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## Use of Henna (*Lawsonia inermis*) in the Islamic Perspectives

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**Abstract:** Henna (*Lawsonia inermis*) is a flowering shrubs belongs to family Lythraceae is a medicinal plants that have many medicinal benefits and purposes to treats illness such as headache, muscular pains, skin disorders, hair treatment, rheumatism, jaundice and chicken pox. Futhermore, henna have been used widely in hand and nail decoratives and hair dye which close related to the wedding ceremony. In muslim culture, henna also being believed to has significant barakah where believed to carries good luck and fertility to the new bride and groom (it has barokah and protect against jnoun (jin). In Islamic perspectives, henna has never been mentioned anywhere in the Quran. However, henna usage is referred to several times in the Hadith. The plant is mentioned in the Hadith in twenty-two instances, out of which, eleven instances refer to men, five instances refer to the color of water of a contaminated well as being like 'an infusion of henna leaves', five instances refer to its use as body adornment and one instance refers to its use as medicinal treatments.

**Keywords:** Henna, Islamic Perspective, Usage

### 1. Introduction

Henna or local name *inai* (Malay), *Mehndi* (Indian) or *hinna* (Arabic) is a flowering plant with the botanical name *Lawsonia inermis* belongs to the family Lythraceae. It is a medicinal plant and its bark and seeds are used in Unani and Ayurvedic medicines. Henna has been used as a cosmetic hair dye for 6,000 years in Ancient Egypt. Henna has also traditionally been used for centuries in other parts of North Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Near East and South Asia. Henna is a middle-sized shrub with many branches, produce small white or pinkish fragrant flowers in large terminal bunches and small round fruits (Gull, et al. (2013). The henna plant is native to northern Africa, western and southern Asia, and northern Australasia, in semi-arid zones and tropical areas. This plant known world-wide for the beautiful colouring dye used by the orientals to colour their hands and body. It produces the most dye when grown in temperatures between 35 and 45 °C (Bechtold, et al, 2009). It contains a red-orange pigment, lawsone, (hennotannic acid). This pigment is released by crushing the henna leaves in an acidic medium. The lawsone molecules will then have the ability to stain, and when applied to the skin they migrate to the outermost layer or cuticle, and stain them. To use henna, the powder is mixed with water and/or lemon juice, to form a smooth paste. The henna mix must rest for 6 to 12 hours so that the leaf cellulose is dissolved, making the lawsone available to stain the skin. The longer the paste is left on the skin or hair, the more the lawsone will migrate, thus making the staining darker.

### 2. Benefits of Henna

Categorized under medicinal plant, henna has been widely used in medicinal sector. Its medicinal properties have been recognized since ages. All the plant part of Henna shows promising medicinal value and others. Traditionally, henna has been used to treat various illness. Henna oil has been used in treatment of headache, muscular pains and skin disorders

such as eczema, scabies and etc (Prema, nd). The oil of its flower relieves muscular pains, while its seeds are used in deodorants and to regulate menstruation. Henna oil also can induce sleep, cure headaches and bruises. Besides, people used to apply henna oil to their hair as it can prevent the hair from greying and also can promotes healthy hair and thus reduce the baldness. As a medicinal plant henna is used as an astringent, anti-hemorrhagic intestinal anti-neoplastic, cardio-inhibitory, hypotensive, and a sedative

The leaves part can be used to reduce the rheumatism, jaundice and chicken pox (Shalini, 2015). The leaves part also can be mixed with vinegar to treat burning body part. Henna is known to have cooling properties (Stephanie, 2014). To treat the burning parts, grounded henna leaves can be applying to the affected parts. The most common use of henna leaves in many culture is as skin tattoo. Indians believed that henna leaves water can help cure the sore throat.

While henna seeds are commonly used in deodorants and the flower are good to cure headaches. The seeds are also believed to be used for mental disorders (Shalini, 2015). Henna bark commonly used to treat jaundice and dysentery. The bark can be consumed in the form of powder. Same as the leaves part, the bark also said to be good in treat jaundice.

In these modern day, there are many products commercialized from henna especially in beauty and skin care industry. Henna have been developed to nourisher and hair conditioner and shampoo as it contains natural ingredients for nourishment of hair. It also has great anti-dandruff activity. Known as good colouring agent, henna also has been widely used as hair dye and textiles dye. Henna also is effective to be use as sunblock (Stephanie, 2014).

