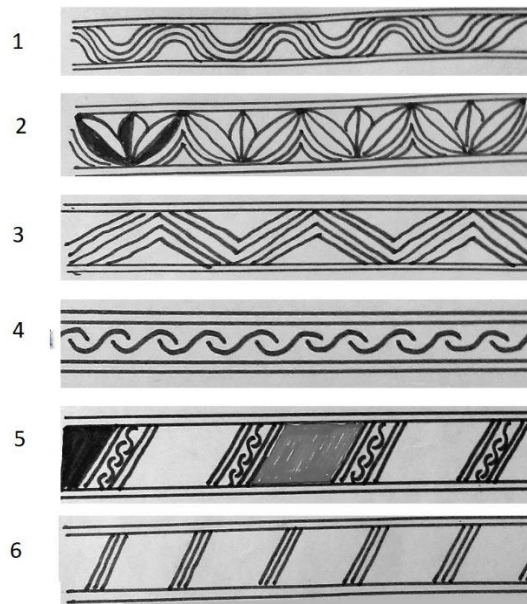
*Human Motifs*

The technique of drawing emphasizes on following:

- Strong, bold outlines in black
- Flat, solid color fills
- Repetitive patterns
- Elongated human figures and serpentine forms

Borders play a significant role in Manjusha paintings. Common border motifs include *leheriya*, *sarp ladi*, *tribhuj*, *mokha* and *belpatra* [Sharma Archana, 2021]

- **Belpatra** – associated with Lord Shiva
- **Leheriya** – representing waves or the flow of a river
- **Tribhuj** – triangular motif symbolizing Shiva
- **Sarp Ladi** – snake pattern border
- **Mokha** – traditional decorative symbols of the ancient Anga region



*Border Designs- 1: Lehariya, 2: Belpatra, 3: Tribhuj, 4: Sarp ki Ladi, 5: Mokha 1, 6: Mokha 2*

These designs are rich in symbolic meaning and offer significant potential for reinterpretation in modern applications—especially fashion. Their bold shapes and rhythmic repetition lend themselves naturally to contemporary surface design development.

### Scope

In recent years, the global fashion and lifestyle industry has shown increasing interest in artisan crafts, sustainable practices, and culturally rooted design. Indian folk arts—such as Madhubani, Warli, and Kalamkari—have gained major commercial visibility through collaborations, digital adaptations, and apparel integration. However, Manjusha painting has not experienced similar growth. Market analysis suggests:

- **Low awareness** outside its native region
- **Minimal commercial utilization** in mainstream fashion
- **High potential** due to unique motifs and storytelling style
- **Growing demand** for handcrafted, culturally meaningful, and visually bold designs in business-casual women's wear

The integration of Manjusha motifs into contemporary fashion, especially using CAD and 3D visualization, aligns with current industry trends focused on heritage revival and digital design innovation.

Existing literature on Manjusha art highlights its roots in ritualistic traditions, especially associated with the *Bihula-Bishahari Puja*. It is often compared to Madhubani due to geographic proximity, yet remains less researched and less commercialized.

Studies on craft preservation underline the importance of documentation of any artform, importance of awareness generation among people and its adaptation to modern contexts. Research in contemporary craft application suggests that integrating traditional motifs into modern fashion can revive interest and create economic opportunities. CAD technologies, digital motif development, and 3D garment visualization have been recognized as valuable tools for merging traditional artistry with modern design processes.

### **Objectives of the study:**

1. Investigate the level of awareness and recognition of Manjusha art among people associated with fashion, textile, art and craft or who are craft enthusiasts.
2. Conduct an in-depth exploration and documentation of the techniques and undertake swatch development to identify suitable contemporary design applications.
3. Innovate and modernize the craft by developing a contemporary digital design collection using CAD technology.

## **II.METHODOLOGY**

Based on the objectives of the study, the research methodology was structured into three phases to systematically examine awareness, explore the craft techniques, and develop contemporary design applications inspired by Manjusha art.

### **Phase 1: Survey and Data Collection**

A survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire to assess the level of awareness, perception, and appeal of Manjusha art. The questionnaire was distributed to both men and women associated with fashion, textile, art, and craft fields, as well as craft enthusiasts between the age group of 30–65 years. A total sample of 50 respondents participated in the survey.

### **Phase 2: Swatch Development**

A detailed literature review was carried out to understand the historical background, motifs, and techniques of Manjusha art. Swatch development was then undertaken to experiment with the application of Manjusha motifs on fabric.

