

Mehandi in the Marketplace: Tradition, Training, and Innovation in the Henna Artistry of Contemporary Jaipur, India

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Abstract

Henna has been an essential part of women's traditional body art in many North Indian communities. In recent decades, professional henna artists have expanded their businesses to offer "walk-in" service along the sidewalks of urban market areas in addition to private at-home bookings. This study examines the skills acquisition and execution of Jaipur market henna artists in order to understand how they satisfy a large customer base that demands convenience, application speed, motif variety, and overall design excellence. In addition to conducting interviews with artists and customers, the author received training from and worked alongside a closed sample of artists. Collected market designs were compared to surveyed design booklets and magazines in order to identify elements of continuity and change in designs since 1948. The data revealed that customer demands require artist training that promotes constant innovation that in turn increases popular appeal and vitalizes the tradition of henna application.

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Competing Interests

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Part 1: Introduction

"*Bhaiya*, how much is a henna design per hand?" a young woman asks, shopping bags in hand.¹

"Fifty rupees for an Arabic design, one hundred for a full design," the henna artist replies, indicating the rate for designs stretching one-third of the way up the forearm.

"I would like an Arabic design on both hands," the woman says and hands her bags to her shopping companion. The henna artist positions two red plastic footstools in front of himself, and the two women sit down. He waves over one of his fellow artists standing across the sidewalk in the bustling Pink City market in Jaipur and sits down to the woman's right. The second artist sits to her left.

The woman silently pushes her bangles up her arm and gently twists them to the side to keep them from sliding down. The henna artist reaches over and picks up a small

glass bottle of *mehandi ka tel* (henna oil). He rests the woman's arm palm-up on his thigh, dabs the bottle against her skin several times, and quickly spreads the oil over her forearm and hand. He hands the bottle to the second artist, who does the same with the woman's left arm. Each artist picks up one of the brightly colored henna-filled cones neatly displayed at the side, carefully trims the tip with scissors, and squeezes the base of the cone, analyzing the flow of the paste as it collects in a small mound on the concrete sidewalk.

Working simultaneously—yet independently—the henna artists begin creating an Arabic *bel* (creeper) design stretching from the woman's forearm to her fingertips. They sit silently hunched over her hands, each stabilizing his wrist with his free hand as he guides thin lines of henna paste back and forth in delicate, swirling motifs. A steady flow of shoppers pass hurriedly by, chattering over the ear-piercing horns of auto-rickshaws, city buses, and local cars and motorcycles. Some shoppers turn their heads to look at the designs in progress as they walk by. One woman steps out of the flow of traffic, watches for a few moments, and then inquires about the rate. One henna artist responds without looking up, maintaining visual focus on his creation in progress.

Within twenty minutes the designs on both hands have been completed. The woman studies both sides of her hands as her friend removes one hundred rupees (approximately USD 2 in 2012) from her purse to pay the artists. The women smile goodbye and walk to the side of the road to call an auto-rickshaw. The first artist hands the second his cut of their earnings, and they begin chatting while patiently waiting for the next customer.

Along the sidewalks of busy shopping areas in Jaipur, henna artists sit outside of boutiques and showrooms among vendors selling trinkets, costume jewelry, and clothing accessories. Strategically positioning themselves in high-volume market areas featuring female adornments, henna artists make themselves easily accessible for their largest customer base: local and foreign women. While the practice of hiring a skilled, professional artist to adorn one's hands and feet with henna designs is not a new practice in North India, doing so in the middle of an urban market area is. Historically, women of the *Nai* caste were called on to apply henna to women in the privacy of their own homes (Bhanawat 1976, 3; Cartwright-Jones 2005). Today, male and female professional artists do not belong to any one particular caste, but they do continue to offer private at-home bookings for their customers. During the past few decades, artists in North Indian cities such as Jaipur have established walk-in business spaces in the market and have grown in number to meet the local demand for henna services. Their current ubiquitous presence indicates the vitality of the tradition of cosmetic henna application as well as its ability to adapt to changing customer demands.

This study offers a glimpse into how Indian henna traditions retain relevance today. Henna artistry is a tradition that adapts to its practitioners' needs without corrupting its meaning or significance. In contemporary India, Jaipur is known as one of the main centers for henna artistry.² Although henna artists work throughout northern India, professional market artists from Jaipur are often booked for weddings and large events across the nation. Through analysis of the work of contemporary market henna artists in high-volume shopping areas, one can understand how refined tools and techniques position both individual artists and the collective henna tradition for success. Henna artists acquire skills enabling them to spontaneously—and oftentimes

continuously for hours at a time—create traditional yet innovative designs that satisfy a large customer base with diverse aesthetic preferences. Their training not only prepares these market artists to satisfy customer demands of convenience, speed, variety, and excellence but it also enriches the art form by promoting—if not requiring—constant innovation. This, in turn, increases the art’s appeal and popularity and ensures the vitality of the tradition of cosmetic henna application in North India.

Since August 2005, I have been interviewing and apprenticing with market henna artists across North India.³ My work with these artists has given me the opportunity to experience both the pressure and the satisfaction of being a market henna artist first-hand. It has also cultivated trust and respect between myself and a group of artists who rarely discuss their personal backgrounds or their experiences with customers. These apprenticeships have also provided additional opportunities to interview henna customers and develop an understanding of the differences in market or “designer” henna motifs and the different reasons for employing a market artist rather than a friend or family member or even applying henna to oneself.

This study will primarily focus on participant observations of and interviews with henna artists and customers in Jaipur that occurred during three field trips between June 2010 and April 2012. It will also be informed by interactions with henna artists and customers in other North Indian cities including Varanasi, Rishikesh, Jaisalmer, and Lucknow that have taken place since August 2005. Interviews with all henna artists and most customers were conducted in Hinglish, the colloquial form of Hindi that utilizes a mixture of Hindi and English vocabulary in Hindi grammatical constructions. English words used in long quoted speech are indicated in my translations with italics.

Henna Artistry and Folklore Theory

This study will examine henna artistry in Jaipur through the lens of folklore studies. I will use the term henna artistry to refer to the skilled practice of creating henna designs on the human body. As a discipline, the field of folklore studies, especially in the United States, is often framed as the study of “artistic communication in small groups” (Ben-Amos 2000, 14), and, as a body art in which the hands and feet are stained red with paste made from the henna plant, henna artistry falls into the category of material culture. Material culture is defined as “culture made material” (Glassie 1999, 41), and its study considers the material object within the cultural contexts of creation, communication, and consumption (Shukla 2006).

In this work, I place an emphasis on tradition as a dynamic phenomenon. Tradition, as defined by folklorist Henry Glassie, is the “creation of the future out of the past” (2003, 176). It is not a static entity or act of preservation. It is a process of reinvention that attributes “meaning in the present through making references to the past” (Handler and Linnekin 1984, 287). Henna artistry is a manifestation of what folklorists identify as folk art, which is art created within a communal aesthetic ideal. Folk artists use tradition as a “tool” with which they find “sufficient space for individual expressiveness” within this communal ideal (Glassie 1989, 198). Body art, as defined by Pravina Shukla, is any purposeful, aesthetic modification or supplementation to the human body.⁴

Henna artistry has received minimal attention in studies of South Asian folk art, which may be due in part to its ephemeral nature. Folk art, or handicrafts, as studied

in the Indian context is art that has been made by hand through traditional means (i.e., methods that have been passed down over time). This art is separate from the court or temple art that the rulers of India patronized in centuries past. Generally speaking, studies of Indian folk art began in museum collections and exhibitions and then shifted to the context of creation. Museum curators and art historians focused on the object, examining the aesthetic qualities of each object and proposing their own scholarly interpretations of the symbolism inherent in each motif, form, and color choice (Aryan 1990, 2005; Bussabarger and Robins 1968; Dutta 1985; Jain and Aggarwala 1989). Over time researchers began to emphasize a more locally grounded perspective and went into the field to study object production with the artists themselves (Fisher 1993; Nath and Wacziarg 1987; Perryman 2000).

In early studies of Indian folk art, objects were argued to be near extinction as a result of modernity. The aim of these studies was to salvage supposedly dying art forms, threatened by the unrelenting forces of modern industrialization, and to inspire campaigns to preserve them (Aryan 1990, 2005; Bussabarger and Robins 1968; Dutta 1985; Nath and Wacziarg 1987). This tone relaxed somewhat over time as authors stressed instead the need for artists to find their respective niches in the modern market, preferably without compromising the quality of their art (Gunning 2000; Ranjan and Ranjan 2009). Considering henna's growing global popularity and the substantial design innovations emerging over the past few decades (e.g., increasing complexity of motifs, demand for elaborate figures, and coverage on the body up to the shoulders and thighs), more in-depth studies of henna artistry are needed to expand Indian body art scholarship. Future inquiries should consider how various henna application tools, paste recipes, cross-cultural motif exchanges, mass media images, and attitudes regarding tradition and fashion in Indian society affect henna designs. Due to the ephemeral nature of henna artistry, media images, objects in museums that depict painted hands and feet, photographs in archives and private albums, and oral histories will be essential for tracking the evolution of the art form.⁵

Existing studies of henna artistry have focused primarily on complete designs and the social function of cosmetic henna application. Two such studies explore henna artistry in Rajasthan. In *Menhadi Rang Rachi*, Mahendra Bhanawat (1976) provides an overview of henna in Rajasthan—from plant to paste, cosmetic to medicinal uses, social to religious functions, and folksongs to proverbial references. Jogendra Saksena gives an overview of henna in his work *Art of Rajasthan: Henna and Floor Decorations* but argues that henna artistry in this state is a tradition threatened by urban migration and is in desperate need of “revival, deliberation, promotion and utilization” (1979, xviii). He echoes Ananda Coomaraswamy (1934) by stating that Indian women “have not yet been brought up-to-date” and are therefore able to “save our [Indian] culture” and decorative arts such as henna, but he fears that women are beginning to forget the traditional methods and motifs used in henna artistry, which will ultimately lead to the extinction of the art form (Saksena 1979, xvii).

Graduate studies of henna artistry in North Africa and the Middle East have explored its social functions and documented local designs (Cartwright-Jones 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2009a, 2009b; Humphrey-Newell 1981; Kelly Spurles 2004). There are also hundreds of how-to books, design booklets, and do-it-yourself kits available in multiple languages worldwide. Catherine Cartwright-Jones has created a valuable online encyclopedic resource on henna artistry (www.hennapage.com) that includes free access to tutorials, sample designs, annotated bibliographies of henna studies, discussion forums, and an artist directory by country and US state.

Theory of Spontaneous Creation

In this study I have closely followed the methodology employed by Ruth Bunzel (1972) in her study of Pueblo pottery. I have apprenticed with multiple artists in the market in order to observe the variations in training and the range of design categories and individual motifs. I have also shown artists my own henna designs and designs created by other artists. The critiques of these designs helped enrich my understanding of contemporary shared principles of design versus individual aesthetic preferences.

In my analysis of artists' skills acquisition and execution, I will use Albert Lord's ([1960] 2003) theory of spontaneous creation to explain how henna artists internalize motifs and arrangement patterns to spontaneously create designs that can satisfy a range of aesthetic demands. The creation of a henna design is a time-sensitive process. The paste begins to stain the skin at the moment of contact; thus, artists must be able to rapidly create and adjust (if necessary) the design while he is applying the paste to the skin. Like other material arts (Bunzel 1972), there are certain principles of design that henna artists internalize; however, the live nature of the creation process in front of an audience sets henna artistry apart. In order to produce aesthetically pleasing designs in real time, the henna artist has internalized a repertoire of motifs that he regularly employs yet uniquely arranges according to each customer.

I will first, in Part 2, provide a brief overview of henna artistry. Part 3 introduces two henna artists working in Jaipur and describes the market areas in which they work. Next I will outline, in Part 4, the basic design categories and motifs used in contemporary Jaipur market henna artistry. I will also discuss overall trends in henna designs since 1948 by examining data from my fieldwork, booklets, and magazines marketed to women applying henna at home and designs collected in other academic studies. Following this, in Part 5, I will discuss the training that market henna artists receive and how it enables them to execute their skills in such a way that ensures the vitality of henna artistry as a market commodity and a tradition.

Part 2: An Overview of Henna Artistry

The term *henna*, or *mehandi*, refers to the plant (*Lawsonia inermis* L.), the paste made from the leaves of the plant, the stain created by the paste, and the design aesthetic associated with the paste's cosmetic application on the skin. Henna has an assortment of medicinal uses—including as an antiseptic and cooling treatment for minor burns, abrasions, and aches—and can be applied to nearly any part of the body.⁶

The henna plant—which can be cultivated as a tree or a shrub (Figures 1 and 2)—grows best from northern India to Morocco. Dry, hot climates are ideal for producing leaves with high dye content (Chand and Jangid 2007). While many North Indian households grow henna plants and harvest leaves on their own, dried whole leaves and powdered leaves are readily available for purchase in the market. Henna is commercially cultivated and exported around the world. In India, Sojat in the Pali district of Rajasthan is known as the best region for producing quality henna with high dye content.

Henna is most commonly used as a cosmetic dye on the hands, feet, nails, and hair of humans, but it has also been used for dyeing textiles and animals.⁷ This study focuses

on the tradition of henna artistry as the application of henna paste to the skin, particularly the hands, for the purposes of producing a visible stain. The earliest known cosmetic use of henna is on the hands and feet of Egyptian mummies such as Rameses the Great (Anonymous 1886; Loewenthal 1972), although some scholars argue that henna use could have originated in India, the Middle East, or Africa.⁸

Henna's cosmetic use has been incorporated into several of the world's cultural and religious traditions.⁹ The Hadith report that henna was used by the Prophet Mohammad to dye his beard. Henna's popularity among Muslim populations is thus partially attributed to its reported use by the Prophet, and its use is considered by some to be a sign of devotion (Farmanfarmaian 2000). Henna has also been used in Jewish communities (Barton 1904, Cohen 1987) but may have been originally avoided in ancient times and "regarded as a foreign, pagan custom" (Loewenthal 1972, 24). In some African and Middle Eastern cultures, henna is believed to have protective powers against the Evil Eye (Cartwright-Jones 2002, 2003; Loewenthal 1972; Sharaby 2006). In India, quite the opposite is believed as many local men and women claim that its beauty can attract the Evil Eye. A local Rajput woman in Jaipur symbolically spat on a design that I had applied to her hand, insisting that the design was too beautiful. I have also been instructed not to venture outside of the house after dark after applying henna as it could attract the Evil Eye. This advice does not seem to be strictly followed as hundreds of women in the market have henna applied after dark, especially on the eve of festivals.