Nowadays, researcher tend to use henna to evaluate its properties scientifically. Researcher had found that henna extract shows antibacterial, antifungal, anticancer and anti-inflammatory activities (Anoop, 2015). It also proven to have anti-hemorrhagic, anti-neoplastic, and cardio-inhibitory.

### 3. Henna in Malay Culture

In Malay culture, henna is very popular to be used in henna painting ceremony for wedding. Henna leaves powder mixed with water were used to decorated the bride as a part of marriage ceremony. In Malay culture, it is known as *Majlis Berinai*. Originated from Hindu culture, Malays eventually follow the ceremony. For the ceremony, the henna powder mixed with water were kept in a cone plastic paper. The paste then was applied on bride palms and hells to get the temporary tattoos. Henna is also tainted on groom and bride's nails to signify their newly wedding status. Those day, the ceremony is done in huge celebration. However, today celebration is done more simply with closest family and friends.

Besides for *Majlis Berinai*, Malays also use henna for nails treatment. It can be used to heal wounds and sores around the nail and also for the cracked nails. Same like temporary tattoo, henna paste will be used for the nail treatment. The paste will be applied at effected nails. Malays also used drink boiled henna leaves water to cure stomach ache, headache and fever. The paste also applied to the hair as the natural dye.

### 4. Henna in Muslim Culture

In muslim culture, henna also used in wedding ceremony. Henna not only used as decorative (hand decorative) but also believed to carries good luck anf fertility to the new bride and groom (it has barokah and protect against jnoun (jin). In some muslim culture, women attend henna party/ceremony shortly before wedding during which the bride's hand's and feet are painted with intricate design. The brideis waitedon by her friends and family.

Besides wedding ceremony, henna also believed to has significant barakah attached to it. Legend has it that, our prophets Muhammad S.A.W. used henna to dye his beard and that the

henna flowers was the prophet's favorite. Therefore, henna occupies a unique place in muslim culture where it is used for both decorative and magical purposes and has religious sanction.

## 5. Henna in the Islamic Perspectives

It is important to mention that this paper focusses on the use of henna among the Muslims but not the practice of using the same plant among of the Jewish and pagan communities in the Arabian Peninsula prior to Islam.

Despite being closely associated with the Islamic practices; henna has never been mentioned anywhere in the Quran. However, henna usage is referred to several times in the Hadith. (Hadith are sayings or anecdotes about the Prophet Muhammad, as narrated by his companions and followers, compiled between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries EC). In fact, the plant is mentioned in the Hadith in twenty-two instances, out of which, eleven instances refer to men, five instances refer to the color of water of a contaminated well as being like 'an infusion of henna leaves', five instances refer to its use as body adornment and one instance refers to its use as medicinal treatments.

Therefore, it could be deduced that henna is not associated with the Islamic religion itself but only with its cultures and traditions. Rather, it is emphasized as a Sunnah, which is defined as a behavior, usually learnt from the examples of the Prophet Muhammad, that is encouraged but not obligatory. The Muslim communities use the plant to show individuals' devotion to the Islamic traditions. It should be noted that the area of the Islamic empire is situated close to the growing range of the henna plant, hence the wide usage among them.

There is no evidence that the early Muslims used henna in any religious ceremony or any form of body art. Early Muslims did not practice any ceremonial use of henna such as in marriage, birth or circumcision. There is also no indication that the plant was used to create body art, either in the form of patterns or designs. The corpus of early Islamic literature shows that henna was used both medicinally and ornamentally. The use of henna in both aspects in the Islamic perspectives will be discussed further in this paper.

Firstly, henna is associated with body adornment or for beautification purposes. It is used as a dye for the hands and feet among the Muslim women. A Muslim woman may apply henna whenever she desires, including when is having her menstruation. However, she is prohibited from applying henna during her period of mourning following the death of her husband, which is four months and ten days. Umm Atiyyah reports that the messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "A woman should not mourn for any deceased person for more than three days, except in the case of her husband's death, which she must mourn for a period of four months and ten days. Such a woman (in mourning) is not to wear any (brightly) colored dress. She may wear only plain dress. During this period, she should not use any adornment or eye makeup, nor wear any perfume, nor dye her hands and feet with henna" (Related by Bukhari and Muslim).