Four fabrics were selected for experimentation due to their varied textures, absorbency, and relevance for business casual apparel category-

1. Cotton Khadi (sourced from Khadi Gramodyog, Noida)
2. Linen blend (sourced from a local retailer, Indira Market, Noida)
3. Cotton twill (sourced from H.P Singh, Nehru Place, New Delhi)
4. Cotton lycra blend (sourced from H.P Singh, Nehru Place, New Delhi)

Different mediums and techniques were explored to assess their suitability -

- hand painting using fabric pens
- acrylic paints and brush
- block printing with pigment color

The color medium specifications are as below:

1. Staedtler, Double ended fabric pens
2. Sheng Bo Shi, Acrylic Markers
3. Brustro, Fluid Acrylic Brush Pen
4. Camel, Artist Acrylic Color
5. Pigment colors

### Phase 3: Design Development and Evaluation

Motifs from Manjusha art were extracted and stylized for contemporary application in **business-casual apparel category**. CAD-based surface designs were developed incorporating repeats, placements, and color variations. A digital garment collection for working women was created.

#### Design Tools Used-

- Digital design softwares- Adobe Photosop, Adobe Illustrator
- AI tools- NewArc V4, Gemini (Nano Banana 2)

This was followed by an evaluation survey conducted among office-going women to analyze the appeal and suitability of the designs.

## III.RESULT AND ANALYSIS

### Phase 1: Survey and Data Collection

A total of 51 respondents participated in the survey conducted to examine awareness, perception, and potential applications of Manjusha Art in modern design and fashion.

The demographic profile of the respondents indicated that the majority were female, reflecting stronger participation of women in discussions related to art, culture, and fashion. Most participants belonged to the **30–50 years' age group**, suggesting that the responses primarily represent the perspectives of working professionals and mature audiences.

The findings revealed that though more than half of the respondents were already aware of Manjusha art prior to the survey, however, a considerable proportion (43%) reported no prior awareness, indicating the need for increased promotion and dissemination of information about the art form. Furthermore, although several respondents had heard about Manjusha art, majority of them (approximately 60.8%) reported low or no awareness. Only 13.7% indicated a high level of awareness, highlighting a gap between general recognition and in-depth understanding.

The survey responses also demonstrated that the visual characteristics of Manjusha art possess strong aesthetic appeal, making it suitable for application in creative sectors such as fashion, textiles, and product design. A significant majority of respondents believed that the art form can be successfully adapted for contemporary design applications, including garments, accessories, and lifestyle products.

In addition, more than **80% of respondents expressed positive interest in purchasing Manjusha-inspired apparel**, suggesting strong potential for its integration into modern fashion if the designs are appropriately adapted. Cultural and historical value was also identified as an important factor influencing consumer preferences, indicating that the use of storytelling and heritage-based branding could enhance the perceived value of such products.

The survey further indicated that nearly all respondents felt that Manjusha art requires greater promotion, awareness campaigns, and institutional support. The findings suggest that the combined use of digital media platforms, fashion industry initiatives, and educational programs could significantly enhance the visibility and appreciation of the art form.

Overall, the survey results indicate that a large majority of respondents perceive Manjusha art as having considerable potential in contemporary fashion and design. Strategic promotion through social media,

educational initiatives, and collaborations with fashion designers could contribute to the revival and wider popularization of this traditional art form.

### Phase 2: Swatch Development

This phase comprised of swatch development in order to explore the suitability of applying Manjusha motifs on different fabric bases. Multiple mediums and techniques were tested, including hand painting using acrylic pens, acrylic paints applied with a brush, and block printing with pigment colors.

The results are as follows:

#### Cotton Khadi



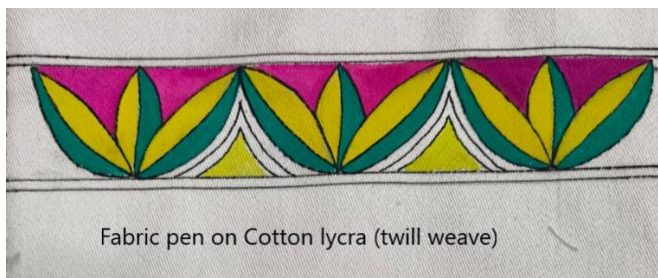
#### Linen blend



#### Cotton (twill weave)



## Cotton-lycra blend



The trials revealed that cotton khadi and cotton twill provided a stable surface that allowed clear outlines and vibrant color application, particularly for hand-painted techniques requiring precision. Cotton lycra blend also showed satisfactory results with finesse, especially for painted motifs intended for contemporary apparel. However, on linen blend fabric, acrylic color pens tended to bleed slightly due to its absorbent and loosely woven structure, thereby affecting the sharpness of the outlines.