From Plant to Paste

The creation of a henna design begins long before the paste is made. The plant is first cultivated, and the leaves are harvested. Henna paste can be made from either freshly harvested or dried leaves (Figures 3–6). Fresh leaves are ground with a stone grinder by hand, and small amounts of water are added until a paste is created with the desired consistency. Dried leaves are ground and then thoroughly sifted twice or thrice in order to separate the larger bits of leaves, which make complex designs more difficult to create. The finer the powder, the thinner and more intricate the henna lines can be. To release the tannins, this mixture is set aside for several hours.

The two basic ingredients for henna paste are ground henna leaves and water. Both professional and nonprofessional henna artists have their own recipes, and they vary from region to region and individual to individual. Artists boast about their secret ingredients for producing a deep stain or an easily manageable consistency. Ingredients such as sugar and the mucilage from okra are used to add viscosity to the paste, and various items—such as tea, coffee, petrol, cloves, pomegranate shells, and nutshells¹⁰—are used to produce a dark stain.

Skin is best prepared for henna application when it has been washed well with soap and water to remove any surface dirt and oils. In India, *mehandi ka tel* (henna oil) is usually applied before the henna. The oil is not derived from the henna plant; its smell suggests that most brands are or include eucalyptus oil, although exact ingredients are not usually labeled.

Before the use of the cone applicator, women in India applied henna paste using their index fingers, a small stick, or a needle.¹¹ Expert artists could pull a thin line of paste from the batch and then guide it into shapes. Market henna artists in Jaipur use a similar technique with cone applicators by first anchoring a drop of henna to the skin



Figure 1. Henna plant (shrub) in the Chokelao Garden of Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India. February 22, 2012.



Figure 2. Henna plant (tree) outside of a private home in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India. July 27, 2011.



Figure 3. Freshly harvested henna leaves on a stone grinder in the backyard of a private home in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India. July 27, 2011.



Figure 4. The paste produced from the freshly ground leaves in Figure 3. July 27, 2011.



Figure 5. Close-up view of the freshly made henna paste in Figure 4 minutes after it was applied to the author's palm. July 27, 2011.



Figure 6. Henna paste (made from henna powder and water) being prepared by an artist at Anil Mehendi Art outside of Metropolitan (MGF) Mall, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India. December 29, 2010.

and then lifting the cone before guiding the filament of paste into the desired shape and resting it back down onto the skin. Henna artists refer to this technique as *uthha ke chalaana* (lift and move). It takes regular practice to master this method, manipulating the henna before gravity pulls it to the skin. The lines created with this method appear cleaner and more intricate than those that are drawn with the applicator touching the skin.

Once the henna paste has been applied, it is optimally left on the skin for at least two hours to let the tannins seep in and stain the skin cells. The longer the paste stays on the skin, the deeper the stain. To prolong contact with the skin and keep the paste moist, women in Indian households usually apply a mixture of lemon juice and sugar; some expose the paste to the smoke from heating clove buds.

Once the paste dries completely, it begins to crack and flake off. In India, mustard oil is commonly applied at this point to aid in paste removal. Once it is scraped off, a mentholated topical cream, such as Vicks VapoRub, is applied to deepen the stain and protect the skin from contact with water. Water must be avoided for several hours to ensure the stain reaches its full color potential. The stain color begins as bright orange and gradually darkens to deep maroon or black over the next couple of days. The stain will then begin to fade over the next several days as the skin exfoliates. Remnants of the stain can last for up to four weeks.

In India, the intensity of the stain is given more attention than the design itself. People judge color first, design second. Henna paste begins to stain the skin immediately, and prolonged contact yields deeper stain potential. There is a common saying in India that the deeper the stain, the deeper the love between a woman and her husband (or potential husband, if the woman is unmarried). Some communities in India even demonstrate this correlation by incorporating it into the marriage ceremony. A lump of henna paste is placed between the bride and groom's palms when their hands are joined together during the ceremony. The stain that develops is believed to indicate the love—present or future—between them. The relationship between stain intensity and love is almost always used in reference to romantic love. However, I have heard a variation of this in India, presumably to console those worried that their henna stains would not be dark. A woman insisted that a light henna stain indicates that the love between a woman and her mother-in-law will be great. Since most Indian families reside in joint-family households, new brides are often just as anxious about building a good relationship with their mothers-in-law as they are about the love they will share with their husbands.

Other factors that affect the intensity of the stain include but are not limited to: the weather conditions as the henna plant was growing, the freshness of the leaves or powder used to make the paste, the ingredients added to the powder, the amount of time allowed for the chemical reaction to occur in the paste before application on the skin, the person's diet and body temperature, the thickness of the skin on which the paste is applied, and the temperature and humidity of the air during the paste application.

From Suhaag ki Nishaani to Desh ki Nishaani (From a Symbol of a Married Woman to a Symbol of a Nation)

In modern Indian society, henna functions as a symbol of marriage, love and prosperity, traditional values, and even the Indian nation itself. Women of nearly every religious group in India traditionally have henna applied for both family and religious

ceremonies, saying that it is *shubh* (auspicious). The notion of auspiciousness is prevalent in Indian society. Words, images, objects, and actions are identified for their perceived positive effects on a particular spatiotemporal cultural context. Henna is applied for multiple occasions throughout the year, including ceremonies, select festivals, and fasts observed to benefit the marital home (e.g., husband's health and safety, peace and harmony between husband and wife, or, in the case of unmarried women, being blessed with a good husband in the future). These practices vary by region and individual, but all feature elements of both ritual and celebration.

Two large festivals during which henna is applied are Diwali and Eid al-Fitr. Diwali, or Deepawali (row of lights), is a festival in which houses are decorated with rows of small earthen lamps or, more recently, strings of electric lights along the exterior. Diwali is most commonly connected to the Hindu epic *Ramayana* and celebrates the return of Rama from exile. Houses are decorated with rows of lamps to light his path home. Modern-day celebrations include participating in a formal *pūja* (prayer), giving gifts to family, and lighting fireworks. Eid al-Fitr is a Muslim celebration marking the end of the month of Ramadan. At the end of this month of fasting, Muslims come together for the Eid prayer and feast with friends and family. Other religious festivals during which henna is applied are *vrats* (fasts) Teej, Karwa Chauth, and Gangor. In Rajasthan, Teej is also referred to as Hariyali (greenery) Teej and falls near the annual monsoon when the surrounding flora turns green. Women perform a *pūja* to the goddess Parvati, who is widely considered to be the model wife. In celebration of the Teej festival, women dress themselves in green and swing on plank swings hung from trees. Karwa Chauth is a daylong fast observed by married women. At the end of the day, a *pūja* is performed and women look into the night sky for the full moon. Once it is visible, women view it indirectly by holding up a large circular sieve or looking at its reflection in water. They then turn to view their husband's face in the same way and proceed to break their fast. Gangor is a popular festival in Rajasthan dedicated to the marital bliss between Shiva (Gana) and Parvati (Gauri). During this festival, married women fast and perform a *pūja* to the goddess Gauri; unmarried women also observe the fast and perform the *pūja* in hopes of being blessed with a good husband.

Throughout northern India—particularly among Hindu and Muslim communities—henna is commonly referred to as *suhaag ki nishaani* (symbol of a married woman). In most Hindu communities, henna is considered one of the sixteen adornments (*solah sringar*) worn by married women. These adornments are considered compulsory during religious festivals and ceremonies, beginning with the wedding ceremony. Traditionally, the groom's name is hidden in the bride's henna and the groom is expected to find it. This practice serves as an icebreaker between the newlywed couple and can be rather difficult if each letter is hidden individually. Nowadays, married women sometimes have their husbands' names hidden in their henna designs for other festivals, particularly Teej, Karwa Chauth, and Gangor, to playfully taunt their husbands at home as they scour the swirls of paisleys and flowers. It is also becoming more common in cities for unmarried women to have their boyfriends' names hidden in henna applied for these festivals.

In the 2001 Hindi film *Zubeidaa* (Benegal 2001), the Muslim title character refuses to have henna applied before her wedding. An older woman is taken aback and asks Zubeidaa, "Mehandi bina dulhan kaise banogi?" (How will you become a bride without henna?) The application of henna on the hands and feet for the wedding day is considered mandatory for brides in many religious and regional communities and merely fashionable in others. For example, in Bengali Hindu communities, *aalta* (a

red dye made from lac) is traditionally applied on the wedding day; however, recent fashion trends have inspired more and more brides to apply henna.

Most North Indian wedding celebrations include a Ladies' Sangeet in the days before the wedding during which the women of the bridal party come together to dance, sing, and have henna applied. Generally speaking, the closer one is to the bride or the groom, the more elaborate one's henna (and overall dress) will be. Henna-adorned feet are considered mandatory only for the bride; however, many female wedding guests also opt to have simple designs or a thick band around the edge of the feet applied in henna. In some communities, the application of henna on the feet of unmarried girls on any occasion is discouraged or even forbidden.

Ladies' Sangeets can be limited to a handful of women with a *dholak* (medium-sized two-headed hand drum) in a living room or include hundreds of guests with an amplified sound system in a rented assembly hall. Whether sung by an aunt playing the *dholak* or by a Bollywood playback singer on a movie track, many of the songs popularly played during Ladies' Sangeets reference henna. For example, two popular Bollywood songs often played at Ladies' Sangeets are "Mehandi Laga Ke Rakhna" from *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) and "Mehandi Hai Rachnewali" from *Zubeidaa* (Benegal 2001).

Mehandi laga ke rakhna, doli saja ke rakhna,
Lene tujhe, O gori, aayenge tere sajana.
(Apply henna, decorate the bridal palanquin,
To take you away, O beautiful girl, your beloved will come.)
—Excerpt from "Mehandi Laga Ke Rakhna"

Mehandi hai rachnewali haathon mein gehri laali.
Kahe sakhiyaan ab kaliyaan haathon mein khilne wali hain.
Tere mann ko jeevan ko nayi khushiyaan milne wali hain.
(The henna is about to stain the hands deep red.
Friends say that flower buds will bloom in the hands.
Your heart, your life is about to reap new happiness.)
—Excerpt from "Mehandi Hai Rachnewali"

Both songs speak of the adornment of the bride, her future marital bliss, and her leaving her parental home for that of her husband. These themes are common for songs sung or played during wedding festivities in India.

References to henna can also be seen in Indian television advertisements and regular programming. In an advertisement for Nakshatra Diamond Jewellery, popular Bollywood heroine Katrina Kaif is dressed in bridal finery. A sensual female voice states, pausing at the end of each line:

Traditions speak.
Red says, "I'm prosperity."
Mehandi says, "Deep is the color of my love."
Veiled, I sit in respect for my elders.
Sparkling,
Precious,
Nakshatra,

The camera zooms in on different elements of her bridal adornments corresponding with the voiceover (“red,” the *lengha* she is wearing; “mehandi,” her hennaed hands; “veil,” the veil being draped over her head; “sparkling,” the diamond necklace around her neck). Hennaed palms dip into a shallow basin of water covered in red rose petals and then lift into the air. The hands swirl delicately in the air to show the henna designs.¹³ This advertisement presents henna as a bridal adornment, an indicator of love, and an essential part of Indian tradition.

In the February 15, 2012 episode of the Indian soap opera *Diya Aur Baati Hum*, the women of the house in a Rajasthani village are having henna applied. Two younger women ask Sandhya, the educated daughter-in-law with dreams of becoming an Indian Police Service officer, to apply their henna. Sandhya hesitates, saying she does not know how to apply henna very well. The girls insist, saying she must know designs that are “*naye*” (newer) and “*hat ke*” (more unique) than the other sisters-in-law applying henna. The disappointment in the young girls’ faces is apparent as Sandhya squirts a fat, jagged line of henna on the first girl’s palm. The girl excuses herself, quickly washes her hand, and goes to another sister-in-law applying henna, reporting that she just “saved” her hand from the “*shahar wali bhabhi*” (sister-in-law from the city). Maasa, Sandhya’s strict mother-in-law’s even stricter mother-in-law, demands that Sandhya apply a “*barik*” (thin, intricate), “*sundar-si*” (beautiful) design. Disgusted with the fat line of henna drawn on her palm, Maasa vigorously wipes her hand clean with Sandhya’s expensive red sari. She mockingly smiles and holds her hand out again. When Sandhya begins by making a fat, crooked triangle, an outraged Maasa rips the henna cone from her hand and throws it. Maasa then insults Sandhya in front of everyone present by asking of what use is an educated daughter-in-law who cannot do any of the work that women should be able to do.

This scene shows interesting attitudes regarding henna and tradition. The younger girls of the house were excited to have henna applied by their sister-in-law from the city, sure that she would be able to create designs that were “newer” and “more unique” than the other sisters-in-law from the village. Sandhya’s mother-in-law’s mother-in-law, however, mocks her for being educated yet unable to perform basic household tasks such as applying henna.

Henna is not traditionally applied in all communities throughout India, but it is gradually becoming representative of adherence to “Indian” and “traditional” values. In his work on Indian nationalism, Partha Chatterjee (1993) describes the role of the Indian woman in Indian nationalist ideology. Nationalists in India strove to unite the vast array of ethnolinguistic and religious groups under a single Indian culture represented by the ideal Indian woman. This ideal Indian woman, contained within the confines of the home (*ghar*), was the embodiment of pure Indian culture unsullied by the Western materialism infesting the outer world (*bahir*). According to these nationalists, the spiritual superiority of India over the materialism of the West is preserved by women’s strict adherence to the ideal model of Indian womanhood and femininity outwardly expressed in her clothing, demeanor, and behavior (Chatterjee 1993). This construction of Indian femininity generally requires wearing a sari, observing religious rituals, and ensuring the unity of the family.

Henna application, much less intricate lacy motifs swirling up the arm, is not traditional for all Indian brides; however, the image of the henna-adorned Indian bride

wearing heavily embroidered red fabric and decked with gold jewelry is prominent in mass media images across the world. Although not traditional in their communities, some women incorporate henna application into their religious rituals and wedding festivities to be both fashionable and adherent to the ideal model of Indian femininity. Henna is also a vehicle through which Indian women living abroad connect to India and this ideal model of Indian femininity. Some NRI (Non-Resident Indian) communities use henna application and pre-wedding festivities such as the Ladies' Sangeet as performances of their "Indianness" (Ramdya 2010, 57). Saritha Prabhu, an NRI columnist at the *Tennessean*, presents henna as a symbol of her own "Indianness" in her June 24, 2012, column when she describes how she arrived in the United States as a new bride clad in a red *salwar kameez* with "the bridal henna marks" still on her hands.

Henna's exposure in countries with large NRI populations—in the United States and the United Kingdom, for example—have helped strengthen the association between hennaed hands and India in the media and in products for sale in the market. For example, covers of language guides, scholarly works, and novels—even those with no mention of henna or marriage in the text—display hands or feet finely adorned with dense henna designs.¹⁴ Hearts for Hearts offers a line of girl dolls from different communities across the world.¹⁵ Each doll has her own backstory and ideas for how to make a difference in her community, which are written in her online journal. Nahji is a young girl working on a tea plantation with her mother in Assam. She comes complete with a dark maroon henna design on the back of her right hand. The design consists of simple swirls, flowers, hearts, and vines scattered haphazardly.