However, it is not permissible for a man to apply henna to his hands and feet, neither in marriage nor outside marriage, unless for medicinal purposes. This is because beautification purpose is only permissible to the women, and it is not permissible to imitate worm in terms of dressing and beautification. Aa'ishah reported that woman had made a sign from behind a curtain to indicate that she had a letter for the Prophet but the Prophet closed his hand and said: "I do not know whether it is a hand of a man or a woman. She replied, "Rather, it is a hand of a woman.". He Said: "If you were a woman, you should have changed your nails (meaning dyeing them with henna)". Abu Huraiyah also reported that a hermaphrodite who had dyed his hands and feet with henna was brought to the Prophet, so he asked: "What is the matter with him?". The companion replied: "O Prophet of Allah, he imitates women. So, the Prophet ordered him to be sent to An-Naqee'ah (the name of a place). An-Nawawi said: "It is desirable for a married woman to dye her hands and feet, as in the well-known Al-Hadith, but this is forbidden for men except in need of treatment.". Apart from that, the Prophet also said: "Allah has cursed men who imitate women and has cursed women who imitate men." (Narrated by Al-Bukhari).

Secondly, henna is used as a dye for the hair among the Muslims. However, two hadiths contradict each other in this matter. Henna was seen as not permissible to be used as hair dye among the Muslim men when Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (Dawud: Book 34: Hadith 4210) narrated that the Prophet of Allah (SAW) disliked ten things: yellow colorings (meaning khaluq), dyeing grey hair, trailing the lower garment, men wearing a gold signet ring, a woman decking herself before people who are not within the prohibited degrees (non-mahram), throwing dice, using spells except with Mu'awidhatan, wearing amulets, withdrawing the penis before semen is discharged, in the case of a woman who is a wife or not a wife, and having intercourse with a woman who is suckling a child, but he did not declare them to be prohibited.

It is seen as a contradiction when Abu Huraira (Bukhari: Book 7: Volume 72: Hadith 786) reported that the Prophet said: "Jews and Christians do not dye their hair. So, you should do the opposite of what they do.". This could be mean that the act of dyeing the hair is to distinguish the Islamic religion from Jewish and Christianity. In other words, to differentiate Islam from the other religions. In another instance, Jaabir ibn Abdullah reported that Abu Quhaafah was brought (to the Prophet) on the day of the conquest of Makkah, and his head and beard were white like "thaghaamah" (a plant whose flowers and fruits are white). The messenger of Allah said: "Change this with something, but avoid black." (Related by Muslim, hadith no.3962). It was reported from the Prophet that one should change grey hair, using colors except black. Abu Dharr reported that the Prophet said: "The best things with which to change grey hair are henna and 'katam' (a plant similar to henna, which is used as a dye." (Related by Al-Tarmidzi, hadith no. 1675). Dyeing hairs is allowed for warriors in warzone so that they can give strong impact on the enemies.

Finally, henna is used for medicinal purposes. It is permissible to use henna to treat ailments. The great scholar Ibn Al-Qayyim mentioned many of its benefits in his book "The Prophetic Medicine" that henna is used in treating headaches and migraines. It is also used to treat burns caused by fire. Apart from that it is beneficial for mouth ulcers and blisters when chewed. Henna can heal thrush in the mouth of children and blisters on the body. Bandaging with henna can reduce hot inflammations. When applied to the fingernails as a paste, it strengthens the nails as well as treats nail infections. Henna makes hair grow as well as strengthens and beautifies it. Mixing henna flowers with warm wax and rose oil can cure pains. Placing its flowers between the folds of wool cloths scent them and keep moths away.

Various studies have been carried out on the benefits of the henna plant on health. Onestudy found that henna has natural antimicrobial properties, such as being antibacterial and antiviral (Habbal et al, 2007). A study carried out in the UAE found that the henna plant has the medicinal properties of reducing inflammations and being a pain reliever (Ali Bashir et al, 1995). A research paper published in 2005 found that the henna leaves inhibit the growth of certain microorganisms, and therefore can be used to treat burn wound infections (Muhammad & Muhammad, 2005). These modern researches provide evidences for some of the health benefits that Ibn Al-Qayyim mentioned about henna over 600 years ago.

## 6. Conclusion

The use of henna in Islamic perspective is basically emphasized as a sunnah, a behaviour, usually learnt from the example of the prophet Muhammad. It is encouraged but not an obligatory. The use of henna in Muslim communities serves as a visible marker to display an individual's piety and devotion to the tradition.

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