Among the techniques explored, hand painting using acrylic pens and acrylic paints with brush allowed better control in recreating the characteristic bold outlines and flat color fills of Manjusha art. In contrast, block printing with pigment colors produced results that closely resembled conventional block-printed textiles, lacking the distinct identity of Manjusha art. Additionally, the repetitive nature of block printing diverted attention from the intricate and narrative-driven motifs, thereby reducing the uniqueness and aesthetic appeal of the designs. Hence, this technique was not considered suitable for the intended application.

Although cotton lycra also proved to be suitable and usable for business apparel, but hand painting using acrylic paints on cotton khadi and cotton twill yielded the most effective results. The particular linen blend used in this study was found to be less suitable due to issues with color bleeding; however, more compactly woven linen fabrics may be explored in future trials.

Thus, among all the fabrics tested, **cotton khadi** was selected for the final collection owing to its inherent handcrafted appeal, textured surface, and strong association with traditional Indian textiles. Its breathable, natural, and artisanal qualities further complemented the ethos of the study, making it an appropriate choice for a handcrafted collection aimed at promoting and preserving Manjusha art.

### Phase 3: Design Development and Evaluation

The digital design development phase involved a hybrid integration of traditional craft research and contemporary design methodologies. Traditional motifs and border elements from Manjusha art were extracted and reinterpreted and developed for a repeat pattern to align with modern aesthetics while preserving their cultural essence. These motifs were digitally developed, repeated, and color-variated using Adobe Photoshop. Final motifs selected after several hit and trial were as follows:

1. Champa flower
2. Lehariya
3. Belpatra
4. Mokha

The garment collection was conceptualized on the 'cotton khadi' fabric with structured and clean silhouettes suitable for business-casual wear, including crop jackets, tailored blazers, and trousers featuring design elements such as welt pockets, cuffs, and lapel collars to enhance professional appeal. The garments were developed using Adobe Illustrator, ensuring precision in construction and detailing. Motif placements were strategically incorporated along hemlines, cuffs, and pocket flaps to achieve a balanced and globally relevant aesthetic while retaining traditional identity.

The process culminated in generating realistic digital visualizations of the designs using AI-based tools such as Newarc and Gemini (Nano Banana 2), enabling near real-life representation of the garments.

Overall, the workflow demonstrates how traditional art forms like Manjusha can be effectively reinterpreted through modern digital tools and AI technologies to create contemporary, culturally rooted fashion suitable for present-day markets.

The range board is given below:



The flat sketches of the developed garments, along with their detailed design specifications, are presented in the image below. These illustrations provide a clear understanding of the garment construction, silhouette, and placement of Manjusha-inspired motifs. The sketches also highlight key design elements such as seams, pockets, and trims, ensuring clarity in visualization and execution of the collection.



After this collection was designed it was circulated for a survey conducted among office-going women to analyze the appeal and suitability of the designs.

A total of 50 respondents participated in the study. The majority of participants belonged to the 35–45 age group, with most respondents from the academic and corporate sectors. In terms of clothing habits, a significant proportion reported frequently wearing business casual attire to work, establishing the relevance of the proposed collection.

The collection received a highly positive response, with over 90% of respondents rating it as appealing or very appealing. More than 75% of participants indicated that the designs were very well adapted to modern business casual wear, while the remaining respondents rated them as moderately adapted. Notably, all respondents found the collection suitable for office or professional settings, with none expressing a negative opinion.

Among the design elements, the color combination emerged as the most appreciated aspect, followed by garment silhouette, motif placement, and fabric choice. Purchase intent was also significantly high, with nearly three-fourths of respondents expressing a strong willingness to buy from the collection. Importantly, no respondent indicated unwillingness to purchase, reflecting a positive inclination toward the designs. The preferred price range was ₹3000–₹5000, suggesting acceptance of a mid-range pricing strategy.

Qualitative feedback highlighted appreciation for the overall concept and execution, with minor suggestions such as introducing more color variations. Overall, the findings indicate strong market potential and a positive acceptance of the Manjusha-inspired business casual collection among the target audience.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Manjusha painting, despite its rich cultural heritage and distinctive visual language, continues to remain underrepresented in contemporary design discourse. The findings of this study highlight that while awareness is limited, there exists strong aesthetic appreciation and market potential for its application in modern contexts. Through systematic exploration, material experimentation, and digital design integration, the research demonstrates that Manjusha art can be effectively adapted into business-casual apparel without losing its cultural essence.

The positive response to the developed collection reinforces the viability of integrating traditional crafts with contemporary fashion, particularly through the use of CAD and AI-driven visualization tools. Such approaches not only enhance design innovation but also create new avenues for craft revival and commercialization.

This study underscores the broader potential of Manjusha, along with many other lesser-known traditional art forms, to be revitalized through thoughtful design intervention, increased awareness, and industry collaboration. Sustained efforts in this direction can contribute significantly to cultural preservation while aligning with evolving market trends and consumer sensibilities.

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