Henna application has become popular in Western countries, especially since singers such as Gwen Stefani and Madonna began performing with hennaed hands. Getting henna "tattoos" is popular in the United States as a fun activity during summer fairs and vacations or as trial designs for permanent tattoos (Keinlen 2005). Some US brides even opt to have henna applied for their weddings. There are some individuals from communities that traditionally apply henna who frown on this "appropriation" by those who do not "understand its cultural significance" (Maira 2000, 350).

From Design Medium to Design Aesthetic

The lacy arrangement of motifs (paisleys, flowers, leaves, peacocks, etc.) found in contemporary Indian henna designs has become representative of henna as a design aesthetic and is now featured in other mediums. For example, India-born New York henna artist Sandhya "Sandy" Patangay has begun executing her henna artistry on cakes. She pipes icing in the same manner that she does henna paste on skin and adjusts the motif arrangements accordingly to complement the shape of her "edible artistry."¹⁶ Another NRI henna artist, Ravie Kattaura, practices henna artistry on candles.¹⁷ Kattaura has developed a style of design that complements the candle canvas while still using motifs and design principles of henna artistry on the body. NRI henna artists, however, are not the only ones taking advantage of this sought-after design aesthetic. Artisans in India also incorporate henna-inspired design principles and motifs in their products. An artisan at a craft fair in Jaipur explained that he piped paint onto the wall hangings and decorative boxes that he sells in the same manner as professional henna artists, using similar designs.

The intricate interlocking motifs popular today have not always characterized henna artistry. Before the use of fine-tipped applicators, full-palm stains or large, solid motifs—such as circles, squares, and *paan* (betel) leaves—were popular. Several women

across North India have described a henna application technique in which a lump of paste is enclosed in one's palm. A unique stain is produced where the folds and crevices of the skin prevent contact with the paste.¹⁸ Full-palm henna stains or those with solid fingertips and a solid central motif are represented in Rajasthani miniature paintings.¹⁹ A common design in Rajasthan features henna-stained fingertips, a large circle in the center of the palm (and sometimes on the back of the hand also), and a line across the back of the hand just underneath the knuckle.²⁰ This design can also be seen in other forms of Indian folk art: some depictions of the Hindu goddess Gauri, such as a wooden statuette from Rajasthan, show her with red designs on her hands and feet, including the horizontal line across the back of the hand (Jain and Aggarwala 1989). Similar patterns are still painted in contemporary miniature paintings. When I asked a contemporary miniature painter in Pushkar why he painted women's hands and feet this way, he replied that local women in Rajasthan apply their henna the same way. This style of henna design is still applied by local women today across North India.²¹

With the use of different application techniques and tools, henna designs have grown progressively more complex. Henna-related products in the market—such as pre-sifted henna powder, ready-made applicator cones filled with henna paste, plastic stencils, and design booklets—make it easier and more convenient for women to create intricate designs at home. Women who apply at home, even those who just apply solid fingertips and a solid circle in the palm, admit to using ready-made cones from the market because it is easier than making the paste and cone from scratch or because the color will more consistently turn dark. Water transfer stickers of colorful and glittery henna designs are also available for those who do not have the time to have henna applied and wait for the stain to develop or for those who do not wish to have their hand stained at all but need “henna”-adorned hands for a particular function. While some scholars and Indians fear that henna artistry is in decline, the ubiquitous presence of henna products and artists in marketplaces across North India show that henna artistry is very much alive. In the next part, I will introduce some of the artists working in Jaipur and the high-volume market areas in which they work.

Part 3: Henna Artists in Jaipur

Carrying a cardboard box of supplies and a short stack of plastic footstools retrieved from overnight storage, a young henna artist of sixteen approaches the empty landing on the stairwell leading to the mall's basement level. He puts the box down and begins arranging the footstools: one against the wall for him to sit on throughout the day and a row of four footstools for the shop display and his customers. He removes a design album from the box and opens it to reveal photos of intricate designs taken mostly from magazines. He neatly places a stack of business cards secured with a rubber band and a couple of bottles of *mehandi ka tel* next to the album.

The young artist then removes an empty clear water bottle and makes his way down the rest of the stairs to fill it from inside the large department store on the basement level. Familiar with the young artist's daily routine, the store's security guard stops him at the door and hands him his empty water bottle to refill as well. The boy returns to his stand and opens a small metal container containing a large lump of henna paste that was prepared the night before. The artist begins stirring in small amounts of water until the desired consistency is reached. He vigorously swirls the spoon around three times and then gently lifts it, analyzing the paste's viscosity carefully to ensure that it is just right. He removes a stack of applicator cones and a few rubber bands. He

expertly drops spoonfuls of the paste into an empty cone and then securely fastens it with a rubber band. He continues to fill four or five more cones—enough for a day in the off-season—and neatly arranges them beside the design album. More cones can be made as needed during the day, but the young artist has finished his work for now. He sits back and patiently waits for his first customer.²²

Henna stands line the sidewalks and stairs of high-volume shopping areas throughout Jaipur (Figures 7 and 8).²³ No signboard or enclosed rented space is necessary. Plastic footstools, brightly colored cones filled with henna, and an album containing sample designs are enough to advertise henna services. Such stands set up in market areas are a relatively recent phenomenon. Local women in Jaipur remember few, if any, henna stands in the market a decade ago. Male henna artist Khemu claims that henna application in public spaces began in Agra, his home city, with two unidentified Muslim women. Seeing their success, men also began learning the art form and opening their own stands. Most henna artists interviewed for this study, however, did not know exactly when or where henna application in the market began. Previously, women would generally call on a friend or relative to apply their henna or to suggest skilled henna artists in the area, and professional henna artists relied mainly on word of mouth to generate business. Some artists even collaborated with local salon owners, offering a commission for bookings made through the salon. In his study of Rajasthani henna artistry, Mahendra Bhanawat (1976) mentioned the existence of professional female henna artists but did not specify whether or not these women had a physical place of business or how they were contacted for bookings.

Contemporary henna artists continue to generate business through referrals, but they have also created opportunities for walk-in business by offering convenient, relatively stable business locations in main market areas. By setting up shop in the marketplace, contemporary henna artists have created a space in which both they and their customers can benefit from the commodification of henna artistry.²⁴

In Jaipur, the largest concentration of henna artists can be found along the busy covered sidewalks outside of showrooms and boutiques in the Pink City, also referred to as the *purani shahar* (old city). Artists strategically position themselves in main market areas to be visible to the largest numbers of both local and tourist female customers. Henna stands can also be found in other market areas such as Raja Park and shopping malls such as Gaurav Towers, the Metropolitan Mall, and Crystal Palm Mall.²⁵ Henna artists make verbal agreements with nearby shop owners and police officers and pay monthly rent to set up shop.

Henna artists choose locations where they can be most accessible to women, their primary customers. While shopping, women can quickly stop at any of the henna stands, peruse the design album, and inquire about rates. Henna artists keep business cards readily available so that such customers passing by are sure to return to the correct stand.²⁶ Women generally complete their shopping and return to the artist to have henna applied, allowing the paste to dry during the auto-rickshaw or car ride home.

Individuals or families of artists generally own henna stands and employ a group of artists (often of the same ethnolinguistic group) to work on commission. With few exceptions, these are largely young Hindu men. Seeking to supplement family income, many male henna artists begin their careers after leaving their villages to find work in the city. They claim that they enjoy their work because they can work comfortably. Although wedding and festival seasons require stretches of full-day application sessions,



Figure 7. Artists Ganesh Kumar (left) and Dilip (right) at Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art in Johari Bazaar, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India. December 31, 2010.



Figure 8. Artist Ashok (in white shirt) at Rohit Mehendi Art on Link Road, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India. January 6, 2011.

months that are inauspicious for weddings give artists time to rest and even return home to their villages to visit friends and family.

Female henna artists largely secure clients through word of mouth or salons. It is rare to see female henna artists working at henna stands along the sidewalks in major market areas. Some stands employ young women but only during festival and wedding seasons when customer demand is at its peak. It is not considered appropriate or even safe for women artists to work in such an exposed business setting. Sitting along the sidewalk in general puts a woman at risk for “eve-teasing” and sexual assault, but sitting with male henna artists will almost definitely affect her reputation, calling into question her character and virginity.²⁷ Additionally, women who work in open-air settings (e.g., vegetable stands) are generally from lower socioeconomic communities. Female henna artists thus prefer to practice their craft in socially appropriate, physically enclosed venues such as a salon or client’s home.

Henna stand owners often recruit new artists through word of mouth. Young men from their home or nearby villages who are looking for work are most often recruited, but owners also make job offers to skilled artists working at other henna stands. Dilip (Figure 7), an artist currently working at Sitaram Ji Mehandi Art, previously worked at a henna stand in nearby Sanganer. Dilip’s skills were reportedly unappreciated at his previous place of employment; therefore, he agreed to begin working for Sitaram Ji Mehandi Art in the Pink City. Artists generally remain loyal to the henna stand where they began working, but there are instances of artists leaving to open their own stands or work at neighboring stands. Artist Ganesh of Sitaram Ji Mehandi Art has received better-paying offers for work in cities such as Mumbai, but he has always turned them down. He has seen how hurt the stand’s owner (his uncle) feels when an artist he has personally trained leaves to work for someone else. One of the artists working at Sitaram Ji Mehandi Art, a man from the same village as Ganesh and his uncle, decided to open his own henna stand directly across the street. While Ganesh understands his uncle’s hurt feelings, he is also happy that another man from their village is making a comfortable living for himself and his family. Competition among stands is present but not extreme. Artists from neighboring stands often socialize with each other throughout the day, sharing supplies and sometimes even lending a hand when extra staff is needed. Some artists do not profess loyalty to any particular stand and instead work for any stand that calls them to work.

In his book *The Indian Craftsman*, Ananda Coomaraswamy (1909) describes the guild system in the urban context that created mutual assurance for the craftsmen serving the people of a given city. Although there was competition among the craftsmen, the guild worked together to make sure that no one artisan dominated the market or failed to make enough money to support his family. As long as each craftsman was upholding the guild’s standard of quality, the guild would ensure that each craftsman had the means to provide for his family. The networks among henna artists in Jaipur work in the same way. No one artist is allowed to apply henna to every customer at a particular stand. The owner of the stand ensures that every artist has an opportunity to earn throughout the day, and each artist is expected to maintain a certain level of design excellence and speed of application that will keep customers coming to the stand in the future. While some women do have individual artists they prefer, women generally remain loyal to a particular stand where they can trust that they will receive a particular style and quality of design.

The Hindi term for professional henna artists, *mehandi wala* (or *mehandi wali* for female artists), does not connote artistry. The suffix *wala* or *wali* in this context is translated as “the one who does” or “the one who is associated with” a particular object or action as a profession. Therefore, a *mehandi wala* is one who does or is associated with henna as a profession. While people do not argue that a particular *mehandi wala* is not an artist, they—like most henna artists themselves—view creating henna designs as an occupation rather than as an art form in which individual talent is recognized. However, although an individual’s skill may not be celebrated, henna stands do present their product as an art. The names of the majority of Jaipur henna stands follow the format of “[Owner’s name] Mehandi Art.” One stand in Jaipur, which will be discussed later in Part 3, recently changed its name from Sitaram Ji Mehandi Wale (artists) to Sitaram Ji Mehandi Art. With this name change, the owners of this stand—like those of other stands—show a conscious effort to present their staff as practitioners of an art form rather than just professional applicators of henna paste.

In his work *Understanding the Art of India*, Coomaraswamy comments that the “problem of individual style scarcely arises in India, where we are fortunately ignorant of artists’ names, and where the distinction of one artist from another at any one time is in degree of skill only, and not in manner” (1934, 23). He does not deny that each artist leaves unique marks on his art, but he does argue that the function of art in the Indian context is not for individual distinction. The artist positions himself within a formulaic tradition that “is often preserved unchanged throughout centuries or even millennia of stylistic change” (Coomaraswamy 1934, 23). In this work, he stresses the importance of the artistic tradition within which an artist operates rather than the artist himself.

In Jaipur market henna artistry, a similar attitude can be seen. While some stands do advertise particular artists on their business cards, most do not. Henna artists do not do this work for fame or fortune. They do this work to help provide for their families. Each artist does develop his own signature style, but it is one that closely mirrors that of his trainer (which is especially helpful when two artists work simultaneously on one customer) and follows the general aesthetic of contemporary henna artistry (which is necessary for being successful in the marketplace). With their training, henna artists are innovative and can effortlessly adapt their artwork according to individual customer preferences and general market trends. The very nature of contemporary henna artistry ensures that the need for henna artists in general (rather than one artist in particular) will remain in demand.

The Stands

Henna artists in Jaipur do not work in completely stable, permanent business spaces. Stands must be set up and taken down every day. As is common among family-owned businesses in India, the day begins on an auspicious note with prayer in front of the deity(ies) or sacred text placed in a conspicuous area in the shop. Many henna artists light incense for an image of a deity pictured on the cover of the design album or on a small, separate altar. Artists who work alongside main roads also begin the day by washing the cement where they will set up their stands using water and a stiff hand broom in order to maintain a clean working space. The footstools are wiped down with water and a cloth rag. Some artists hang printed banners with the shop name and pictures of designs taken from the internet—some with the original artist’s copyright still on it—and vinyl boards displaying a sample of the most popular designs



Figure 9. Two artists at Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art applying henna to a young Jain girl for a wedding. January 6, 2011.



Figure 10. Four artists applying henna on the eve of Diwali at Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art. Due to the volume of customers, the stand was expanded to include the adjacent parking area facing the stand. October 25, 2011.

at the time. Small printed design booklets can also be displayed for customers to purchase or browse when choosing a design style.

In the market, both artist and customer sit on plastic footstools. The customer sits facing the artist, and the artist rests the customer's arm palm-up on his thigh. Using his hand, the artist smooths *mehandi ka tel* over the customer's skin where henna is to be applied and then rests the back of his hand against her arm to stabilize his hand during application. The artist leans completely over the customer's hand during application for an overhead view of the canvas (Figures 9 and 10). When henna artists apply henna at a customer's home, they improvise with the materials at hand. Whether sitting in a chair or on the floor, a henna artist will place a pillow on his lap to elevate the client's hand or foot (Figures 11 and 12). Henna artists in Morocco employ similar techniques, including placing the client's hand on the artist's thigh to stabilize the canvas and using a pillow to elevate the hand (Kelly Spurles 2004).

Despite the conservative attitudes regarding gender relations in North India, interaction and even physical contact between male vendors and female customers is commonplace. In bangle shops, for example, a vendor will grasp his customer's hand and gently fold the joints at the thumb and pinky finger together while twisting snug-fitting bangles over the hand. However, such intimate contact between strangers is not always welcomed. In her study of Indian body art, Pravina Shukla reports that some store merchants "are reluctant to touch the hands of their female customers, which is regarded as an unnecessary and often embarrassing intimacy among strangers" (2008, 186). Physical contact is particularly frowned on between male vendors and Muslim female customers. The same attitude exists regarding contact between male henna artists and Muslim female customers. Few Muslim women have henna applied at market stands or hire male artists for at-home bookings. A Muslim woman in Lucknow explained that the reason for this restriction is the belief that male strangers should not have contact with Muslim women. Women of other faiths do not exhibit the same discomfort, perhaps due in part to the youthful, often prepubescent appearance of most male market artists. Imminent sexual harassment is an unfortunate reality that Indian women are conscious of when entering public arenas. The prepubescent appearance and limited number (one or two) of male henna artists at a stand combined with the exposed, public location of the stand reassure (consciously or subconsciously) female clients that the henna artist is not likely to attempt to assault her, at least without witnesses. Male henna artists are careful not to touch their clients for longer than or in areas other than necessary for the design creation. Many henna artists place a cloth over their thigh where the client's hand is stabilized during application. This barrier between male artist and female client reduces the discomfort of physical contact for both parties (and also prevents henna stains on the artist's clothing).

Market henna artistry is a time-sensitive process; therefore, all of the artist's essential tools are placed easily at hand. Filled applicator cones and bottles of *mehandi ka tel* are kept within reach of the seated artist. Scissors are generally stored safely in a supply box.²⁸ Scissors are used for trimming the tip of the applicator cone immediately before application and during application if the size of the hole is too small (which can cause slow or uneven flow of paste). Many artists use small, rectangular plastic boxes for storing scissors, extra *mehandi ka tel* bottles, extra business cards, cello tape, rubber bands, and previously cut Mylar wrapping paper for making cones, if needed. Wrapping paper is purchased from nearby stationery stores and is usually cut soon after purchasing to prevent deep creasing from prolonged folded storage. The

artists fold the sheets of paper so that multiple sheets of four-by-six-inch rectangles can be cut at once. Once they are cut, the sheets are rolled together and secured with a rubber band to prevent creasing. A cloth is kept nearby to place over the artist's thigh or to wipe off excess henna from the fingers during application.²⁹ Extra paste is also kept in a small steel container so that more cones can be filled as needed throughout the day. Once filled, cones can only be used for two or three days. After a few days, the stain potential decreases and water begins to separate from the paste and interfere with the adhesive on the tape. If one attempts to use one of these cones, it will fall apart during application. Some henna artists keep a small stack of newspaper to use for packing henna cones when going to bookings and for customers who have purchased cones for their own use.

Henna artists in the market prepare henna paste the night before its intended use. Artists purchase packages of presifted powder from the market or in bulk from distributors. Most henna artists claim to add only water to the powder, although some admit to adding petrol to ensure that a dark stain will develop even if the customer does not leave the paste on long. The paste sits overnight to develop, and small amounts of water and sometimes *mehandi ka tel* are added in the morning to achieve the desired consistency for application. The henna paste should be viscous but also flow smoothly off of a spoon. This consistency enables the paste to flow freely from the cone tip, yet also stick together enough to create lines that can be easily manipulated. As noted previously, nearly all market henna artists employ the lift-and-move method in which a drop of henna is squeezed out as an anchor for a filament of henna that is then pulled to the desired length and shaped before being placed on the skin. By lifting the lines of henna slightly and then setting them down, lines can be completed quicker and have a cleaner appearance.³⁰ If one drags the cone applicator against the skin like a pencil, the edges of the lines are jagged and uneven.

In contrast to North Indian practice, Moroccan market henna artists use 10 mL hypodermic syringes with small (21 or 20 gauge) or large (18 gauge) needles when applying henna. The artists use the larger needles to produce a thicker stream of henna paste and thus fill a larger surface area faster (Kelly Spurles 2004). In Jaipur, henna artists have two methods for producing thicker lines. If they are trying to apply very quickly and are applying a design with thick henna lines, then they will simply trim the tip of the cone. If the artist wants to use both thick and thin lines of henna, especially to produce more contrast between outline and filling, then he will use his thumb to manipulate the flow of paste. Pressing down harder on the base of the cone—but not too much as to avoid splattering—produces a thicker line of henna. In this way, with skilled practice, the henna artist can easily switch back and forth between thick and thin lines when creating intricate, delicate designs. Some henna artists may use two cones, one cut to produce thick lines and one cut to produce thin lines; however, this practice is rarely used as switching cones during application is inconvenient and can interrupt the creation process.

Henna stains on the left finger and thumb (or right if the artist is left-handed) are the mark of a henna artist. During an interview in the market, a henna artist from a different stand interrupted to ask if I applied henna. When I replied yes, he pointed out the dark orange stain on my right index finger and thumb, saying that this type of stain is the "*mehandi wale ki nishaani*" (mark of the henna artist). The fingers, especially the tips, become stained when the artist uses his opposite finger and thumb to clean the excess paste off of the tip of the cone. This *mehandi wale ki nishaani* can be seen on my right thumb and index finger in Figure 47. Wiping the cone with a rag



Figure 11. Artist Ganesh Kumar of Sitaram Ji Mehandi Art applying henna to Dr. Anita Tripathi, a local Hindu bride, in her home. February 7, 2012.



Figure 12. While applying the bridal designs in Figures 11 and 39, Artist Ganesh Kumar uses a pillow to elevate the Dr. Anita Tripathi's leg and his left hand to stabilize his right hand. February 7, 2012.

is inconvenient, slows down the application process, and can even completely disrupt the design in the artist's mind. Some artists also wipe excess paste off on the side edge of their supporting hand. By not lifting the supporting hand to pinch the excess paste off of the tip, the artist reduces the length of interruption in the creation process. This practice, however, leaves an uneven cluster of henna streaks that henna artists find unsightly. Henna stains on the fingertips can become black, especially during peak seasons, due to repeated prolonged exposure to the wet paste.³¹

Henna artists keep an album of photographed designs for customers to browse (Figures 13 and 14). The majority of these designs are printed on approximately four-by-six-inch glossy photograph paper and are taken primarily from internet sources, magazines, and design catalogs. Artists select multiple samples of each design category—*bhara-hua* (full), Arabic, bridal, tattoo, and so on—to represent the range of design possibilities. One henna artist remarked that he does not like the look of designs requested by tourists (e.g., tattoo designs), but he includes a few photographs in his album for his foreign customers. A very small percentage of the album's photographs are of original designs created by the stand's artists. Similar to artists in Morocco, henna artists in India also use their albums "to convey their product to potential clients" (Kelly Spurles 2004, 160). The album is displayed with open pages, inviting passersby to stop and have a closer look. Women who do not approach the artists knowing what style of design they want or who are unable to describe their desired design choose a design they like from the album and indicate the parts that should be included in the final design. For example, "I like this paisley but with that filling"; "I want a *bel* like this but without this flower"; and so on. In addition to attracting customers, the design album is also a valuable resource for overcoming language barriers. Few foreign tourists speak much, if any, Hindi, and few artists speak much English. If the customer and artist cannot find a common verbal form of communication, they can still create designs with the help of the album.

With easier access to technology such as camera phones, henna artists are collecting images of their best personal work to show potential clients. They will either show the customer the image on the phone itself or have the image printed at a local internet café and add it to the design album. Some artists have even begun posting images online to attract clients. Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art, for example, has been receiving bridal bookings from other North Indian states through its Facebook page.³² Although henna designs are not created exactly according to a photograph, multiple examples of intricate designs serve as reassuring evidence that the artist will create a beautiful design.

Many of the design photographs taken from the internet still have the original (Western) artist's copyright visible. Henna artists in Jaipur do not understand this practice to be a violation of copyright. Market artists hardly ever copy designs directly from their design albums. The designs are merely a sample of the categories of design that can be applied by the stand's artists. Each leaves his own mark on his designs, much like a signature. This is not necessarily a deliberate marking, but over time and with careful study, one can identify the styles of different stands and individual artists. For example, I once visited the artists at Rohit Mehendi Art with henna on my hand from a different stand. My hands were immediately examined, and I was asked who had made the design. Another artist walked up and confidently (and correctly) identified the design as one from Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art. I was taken aback and asked him how he knew, to which he replied that the artists there apply henna that way. When I too became skilled at correctly identifying which artist applied a photographed design, the artists began trying to stump me by showing me photos of recently applied de-



Figure 13. The design album at Rohit Mehandi Art. January 6, 2011.



Figure 14. The first page of the design album at Anil Mehandi Art outside of MGF Mall. December 26, 2010.

signs.

While copying individual designs is not practiced and therefore not a major concern, the copying of an *individual's style* is. Stand owners train new artists in hopes that they will remain loyal employees while learning all of their techniques and developing a style of design that only the artists there offer. When I first approached henna stands for interviews, nearly all of the shop owners seemed uneasy with me photographing their albums. One artist even protested and asked for reassurance that I would not give the photographs to anyone else. It was not until this interaction that I realized that the shop owners were uneasy about me copying examples of their personal designs rather than the designs from other sources included in the album. Some artists who develop the skills to create a particularly impressive motif may keep their technique a secret. A skilled artist, especially one who can create figures similar to those pictured in bridal magazines, is an asset to shop owners. With more and more brides demanding elaborate figures, especially the Hindu deity Ganesh and faces of the bride and groom, such skilled artists keep their techniques secret in the interest of job security. One shop owner expressed to me his frustration that his new employee would not teach him how to create the groom motif that he uses in bridal henna. This particular owner considers his own figure-making skills weak and lamented that he would have to do his best to teach himself how to create his employee's groom motif by copying a photographed design.

Sitaram Ji Mehandi Art – Ganesh Kumar

Walking along Johari Bazaar past showrooms displaying finely crafted silver jewelry inlaid with gemstones, one can see henna artists sitting along the sidewalk ready to decorate outstretched hands with intricate swirls of henna. Outside of Shop #77, two stacks of plastic footstools sit next to a small table displaying an album of sample designs, small design booklets for sale, neatly arranged bottles of *mehandi ka tel*, applicator cones of henna paste, and a small altar. Sitaram Ji Mehandi Art's namesake, Sitaram Singh, came to Jaipur twelve years ago on vacation and noticed that henna would be a profitable business in the market area. He took a course in henna artistry in Delhi and then moved to Jaipur to open his shop in Johari Bazaar. His brother, Sri Shankar Singh, and nephew, Ganesh Kumar, now manage the business.

Ganesh Kumar (Figure 7) began learning henna artistry from his uncle eight years ago and currently works at the shop full time. At only twenty years old, Ganesh conducts himself with maturity and professionalism. He takes pride in working to earn money. "Do you know why I apply henna [for a living]?" Ganesh asked before telling me the story behind his family's business. No one in his family had ever applied henna professionally. His family owns and farms land in Bihar. The henna business began as a way to earn extra money. According to Ganesh, owning one's own business is more desirable than working for someone else. Although henna artistry is not his ideal line of work, he is thankful that he has been able to help provide for his family. He has seen artists stop working once they have found other, more socially respected lines of work, but he insists that no matter what happens in the future—that is, if he were to find higher-paying work—he would never completely stop practicing henna artistry. He considers it disrespectful to leave the job that has brought one financial success over the years. As a henna artist, he is not looking for fortune or fame. Ganesh hopes that he can earn and save enough money to purchase a home and a car of his own.

Ganesh does not view his work merely as a source of income for himself; rather,

he understands that henna is a source of happiness in times of celebration for his customers and is pleased when customers praise his designs. Like most vendors in the Pink City, Ganesh engages in bargaining when finalizing the rates for his services. He maintains a general price range based on the design complexity and coverage on the customer's arm; however, he quotes the price based on the customer's perceived financial status, as is common in retail shops throughout the marketplace.³³ Although he may quote a higher price to a woman perceived to be wealthy, he often gives generous discounts to repeat customers and to those perceived to be poor. Ganesh told me of a Muslim bride-to-be who had hired him to apply her bridal henna. The minimum rate for a bridal package is INR 1,500³⁴ (approximately USD 30), which includes intricate designs halfway up toward the elbow and halfway up toward the knee. The bride's family was unable to afford henna along with the other wedding-related expenses. Understanding the financial strain that traditional Indian weddings can have on the bride's family, Ganesh reduced the rate, requesting only INR 400 (approximately USD 8) for the same package. After he applied her henna, the bride was exceptionally pleased and admitted that this was the first time that she had gotten henna professionally applied. When I asked Ganesh why he agreed to apply her bridal henna at such a low rate, he explained that generally only those who are financially well off have henna applied by artists in the market, but sometimes those who are not wealthy should be able to get henna professionally applied too.

Ganesh is an artist and a businessman. He tries hard to ensure that he always creates beautiful designs for his customers. He understands that henna artistry in Jaipur is a business still heavily dependent on referrals and that competition is high due to the large concentration of artists in shopping areas. Therefore, he shows his customers respect and tries to offer designer henna at fair prices. He is happy with the number of his loyal customers, especially when they send their friends to him trusting that he will create beautiful designs for them as well.

Rohit Mehendi Art – Rohit Sharma

Rohit Mehendi Art is situated on Link Road at one of the main entrances to the market area in the Pink City (Figure 8). "Please come, would you like to have henna applied?" the artists call out to women stepping out of auto-rickshaws. Unlike Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art, Rohit Mehendi Art competes with up to five other henna stands³⁵ on this small stretch of road and thus tries to get the attention of customers entering and exiting the market area before the artists at other stands can. When the henna stand first opened for business eight years ago, it was located in Johari Bazaar and was managed by Rohit's uncle, Janak Singh, who employed two additional artists. Approximately five years ago, they began placing a footstool on Link Road and gradually expanded the henna stand to the five footstools that exist today. Rohit Mehendi Art is now managed by Rohit Sharma; his mother, Rajkumari; and his father, P. V. Sharma.

Rohit was born and completed his education in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. His father, who was serving in the army at that time, was then transferred to Jaipur. Rohit began working in the marketing industry but quickly realized that he did not want to continue in that line of work. He began learning henna artistry from his uncle and became an "expert" in one and a half years. Now twenty-three years old and recently married to his childhood sweetheart, Rohit alternates shifts managing the four to six henna artists working at their stand. His mother says that she is happy that her son is helping provide for the family.

Although the Sharma family chose their current location on Link Road to take advantage of the large volume of customers that flows through this entrance to the main market, Rohit Mehandi Art must also compete with adjacent stands. In addition to calling out to customers to get their attention as they enter the market, the artists are also forced to give generous discounts in order to secure business. I once observed a customer interaction during a lesson with artist Ashok. Rohit's father and another artist were audibly squabbling over the price of a henna design for a young woman. The woman's middle-aged female companion spoke forcefully and began to step away—a common technique employed by shoppers to threaten to take their business elsewhere unless their demands are met. Mr. Sharma then directed the young woman to one of their stools and instructed two of his artists to apply henna to her hands. After both women left, I asked Mr. Sharma how much they had paid for the designs. He hesitantly admitted that he accepted INR 75 (approximately USD 1.50) for both hands, even though it would usually cost INR 100 (approximately USD 2) per hand, or INR 200 (approximately USD 4) total. He explained that in the off-season when business is slow they sometimes have to reduce the rate in order to secure customers. This practice is common in the marketplace for two reasons. First, the public display of the creation process attracts passersby, curious to see the artist's skill in action and judge the final design. Second, this woman was the first customer of the day. Hindu shop owners believe that securing the first customer ensures that the rest of the business day will be prosperous, a belief some customers take advantage of to haggle prices down incredibly low.

While some customers are aggressive, Rohit reports that 90 percent of his customers are pleasant. He does his best to create beautiful designs and feels proud when customers praise them. He admits that he sometimes gets sloppy during peak season or when he is tired and that he feels guilty if a customer leaves unsatisfied with her henna design. Rohit says that he feels bad accepting money for a design that the customer does not like. If the customer expresses dissatisfaction prior to the design's completion, either the artist will adjust the design per the customer's request or a different artist will complete it. Rohit has trained all of his artists to create the same basic motifs and arrangement patterns, but each artist has also built on these in order to develop his own unique style; therefore, two artists working on the hands of a customer can create designs that are complementary yet different enough to appeal to the wide range of customer aesthetic demands.

When Rohit first began learning henna artistry, he would create ten to twelve designs daily. His uncle would give him designs to copy: one day a peacock, the next day a bride. Rohit would carefully replicate every motif his uncle taught him until they were all committed to muscle memory. Unlike most Western tattoos, Indian henna designs do not consist of a single motif or figure; rather, they consist of multiple interlocking motifs. During training, henna artists gradually internalize the design principles governing the arrangement of these motifs.

Rohit trains his artists and interested customers in the same manner that he was trained. Just as most of Ganesh's henna artists have a family connection to Bihar, most of Rohit's artists have a connection to his mother's hometown of Agra. According to Rohit, most of his henna artists began working in Delhi then decided to move to Jaipur. Rohit gives his artists-in-training designs to copy daily and ensures that they internalize how to properly form each motif while cultivating their own styles within the contemporary principles of design. Each of his students may develop their own signature styles, but elements of Rohit's style can also be seen—such as in the

way they form the beak of the peacock motif, the streaked *bindis* (dots) of the sun-like motif, and the tight clusters of swirls used as filling motifs. Before discussing artist training in detail, I will outline the basic categories of designs found in contemporary Jaipur henna artistry.

Part 4: Henna Designs in Jaipur

With the introduction of the cone applicator, the variety and complexity of henna designs have increased exponentially. Bookstores and small shops sell paperback booklets of printed designs on templates and magazines featuring the work of professional artists in India on live models. Primarily women use these collections at home for design ideas, but also these publications help start new trends in the market when women request particular motifs or arrangements seen in a magazine. Although there are no official subcategories of designs, booklet authors and professional henna artists seem to adhere to similar guidelines for the basic design categories acknowledged by henna artists in Jaipur: *bhara-hua* (full) and Arabic. Collections of bridal designs also follow similar principles of design. In Part 4, I will describe the basic design categories and motifs used by contemporary market artists in North India in general and Jaipur in particular. I will then compare these to the design categories and motifs present in paperback design booklets and collected designs in other studies of Indian henna artistry.

The term *design* refers to a completed arrangement of motifs according to a particular category or subcategory on one hand, foot, or other part of the body. Motifs are distinguishable patterns or figures arranged within a design. Motifs are made up of units, the smallest complete strokes, namely the *bindi* (dot) and the line. These two basic units are manipulated and arranged to form complete motifs. Artists form a *bindi* by squeezing a small dot of paste out onto the skin and quickly releasing pressure on the cone. *Bindis* are made in various sizes and thicknesses. Streaked *bindis* are made by flicking the tip of the cone as pressure is released; elongated *bindis* are those made by gradually decreasing pressure as the tip of the cone is swept downward. Both of these techniques create a *bindi* with a tapered end. Lines are created with the lift-and-move technique—anchoring a small amount of paste to the skin, lifting the tip of the cone while maintaining constant pressure on the base of the cone, and then completing the line by setting the other end of the filament onto the skin. Lines are also made of various lengths and thicknesses. The longer the line, the higher the artist must lift the cone to ensure a clean execution. Lines that are drawn by dragging the cone against the skin have rough, aesthetically displeasing edges. Lines can be straight, curved, curled, zigzagged, and connected to other lines to create virtually any shape from a basic circle to complex figures such as a bride's face.

There are three categories of motifs employed in contemporary henna artistry: framing, filling, and independent. Framing motifs refer to the completed outlines of figures or shapes. Examples of framing motifs include flowers, peacocks, paisleys (known locally as *keri* [unripe mango]), and *paan* leaves. Filling motifs are those patterned clusters of units that are used within framing motifs. Examples of filling motifs include checks (checkerboard pattern), *jaali* (lattice-work pattern), swirls, and one *bindi* enclosed by one or more lines. Another technique used to fill framing motifs is shading. Scratching the tip of the cone back and forth against the skin while applying slight pressure to the base of the cone releases and spreads a thin layer of paste, which some henna artists refer to as *mehandi ka pani* (henna water). This thin layer stains the skin lighter, thus creating a shaded appearance. Independent motifs are those

usually found along the edges of a design to fill in unappealing gaps of negative space. These motifs include rows of *bindis* in decreasing size, elongated *bindis* in a fan-like arrangement, and rows of small humps.

Before the henna artist begins his creation, three things are decided: the rate of payment, the type of design, and how much skin will be covered with the design (e.g., only the palm, up to the elbow, in between the two). In Jaipur, market artists consistently acknowledge two basic categories of designs, *bhara-hua* (full) and Arabic. Full designs generally entail densely arranged motifs covering the surface of the skin, giving the appearance of a glove (Figures 15–18). Framing motifs are outlined and arranged touching each other. The outline serves to create a thin line of white space that keeps the motifs from bleeding into each other, enabling each to be easily distinguishable from a distance. Arabic designs are generally characterized by floral motifs and negative space (Figures 19 and 20). Motifs are arranged next to each other in order to give the look of a flowering creeper extending up the arm from the fingertip(s). In the market, full designs are rarely applied on both sides of the hands. Instead, the palm is decorated with a full design and the back with an Arabic *bel* (creeper). Artists refer to this pattern in various ways, such as “local *haath* (hand)” or “normal” (Figures 21 and 22). Designs on feet are similar to those on hands; however, feet designs should always be mirror images of each other, whereas hand designs rarely are. Within these two categories of designs are various advertised regional subcategories, such as Marwari, Rajasthani, Mumbai, and Gujarati. There is little consensus regarding the exact characteristics of each of these subcategories. Each artist has his own interpretation, but such variations do not seem to negatively affect customer satisfaction.

Subcategories of Arabic designs are more obvious and agreed upon. The basic Arabic design most often applied today is the *bel* that extends to one finger, usually the index finger (Figure 23). *Bels* can also extend to any other or multiple fingers (Figures 24–27). Jaipur henna artist Ajay, for example, showed me the “three *bel*” variation in which a *bel* extends a few inches from the wrist to the index finger, one to the pinky, and one to the thumb (Figure 28). The two remaining fingers are filled with small motifs from the fingertip to where it meets the palm. In every variation of the *bel*, fingers to which the *bel* does not extend can be left bare or covered with smaller *bels* or clusters of independent motifs, all of which should have different arrangements. *Bels* can be thin, leaving a large amount of negative space, or full (Figures 29 and 30), covering nearly the entire hand.

Another subcategory of Arabic designs is the *chudi* (bangle) design. The *chudi* design consists of a series of parallel *bels* that are applied horizontally across the skin like bangle bracelets (Figures 31–34). The *bels* on one side should seamlessly connect to those on the other. These bangles can be straight or diagonal across the arm. Each bangle must begin with a different motif (e.g., two bangles beginning with flowers should not be placed next to each other) and must have different motif arrangements. Otherwise, all *bels* must be arranged exactly the same. Some artists add variation by alternating *bels* and bands filled with *jaali*. Generally, the bangles stop once they reach the base of the fingers, and the fingers are decorated with small *bels* from the tip to the base.

Other design categories include tattoos, *bajuband* (arm band), *haath phool* (hand flower), and the flower design. Tattoo designs refer to those that center on a single motif or figure, similar to Western tattoos. Foreign tourists oftentimes have such designs applied on their hands, arms, back, feet, or ankles. Tattoo-like designs are



Figure 15. Full designs for the author by Ganesh Kumar. July 15, 2011.



Figure 16. Full design for the author by Rohit Sharma featuring a peacock. October 25, 2011.

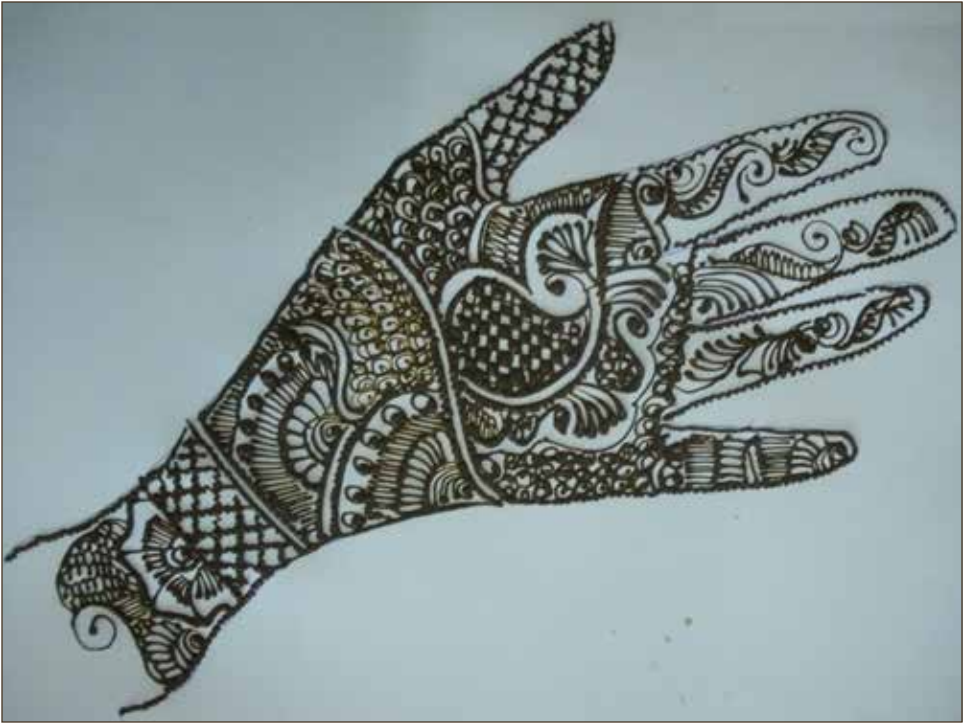


Figure 17. Full design by Ajay. December 25, 2010.



Figure 18. Full design for a local wedding guest by an artist at Anil Mehendi Art near Gaurav Towers. October 5, 2011.



Figure 19. Arabic *bel* designs for the recently engaged Dr. Anita Tripathi by an artist at Anil Mehendi Art near Gaurav Towers. July 12, 2011.



Figure 20. Arabic *bel* designs for Adrienne Atterberry by Ganesh Kumar. September 17, 2011.



Figure 21. Full designs by two different artists—one on each hand—at Rohit Mehendi Art. January 6, 2011.



Figure 22. Arabic *bel* designs by two different artists—one on each hand—at Rohit Mehendi Art. January 6, 2011.

often used or modified for use as a *bajuband*. Local women have these designs applied to their arms just under the shoulder, especially for weddings. The *haath phool* design gives the look of the piece of jewelry by the same name (Figures 35 and 36). The *haath phool* design is always applied to the back of the hand. It features a band at the wrist and a large central medallion pattern or flower motif that covers most of the back of the hand. In order to mimic the chains on the jewelry that connect to rings on the fingers, *bindis* or vine-like motifs created with straight or curved lines and streaked or elongated *bindis* extend from the central motif to each fingertip and the band mimicking a bracelet at the wrist. The flower design consists of multiple unconnected large flower motifs, sometimes of varying size, neatly arranged up the arm (Figures 37 and 38).

Black henna designs are created using a chemical paste not derived from henna. This chemical creates a very dark stain on the skin but is also known to cause serious allergic reactions that can result in scarring.³⁶ Henna artists in the market are sure to warn customers of the risk, but many women still request black henna to keep up with current fashion trends. Black henna is usually applied as an outline for large framing motifs arranged in an Arabic *bel*. These outlines are then filled solid with regular henna paste, giving the look of maroon motifs outlined in black. I have also observed large framing motifs in full henna designs outlined in black henna, but it is not as common or aesthetically pleasing.

The most special—and perhaps most important—subcategory of henna is bridal henna. The intricate designs decorating the arms and legs of the traditional Indian bride adorned with heavily embroidered red fabric and gold jewelry is becoming an increasingly more common image in the media.³⁷ Henna artists understand the importance of the bride's henna on her wedding day. The design must be intricate to complement her finely crafted stone-inlaid jewelry and the intricate embroidery on her bridal *lengha*.³⁸ The color of the stain must also be dark, as it is said that the love between the husband and wife-to-be will be shown in the deepness of the stain. When applying henna for a bride, artists take extra care to perfectly form motifs with impeccable finishing and arrangement so that each will be easily seen from afar by wedding guests and in wedding photos. Bridal henna can fall into either the full or the Arabic category; however, full designs are currently most popular (Figures 39–41). Although the arrangements may seem to be the same, there are motifs that are reserved only for bridal henna (Figure 42). These motifs are considered auspicious and depict scenes or objects that can be seen during the ceremony, such as the bride and groom, the *baraat* (wedding procession), the *swastik* (auspicious symbol), a bridal palanquin, and a *kalash* (earthen pot). One henna artist explained that bridal henna was essentially full henna with special figures added. Henna designs for Muslim brides, however, do not include figures due to the religion's views regarding iconography.

Wide variations exist in motif formation and arrangement among different stands and artists. I will not point out every instance of variation; rather, I will highlight the general trends in variation. Arabic *bels* generally begin in one of three points on the hand: at the base of the index finger, in the center of the palm, or at the wrist. Motifs are applied from these points away from the artist up to the point on the arm desired by the customer. The artist then returns to the starting point and finishes the design to the end of each fingertip to be covered. Some artists complete the fingertips after the paste has been applied to the back of the hand in order to prevent smudging while the customer's hand is stabilized with her fingertips on the artist's thigh. Other artists are comfortable enough to apply henna on the backside of the hand while the customer holds it in the air.



Figure 23. Arabic *bel* design by Ajay. December 30, 2010.



Figure 24. Arabic *bel* design for the author by Ganesh Kumar. September 17, 2011.



Figure 25. Arabic *bel* design for the author by Ganesh Kumar. September 17, 2011.



Figure 26. Arabic design for the author by Shankar at AK Mehendi Art on Link Road. August 10, 2010.



Figure 27. Arabic design for the author by Shankar. August 10, 2010.



Figure 28. "Three bel" design by Ajay. December 30, 2010.



Figure 29. Full Arabic design by Ganesh Kumar. Photo provided by the artist.



Figure 30. Full Arabic designs for the author by Ganesh Kumar. December 23, 2011.



Figure 31. *Chudi* design for the author by Sri Shankar Singh at Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art. October 26, 2011.



Figure 32. *Chudi* design for the author by Sri Shankar Singh. October 26, 2011.

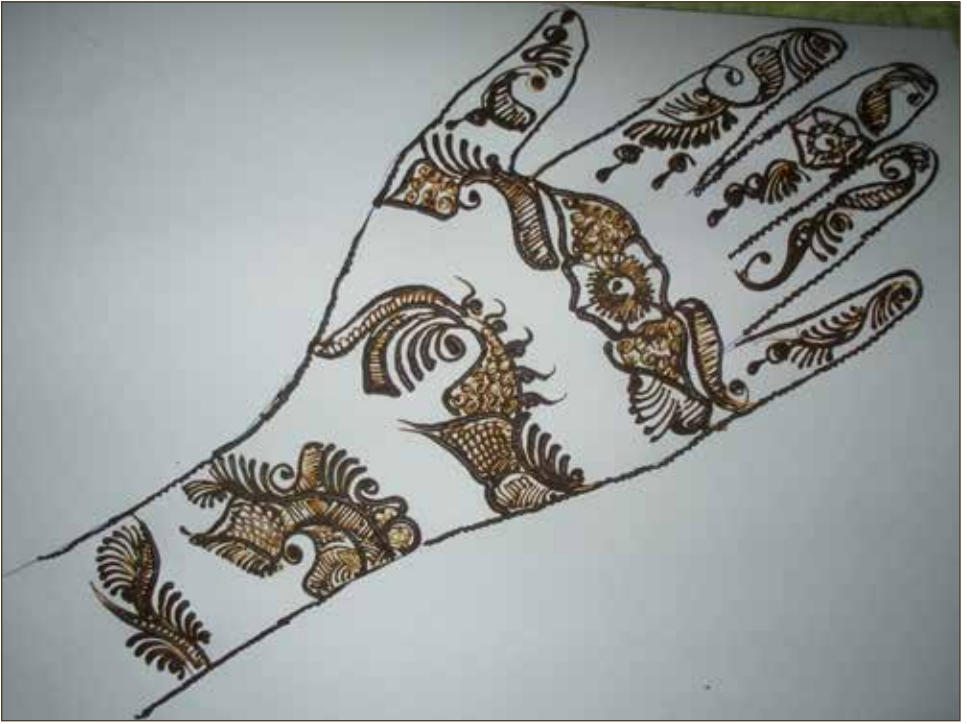


Figure 33. *Chudi* design by Ajay. December 26, 2010.



Figure 34. *Chudi* design by Ajay. December 31, 2010.



Figure 35. *Haath phool* design by Ganesh Kumar. Photo provided by the artist.



Figure 36. *Haath phool* design by Ajay. January 5, 2011.



Figure 37. Flower designs for the author by Ganesh Kumar. December 23, 2011.



Figure 38. Flower design by Ajay. January 5, 2011.

From the starting point, artists at Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art who have learned from Ganesh usually employ the same basic pattern of motifs: paisley, a line outlining the outside edge of the paisley, an independent motif or series of motifs (band, petals, elongated or streaked *bindis*), and finally a flower or another paisley (Figures 43 and 44). Although this basic sequence of motifs is repeated, variations of each motif are employed each time in order to keep the design beautiful and not appear repetitive. All artists stress that variation in motifs is necessary for a beautiful design. Artists at Rohit Mehendi Art who have learned from Rohit generally favor the following sequence of motifs in Arabic *bels*: paisley; a line extending a couple of inches past the tip of the paisley along the outside edge; a series of large humps, elongated *bindis*, small paisleys, and/or leaves along the edge of that line; and a flower or fan of elongated *bindis* at the end (Figures 45 and 46). This sequence is also repeated with variations of each motif until the design reaches the fingertips.

Full designs generally cover at least the palm and can extend all the way up the arm. Application begins at either the wrist (if only the palm is to be covered) or the point where the design will end on the arm. The design begins with a straight line across the width of the arm. Independent motifs are arranged along this line to form the edge of the glove. The artist then begins applying henna from this line down to the fingers, starting first with a band and then building upon that from one of either sides of the arm or the center. Some artists, such as those at Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art, usually apply another band at the wrist and then continue to build motif upon motif to the base of the fingers. The fingers are then covered fully with motifs. Some artists apply henna to the back of the hand once they reach the wrist, others once they reach the fingertips. Fingertips are almost always covered solid.³⁹

During training, henna artists are taught multiple ways to create each motif, and over time, they develop their own style of each variation. The most commonly used framing motifs are flowers and paisleys. Flowers appear in henna designs as full or partial blossoms in various sizes.⁴⁰ Generally, at least three petals are included. Artist Ganesh admits that the flower is his favorite motif, which is apparent by the number and variety of flowers and petals in his designs.⁴¹ Ganesh creates flowers with straight, stiff petals (Figures 47 and 48). His most commonly used variation is made with two capital *J* strokes connected at the hooks. The edges of the petals are finished with two thick humps inside of the hooks of each *J*. Three or more straight vertical lines are then drawn halfway up from the base of the petal. This style of petal is modified slightly by adding a line of small *bindis* above the lines at the base of the petals, by adding another hump in between the *J* hooks, by increasing or decreasing the number of or spacing between the vertical lines at the base, and so on. Larger petals are also filled from the edge of the petal almost to the base with thin vertical lines drawn very closely together. Small flowers are made with longer, thinner oval petals that are either left empty or embellished with one *bindi* or a thin line in the middle. Other artists at Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art tend to employ the same type of flower motifs but seem to favor different variations. Rahul, for example, favors a petal variation in which one *bindi* is applied in the space between each hump of the petal's edge and the vertical lines at the petal's base (Figure 49). The edges of his petals are also slightly wider and more rounded than Ganesh's petals.

At Rohit Mehendi Art, artist Ajay most often draws flower petals that seem to be blowing in the wind (Figure 50). Moving from right to left in one fluid motion, Ajay begins at the base of the first petal, then moves up and applies extra pressure at the first hump to create a thicker line. He then dips in slightly and creates the other



Figure 39. Bridal designs for Dr. Anita Tripathi featuring the face of a bride (left hand), peacocks (top of both feet), and the face of a groom (right hand). Created by Monilal (right hand) and Ganesh Kumar (left hand and feet). February 7, 2012.



Figure 40. Bridal designs featuring the face of a bride (left forearm) and groom (right hand). Created by Ganesh Kumar (left hand) and another artist. Photo provided by the artist.



Figure 41. Bridal designs featuring the face of a bride (left hand) and groom (right hand). Created by Ganesh Kumar (left hand) and another artist. Photo provided by the artist.



Figure 42. Bridal henna figures (clockwise from top: unfilled drums, *kalash*, drums, bride in palanquin, the Hindu deity Ganesh) by Ajay. December 27, 2010.



Figure 43. Arabic *bel* designs for Adrienne Atterberry by Ganesh Kumar. September 17, 2011.



Figure 44. Arabic *bel* designs for Paige Wielgos by Rahul at Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art. October 25, 2011.



Figure 45. Arabic *bel* design by Ajay. December 31, 2010.



Figure 46. Arabic designs for Clara Savage by two different artists—one on each hand—at Rohit Mehendi Art. November 20, 2011.

hump. He releases the pressure on the cone as he rounds off the edge of the petal and then quickly flicks the tip of the cone down to the base, angling in slightly to complete the petal. Each consecutive petal is formed from the edge of the previous petal and is completed in the same manner. After completing all of the flower petals, Ajay fills the bottom portion of each petal with closely spaced vertical lines that extend halfway up the petal. Ajay also commonly creates a different large flower motif with long thin petals. He first creates the center of the flower with a *bindi*, encloses the *bindi* with a circle, and creates a row of small humps around this circle. The petals are then created with a thin line of henna extending up from the base. Ajay applies extra pressure as he rounds off the tip of the petal and releases the pressure as he flicks the tip of the cone down, creating a thin line down to the base of the petal. Each consecutive petal is created starting at the edge of the previous petal in a similar manner.

Ajay's manipulation of thick and thin henna lines can also be seen in his paisleys. Ajay begins his paisleys at the base, pulls the line of henna out, and curves it back in line with the starting point. He swirls the end of the line around to make a small curl and completes the curl with a thick *bindi*. The outer edge of the paisley is then formed with a thicker line of henna. Ajay tends to use dense filling motifs such as tight clusters of swirls, closely spaced lines, or rows of small humps. While other artists create contrast and texture with fillers of various levels of density, Ajay uses line thickness in his framing motifs. While applying, Ajay periodically surveys the completed motifs and adds thickness as necessary. At the time of research, Ajay worked at Rohit Mehendi Art and had learned the art of henna from Rohit. Other artists at Rohit Mehendi Art who have learned henna artistry from Rohit form paisleys with the same shape but without the thick outer line (Figure 46).

Dilip of Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art creates paisleys similar to those created by artists at Rohit Mehendi Art, yet the paisley is narrower and the curl of the tip more pronounced (Figure 48). As he applies, Dilip pays extra attention to the tip of the paisley, ensuring that the curl is swirled around perfectly and completed with a thick *bindi*. Other artists at Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art, including Ganesh and those who have learned from him, have slightly different paisleys. These paisleys are more oblong and have smaller, less tightly curled tips.

While flower motifs vary primarily in petal shape, paisley motifs vary primarily in filling motifs. Artists stress the need for all of the motifs to be filled. If filling motifs must be repeated, then they should at least not be repeated in adjacent frames. After reviewing photographs that I had taken of henna designs applied at his stand the night before the Hindu festival of Diwali, Ganesh criticized a design created by Rahul and commented that the design did not look good because Rahul had filled nearly every framing motif with vertical lines (Figure 51).

Just as framing motifs of the same type should not be adjacent to each other, filling motifs of the same type should also not be placed in adjacent framing motifs. For example, one *bindi* enclosed by one curved line should not be next to one *bindi* enclosed by three lines or one *bindi* enclosed by one line covered by a row of small humps or any other such filling motif in which there are *bindis* enclosed by curved lines. Similarly, variations of *jaali* should not be placed near each other. Basic *jaali* consists of evenly spaced vertical and horizontal lines that form a grid or lattice pattern. In Figure 52, the paisley just below the index finger on the proper right hand is filled with basic *jaali*. Other variations of *jaali* appear on this hand. The band under the ring finger is filled with basic *jaali* formed with zigzagged lines. The band along the



Figure 47. Full designs for the author by Ganesh Kumar. January 6, 2011.



Figure 48. Full designs by Dilip (left hand) and Ganesh Kumar (right hand). Photo provided by the artist.



Figure 49. Full designs for Paige Wielgos by Rahul. October 25, 2011.

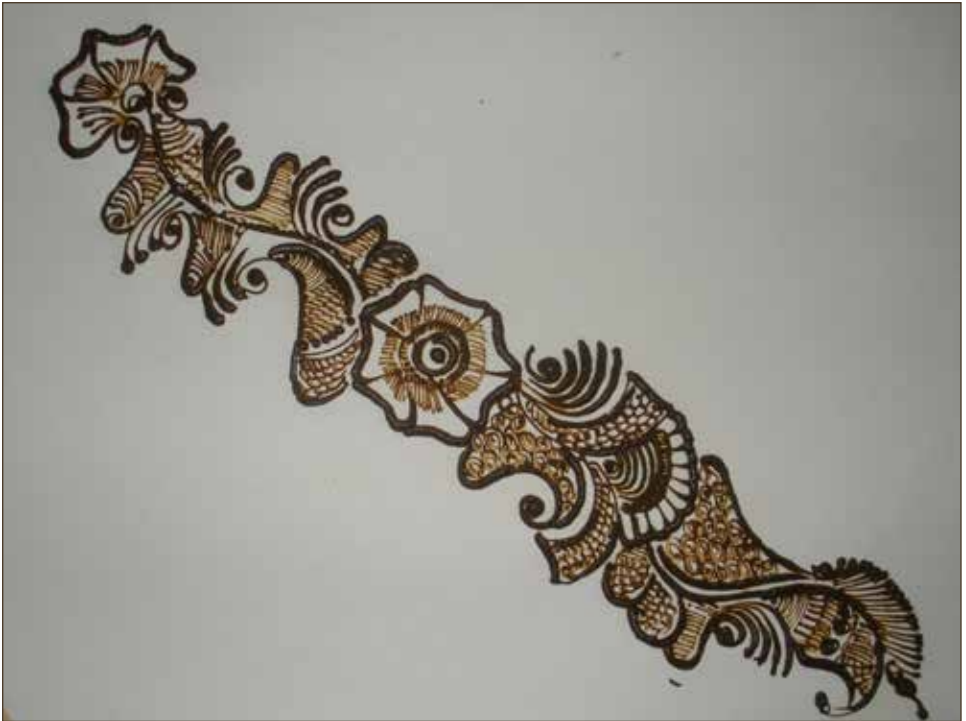


Figure 50. Arabic *bel* design by Ajay. December 27, 2010.

edge of the thumb is filled with basic *jaali* embellished with *bindis* at all four corners of each square. The band along the outer edge of the palm is filled with basic *jaali* formed with straight and zigzagged lines that have *bindis* in the center of each square. The band at the end of the design on the forearm is filled with *jaali* formed by zigzagged lines with *bindis* in the center of each square. Variations in which *bindis* (basic or streaked) are dropped in the center of the squares or at the corner of the squares should not be applied close to each other, nor should the mesh-like variation of *jaali* in which the vertical and horizontal lines are applied very close together. Other grid-like filling motifs such as checks (including plaid checks) should not be placed too close to other *jaali*-filled motifs.

Ghar baithe lagaayein designer mehandi (Apply Designer Henna at Home)

Inexpensive paperback booklets are available in Indian market areas for as little as five rupees. I surveyed forty-three such booklets of price points ranging from five to eighty-five rupees (approximately USD 0.10–1.70) available for sale in Jaipur at sidewalk stalls and in bookstores (see the Appendix). These booklets appear to be printed copies of designs hand-drawn with a fine-tip marker or gel ink pen within a standard hand or foot outline template.⁴² Some booklets over twenty rupees feature color and/or glossy pages. The covers of some booklets, usually those under twelve rupees, feature popular Bollywood heroines such as Madhuri Dixit, Kajol, Bipasha Basu, Kareena Kapoor, and Aishwarya Rai. Categories and subcategories of designs—such as Rajasthani, Marwari, bridal, and Arabic—are sometimes indicated in the title. The categories of designs published in these booklets include full, *bel*, *chudi*, *haath phool*, bridal, feet, tattoo, *bajuband*, black henna, and shoulder and back designs. Finger



Figure 51. Arabic *bel* designs for Katy Eagle by Rahul. October 25, 2011.



Figure 52. Full Arabic designs for the author by Ganesh Kumar. February 29, 2012.

motifs and forehead *jaali* patterns are also included in some booklets. Full and Arabic designs make up the majority of the designs printed.

Design booklets also include two types of designs not generally applied in the contemporary market. One such design consists of a medallion pattern covering the palm that is not connected to the finger motifs as in the *haath phool* category of designs. Medallion designs are not commonly seen nowadays, even on women who apply henna themselves. Based on design illustrations and photographs from other works, the medallion design seemed to be popular before the early 1990s. The other style of design not applied in contemporary market henna artistry is that in which independent and framing motifs are scattered seemingly haphazardly to cover the palm.⁴³ This type of design often incorporates vine motifs, especially extending from all fingers. I have observed this style of design on local women (and men) traveling on trains and walking through marketplaces across northern India. Every woman I spoke with who had such a design told me that she or a friend or relative had applied the design. I have never seen such a design applied in the market. The designs in Kanchan Puri's (1992) *Mehandi Ke 101 Design* densely cover the entire palm, some centering around a central motif. Individual framing motifs are not clearly visible; rather, they are lost among the surrounding clusters of motifs. There are no Arabic *bel* designs, only full and *haath phool* designs that stop at or just below the wrist. Many of the designs feature solid fingertips. Puri's book features a brief how-to section for a few select motifs, motifs for palms and feet, arrangements of motifs for the wrist, and also designs covering the palms and feet up to the ankles.

Overall, the designs found in these booklets are less intricate, are less complex, and have larger, fewer framing motifs and repetitive, less complex filling and independent motifs. Considering that the target audience for such booklets are women who will apply these designs nonprofessionally at home, such relatively simple designs are more useful if the woman is not a practiced artist, especially since step-by-step instructions in creating the designs are not included. One booklet, *Sajni Mehandi* by Manoj Pocket Books, includes practice spaces for full hand and feet designs, finger motifs, about a dozen filling motifs, and over a dozen figures and tattoo motifs. The main frames are dotted for tracing outlines, and the space between is left blank for the practicing artist to fill according to the completed design printed on the opposite page. These booklets, especially *Sajni Mehandi*, show that nonprofessional artists at home, like professional artists in the market, learn the art of henna first by copying designs.

Magazines have also begun to include a few pages or even a separate issue featuring photographs of freshly applied henna designs on live models. The Hindi language women's magazine *Grihshobha*, for example, has featured two-page spreads of several designs applied by one artist whose location and contact information are provided. Multiple design categories are represented. The February 2006 feature, "Mehandi Saje Haath" (Henna Decorated Hands), includes a tattoo design on the side of the arm, two full bridal designs extending two-thirds up the arm toward the elbow, a *bel* variation extending diagonally from the corner of the palm to the index finger with small independent motifs on the other fingers, a *bel* extending from the corner of the palm to the thumb and also to the pinky finger with the rest of the palm decorated with small flower-like clusters of *bindis*, a medallion design with small independent motifs on the fingers, and one full palm design. The January 2006 feature, "Adayein Mehandi Rache Hathon Ki" (Hennaed Hands Applied with Style), includes two full Arabic designs on the back of the arms up to the elbow, a full Arabic design extending from the foot nearly up to the knee, a *bajuband* on one arm, and a *bel* across the neckline connecting to a large design on the back as if to outline a backless sari blouse. All of the designs are embellished with rhinestones.

"Chahat ke Rang" (The Color of Desire), a feature in the December 2011 issue of Hindi language women's magazine *Meri Saheli*, shows elaborate full bridal designs complete with large intricate figures such as the Hindu deities Radha and Krishna, full-bodied brides and grooms, faces of brides and grooms, and a *kalash*. The text of the feature describes the practice of hiding one's beloved's name in a henna design so that "without even saying, the world will know who [you] are to him." In the following issue of *Meri Saheli*, a full-page advertisement announces that henna designs will now be published in an issue separate from the magazine. The title reads, "Now apply *designer* henna at home—whether for a festival or wedding, now apply beautiful *trendy* and *innovative* designs for every occasion." Each issue features 150 photographed and printed designs from simple Arabic *bels* on the palm to elaborate bridal henna extending past the elbow. The same categories and subcategories of designs applied in the market are represented in these magazines. Printed hand-drawn designs are minimized and printed alongside photographs of freshly applied designs on live model hands. The designs in these magazines feature a large variety of framing motifs and simple, repetitive filling motifs—mainly rows of humps, lines, *jaali*, swirls, shading, and checks. The target audience for these magazines seems to be more skilled nonprofessional artists who want to be able to create "trendy" and "innovative" "designer" henna designs at home themselves rather than hiring a professional.

General Trends in Henna Designs Since 1948

In his work, Mahendra Bhanawat (1976) provides collected and illustrated henna designs from his fieldwork in Rajasthan. All of the designs cover the hand just to or right below the wrist. There are no Arabic designs. Each design has solid fingertips and is densely covered with motifs. The designs center around a particular motif or theme such as the peacock, scorpion, *kalash*, or mango. There are several designs with a large central medallion or square pattern and small finger motifs. Each of these patterns is connected to a particular household item or festival such as board games, rupee coins, *ghevar* (a circular sweet prepared for Teej), a floor mat, and *sakarpala* (a diamond-shaped sweet prepared for the festival of Holi). The full designs are more similar to the designs in booklets that cost less than fifteen rupees than they are to market full designs. Framing motifs do not build on each other; rather, they are clustered around a central motif.

In his study, Jogendra Saksena (1979) includes reproductions and photographs of designs collected during his thirty years of fieldwork in Rajasthan, beginning in 1948. Like the designs in Bhanawat's collection, all of the motifs stop at or just below the wrist. Each palm design is densely covered with motifs and has solid fingertips. Many of the designs center around a particular motif or theme, such as the *swastik*, *ghevar*, *lahariya* (stripes), *sakarpala*, or paisleys. There are several large central medallion or square designs with small finger motifs. Many of the back-of-the-hand designs feature a large central motif (e.g., *swastik*, parrot, fish), and each has a thin band stretching across the hand just below the knuckles. Some designs include a pattern at the wrist mimicking a ladies watch. Most of the designs are geometric and symmetrical. In fact, only two designs are asymmetrical. Saksena labels these as "modern" henna designs, suggesting that asymmetrical designs stretching diagonally across the palm began to gain popularity in Rajasthan by the late 1970s. Saksena found that the applications of some designs or motifs coincide with a particular festival. In her study of the Hindu festival of Teej in Rajasthan, Manju Bhatnagar (1988) observes that the most popular motifs applied were *lahariya*, similar to the pattern worn for the occasion, *ghevar*, and *chaupar* (a cross and circle board game), in addition to regular motifs such as flowers and leaves.

In her study of body art in northern India, Pravina Shukla quotes beauty school instructor Ashok Kumar as saying that "henna designs 'must be full' on the hands, covering the palms with motifs" (2008, 364). This traditional look contrasts the trendy or designer look of the Arabic *bel* variations. Most henna artists agree that bridal henna should always be full, and some even argue that the fingertips should always be solid. In fact, the general attitude regarding henna designs is that full henna designs are traditional and Arabic designs are not. During my experiences applying henna in the market, I usually attracted queues of older women. Several of them commented to me and the other women in line that they preferred my henna designs to the other artists' at the stand because mine looked more "traditional." Admittedly, my skills at creating Arabic *bels* and figures is lacking due to inconsistent practice. In late August 2011, my former host mother in Varanasi, Meena Khanna, challenged me to create a *chudi* design on her hand. I hesitated and warned her that I was not good at Arabic designs, but she insisted that I try. Although the design in my eyes was basic and boring, she was pleased with it (Figure 53). She cheerfully commented that I had finally begun to apply "designer" henna.

Although designs have evolved over the past few decades, traditional motifs and ar-

rangements have not been lost. Full designs are still regularly requested, as are solid fingertips. Innovative or trendy designs combine new and old motifs and arrangements. For example, Arabic *bels* are sometimes outlined and incorporated into full designs with solid fingertips. Based on interviews with local women and my analysis of henna designs collected in the 1940s–1970s, in the 1990s, during my fieldwork from 2005 to 2012, and in design booklets available today in the market, I have observed several trends. Henna designs have gradually begun to extend farther up the arms and legs than before. On the hands, designs generally extend from three inches past the wrist up to the shoulder rather than just to the wrist. On the legs, designs generally extend to at least halfway to the knee rather than just the feet below the ankle. Motifs and arrangement patterns have generally evolved from vine-like and geometric to lacy and swirled. Figures such as the parrot, fish, scorpion, lotus flower, *ghevar*, and *sakarpala* are rarely, if ever, applied.⁴⁴ With the exception of bridal henna, particular motifs for particular occasions are not favored today. Designs featuring a central medallion or square, except for *haath phool*, are rarely applied, and motifs such as checks, paisleys, peacocks, *paan* leaves, and flowers in general have been retained in contemporary artistry. Solid fingertips have remained popular, especially with full henna designs. Asymmetrical designs such as the Arabic *bel* have been introduced and have become more popular, except for in bridal henna.

Part 5: Training

“Please clean the tip of the *cone*. You don’t ever clean it, do you?” Ganesh scolded me with a sigh. I pinched the tip of the cone with my thumb and index finger to remove the excess henna paste that had accumulated so that my next few lines of henna would be smooth, not clumpy. I resumed work on the design he was teaching me, but within ten minutes, Ganesh was forced to remind me again. My henna lines were becoming progressively clumpier, lacking finishing. Ganesh stopped me and explained, “The more you clean [the cone], the more the henna [lines] will be made with clarity.”

“I forget,” I said to him, ashamed of myself; after four lessons and constant reminders, I could not remember this simple yet critical technique.

Ganesh chuckled to himself, perhaps remembering his days of training, and said, “In the beginning I used to forget too.”⁴⁵ Ganesh’s admission made me feel better about my progress in learning the market style of henna. Every henna artist in the market receives one to three months of training during which he learns all of the basic application techniques and principles of design. With daily practice, artists can master the full range of design categories in one to two years and will be able to adorn hand after hand at a moment’s notice.

In Part 5, I will describe the training that market artists receive in henna artistry using personal testimonies from local artists and my personal experiences in being trained by seven local artists at three stands. I will then argue that this training is essential for preparing artists for spontaneous creation in the marketplace and that such training promotes a degree of innovation that helps ensure the survival of henna artistry in the market.

In his study of complex, real-time compositional practices, Albert Lord ([1960] 2003) argues that Yugoslavian oral epic singers unconsciously internalize formulas in which patterns of words and phrases are inserted during spontaneous performances. These formulas enable the singers to adhere to the essential guidelines of the tradition



Figure 53. *Chudi* design by the author for Meena Khanna on the eve of Teej in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. August 28, 2011.



Figure 54. Full designs by the author for recently married Dr. Anita Tripathi one the eve of Gangor in Jaipur. March 24, 2012.



Figure 55. Full design (left hand) and Arabic *bel* design (right hand) by the author for Rubal Joshi (unmarried) on the eve of Gangor in Jaipur. March 24, 2012.



Figure 56. Full designs by the author for Dr. Pravina Shukla in Bloomington, Indiana. May 3, 2011.
 Photo provided by Dr. Pravina Shukla.
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Figure 57. Bridal designs by the author for Mariah Coley in Bloomington, Indiana. May 2, 2011. Photo provided by Mariah Coley.



Figure 58. Bridal designs by the author for Mariah Coley in Bloomington, Indiana. May 2, 2011.



Figure 59. Bridal designs by the author for Meagan Haberman-Ducey in Bloomington, Indiana. July 19, 2012.



Figure 60. Foot designs by the author for Janice Frisch in Bloomington, Indiana. July 21, 2012.

Designs by Non-Market Henna Artists in North India



Figure 61. Henna designs two girls in Lucknow applied themselves. June 23, 2011.



Figure 62. Arabic henna design applied by a woman herself in Jaipur. January 12, 2012.



Figure 63. Henna design applied by a woman herself near Tilonia, Rajasthan. February 4, 2012.



Figure 64. Henna design applied by a woman herself in Jodhpur. February 22, 2012.

while still producing unique songs adjusted according to the audience and specific performance context. Bruce Rosenberg (1970) applied this theory to spontaneously performed Christian sermons in America, but Lord's theory can also be applied to nonverbal arts in which no temporal "gap" ([1960] 2003, 13) exists between creation and performance. The spontaneous creation of oral poetry and henna designs can be distilled to underlying units and formulas that facilitate seamless adjustments during the performance in response to the audience (or individual customer in the case of henna). The oral epic singer has absorbed the patterns of oral performance through his auditory sense, unconsciously internalizing words, phrases, meter, and melody. Similarly, the henna artist has absorbed and internalized Indian motifs and arrangement patterns through his visual and tactile senses. The singer adjusts his performance according to the temporal limits of the audience's attentiveness while maintaining the song's "stable skeleton of narrative" (Lord [1960] 2003, 99). The henna artist likewise adjusts his motif arrangement to fit within the spatial and aesthetic limits set forth by his customer while maintaining the "stable skeleton" of the design category.

Lord ([1960] 2003) identifies three stages of learning for Yugoslavian oral epic singers. In the first stage, the potential singer sits and listens to other oral epic singers perform. Although he may not be actively learning the songs for performance or have an interest in becoming a singer himself, he is absorbing the story, themes, and rhythms of the songs, as well as the phrases that make up the formulas. In the second stage, the potential singer has begun learning the rhythms, melodies, words, phrases, and themes needed to sing. The third stage begins once the singer can sing one full song for a "critical audience" (Lord [1960] 2003, 24). This audience is not a practice audience or an instructor; it is an audience listening for entertainment and can include singers from neighboring regions (Lord [1960] 2003). It is during this third stage, which never truly ends, that he builds his performance skills and repertoire.

Henna artists in Jaipur go through similar stages of learning. Before even deciding to learn henna artistry, artists visually consume the designs on the hands of women in their communities and in the media. This consumption may be only passive in nature, but the artist develops a basic understanding of the principles of design with respect to allover look and placement on the body. Designs applied to the face or neck, for example, would be considered odd by both professional artists and non-artists, as local women do not have henna applied to these areas. The second stage of learning begins when the artist picks up a cone and begins his formal training. It is during this period that the artist simultaneously learns all of the basic motifs, design categories, and application techniques. He learns first by example, mimicking his trainer's movements and copying his designs. The artist gradually develops the skills to create his own original designs in each of the basic categories using his basic motif vocabulary. It is once he begins applying designs on paying customers that he enters the third and final stage. In this third stage, he continues to refine his application skills and develop his motif vocabulary, influenced by the work of others and images in his surroundings. According to most henna artists, one month is necessary to learn the basics well enough to apply henna to the first customer and one to two years is needed to become a master.

There is no written how-to manual for market henna. All market artists learn by doing. Printed design booklets include instructions on how to make an applicator cone and how to make henna paste from store-bought dried powder; however, these books do not include application tips and techniques, nor do they include step-by-

step instructions on how to create designs. Through personal, one-on-one training, market artists acquire the skills to execute beautiful designs quickly and efficiently and to build the motif repertoire necessary to satisfy their customers' various tastes in design.

“Dekh kar banaana” (Create by Copying): “Haath baith jayega lagaane ko” (The Hand Will Get Used to Applying)

“Do you know what *chhe* means?” Rajkumari asked me.

“Six,” I replied and watched as Ashok formed the number six with henna.

“This is a six,” he said and began demonstrating how to create a paisley (known locally as *keri* [unripe mango]) from the number six by pulling a curved line from one tip to the other.

“Now your *mango* has been made,” Rajkumari announced and then proceeded to instruct me in filling this framing motif with basic filling motifs.⁴⁶

Market henna artists learn first by example. Just as Rajkumari and Ashok taught me how to create the paisley motif by first demonstrating it step by step and then asking me to copy the motif in the same way, trainers transmit their motif vocabularies to their students. Perfection is never achieved in the first attempt. Trainers encourage their students to keep trying; practice makes perfect. Rajkumari and Ashok repeatedly reminded me: “It will be bad once. It will be bad twice. It will be bad four times. Then you will get it.” Henna artistry requires regular practice, even after years of mastery. Artists-in-training must practice daily in order to keep all of their newly learned motifs and techniques fresh in their minds. Motif vocabulary is taught from day one along with application techniques.

The trainer begins by showing his student step by step how to create a basic design. Some trainers teach motif by motif, completing the filler motifs within each frame before proceeding to the next; some trainers complete all of the framing motifs, wait for the student to do the same, and then go back and instruct the student frame by frame how to add the appropriate filling and independent motifs. Trainers give their students multiple examples of each design category to practice each day, gradually increasing the number of motifs and variations. Any given basic motif can have multiple variations. A flower motif, for example, may be initially taught with wide petals. In later lessons, the petals may be triangular or thin and long. Any particular framing motif, such as the *paan* leaf, will be presented in each lesson with different filling motifs—first one *bindi* enclosed by three curved lines, then basic checks, then plaid checks, and so on. As the artist-in-training internalizes how to consistently and perfectly form each motif, he also internalizes the principles of design governing motif arrangement: adjacent frames should not have the same filling motifs, one motif should not be used multiple times within the same design, densely filled and sparsely filled motifs should be evenly distributed, and so forth.

Market henna artists also offer lessons for interested tourists or local community members as well as apprentices. These lessons can take place in the market or at the individual's home. Some artists find the chaos of public spaces too distracting for instruction, while others do not want to lose potential business by sending an artist to an individual's home. Fees are arranged according to the length and duration of



Figure 65. Lesson with Ajay: his *chudi* design (left) and the author's attempt to copy it (right). December 31, 2010.



Figure 66. Lesson with Ajay: his *bel* design (left) and the author's attempt to copy it (right). January 4, 2011.

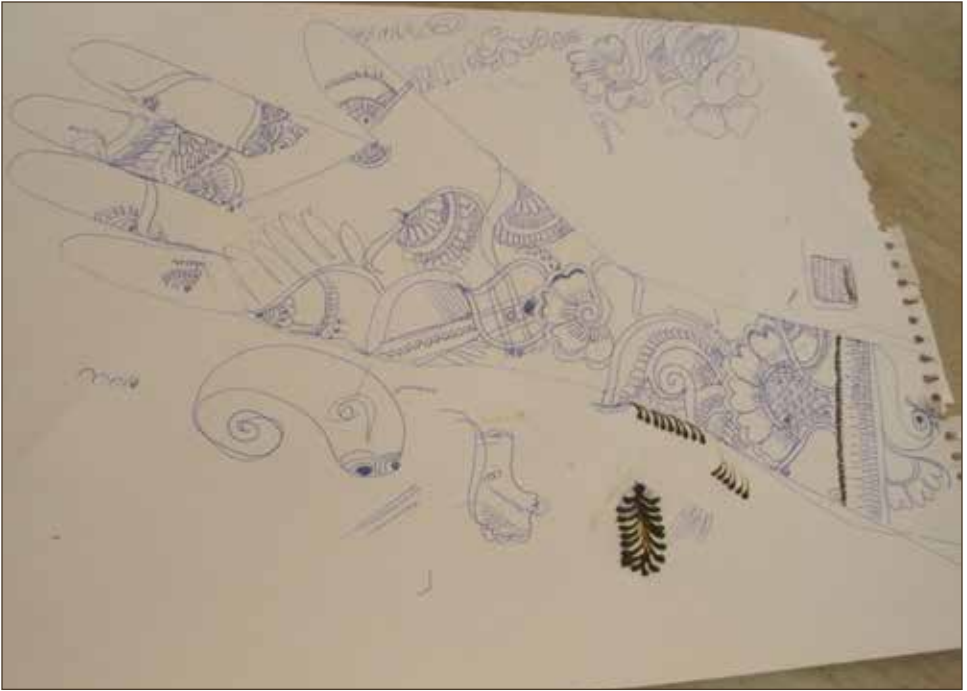


Figure 67. Lesson with Ganesh Kumar: his step-by-step instruction drawn with an ink pen. January 1, 2011.



Figure 68. Lesson with Ganesh Kumar: full design created by the author with henna paste per his step-by-step instruction in Figure 67. January 1, 2011.

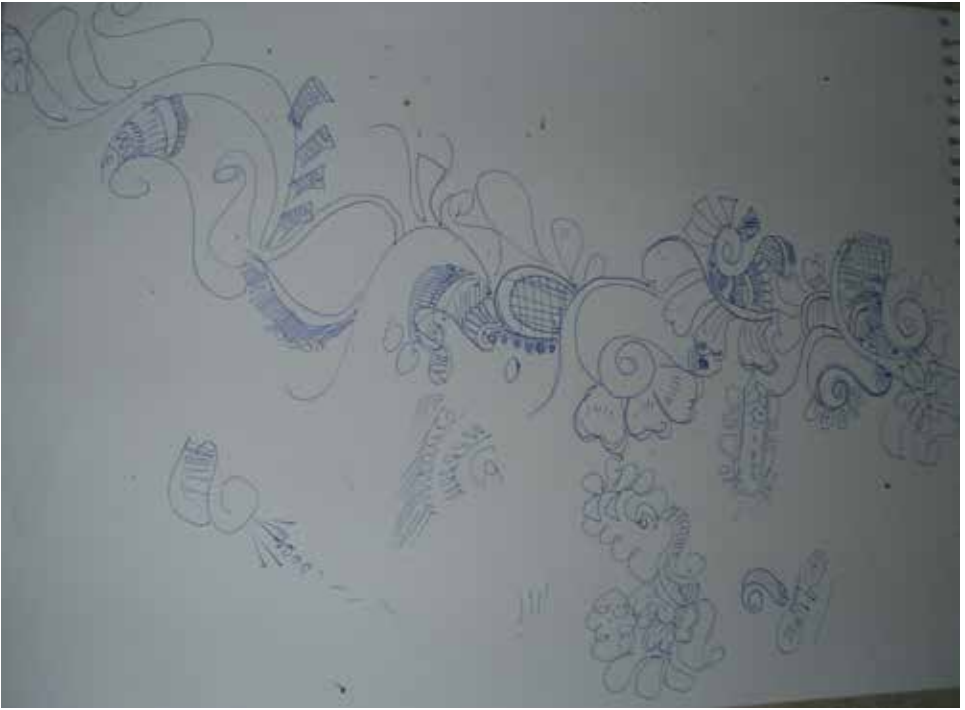


Figure 69. Lesson with Ganesh Kumar: his step-by-step instruction drawn with an ink pen. January 3, 2011.

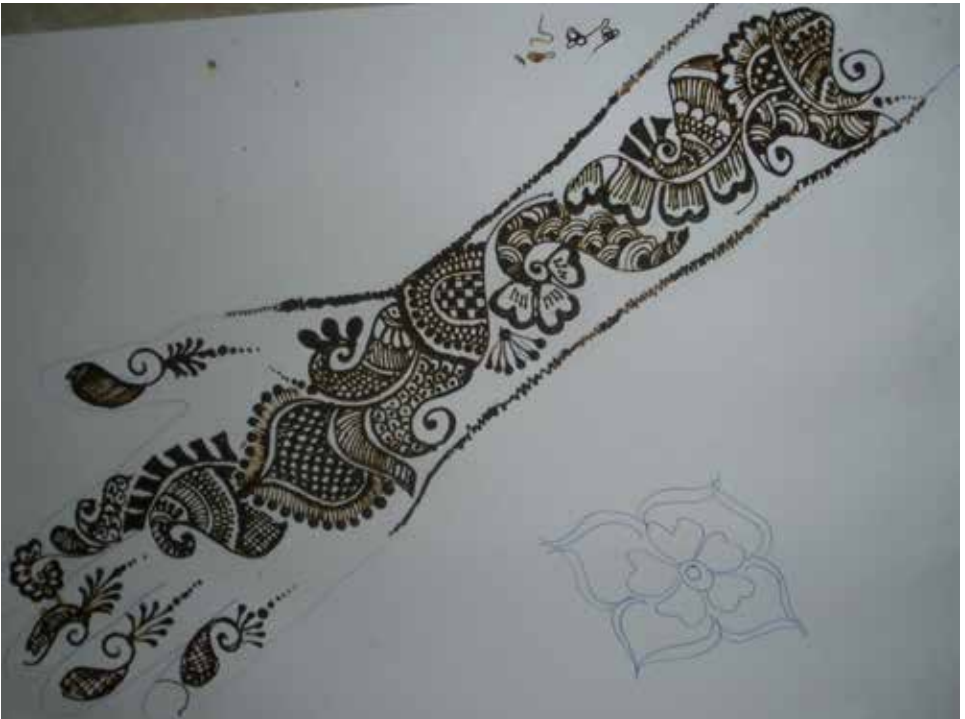


Figure 70. Lesson with Ganesh Kumar: Arabic *bel* design created by the author with henna paste per his step-by-step instruction in Figure 69. January 3, 2011.



Figure 71. Lesson with an artist at Anil Menahndi Art outside of MGF Mall: his Arabic *bel* designs (left) and the author's attempts to copy them (right). December 29, 2010.



Figure 72. Lesson with Rajkumari Sharma: her Arabic *bel* designs (far left) and the author's multiple attempts to copy it before the next lesson. January 1, 2011.

instruction, the distance (if any) traveled from the stand, and the student's perceived financial status. For the most part, trainers teach both professional and nonprofessional artists the same motifs and techniques. The difference lies in extra tips and explanations given to professional artists that will help them satisfy customers.

Women who employ market henna artists expect the following four traits in their henna designs: a dark stain, motif variety, clarity or finishing, and speed in application. Henna artists are trained to consistently offer a product with these traits. Dark color is achieved with ingredients added to the paste itself and careful explanation of the proper aftercare. Motif variety, clarity, and speed of application are achieved with regular practice. No matter how expertly and cleanly motifs are formed, customers demand a variety of motifs in their henna designs and immediately voice their displeasure if they see one motif repeated multiple times.⁴⁷ A completed henna design without finishing is equally unacceptable. On October 14, 2011—the eve of Karwa Chauth—I was applying henna in the market at Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art. As I was applying henna on a woman's hand, she lamented to her friend that she liked the motifs I was using but was displeased with the lack of finishing.

Speed is also key in market henna designs. Artists must be able to complete intricate designs quickly to prevent customers from waiting (especially the current customer). In the market—and during festival times in particular—women go to henna artists to get hennaed beautifully and quickly. For occasions such as Diwali and Teej, henna is only one part of the day. Special shopping and a *puja* must be performed in addition to daily responsibilities. Some women struggle to find the time to apply henna. Such women need a henna artist who can finish the design quickly so that they will have enough time to let the stain darken. Many local women opt to apply henna at home to only the fingertips—the minimum requirement—when there is not enough time to have henna applied and wait for the paste to dry. One woman explained to me that she does not have time to apply henna because of the time constraints of housework and caring for her small children. Her mother-in-law, however, insists that she apply henna to at least the tip of her finger so that the religious ritual will be complete.

It is the ability to quickly create a design exhibiting motif variety and clarity that is most desirable in a henna artist. Unfortunately, extreme time constraints can negatively affect designs. Rohit explained that design clarity is sometimes sacrificed for speed when there is a crowd of women waiting to have henna applied, especially during festival times. If customers are kept waiting for too long, they may go to a different stand where artists are applying faster. On the eve of Karwa Chauth in 2011, I watched as a woman frantically rushed from one henna stand to the next trying to find the shortest queue. She stopped at one stand but left after only one hand had been completed, frustrated that the artist was not applying fast enough. She went to an artist at a different stand, loudly complaining about the other artist's lack of speed and that she was running very late. She thrust her bare hand in the artist's face while he was applying henna to another customer and pleaded with him to apply her henna next.

Clarity should not be sacrificed completely for speed. Women paying for henna services in the market expect to get their money's worth and generally have no qualms about voicing their displeasure with a design in progress. In such situations, henna artists report that they do their best to make the necessary adjustments to the design to please the customer, but occasionally customers will also change stands as a last resort. Two days before Karwa Chauth in 2011, I observed a woman criticizing the design in progress on her mother-in-law's hand. At one point she commented that



Figure 73. Full designs by Ganesh Kumar two days before Karwa Chauth. October 13, 2011.



Figure 74. Foot designs by Ganesh Kumar two days before Karwa Chauth. Foot designs are almost always mirror images of each other. October 13, 2011.

the design looked like a five-year-old had applied it. Although this artist scoffed at the insult in the moment, he later admitted to me that the woman was right about the design (Figure 73). He explained that he was very tired after working alone all day; thus, his execution of the design was below par. Despite expressing dissatisfaction with her mother-in-law's design, the woman had henna applied to her feet (Figure 74) by the same artist immediately afterward and then returned the following day to have the artist apply henna to her hands.⁴⁸

Market henna artists learn first by example. Instruction begins when the trainer hands his trainee a brightly colored cone filled with henna. He teaches the artist-in-training the proper method of preparing the cone for application by lightly trimming the tip then firmly squeezing the cone in order to judge the flow of henna. The trainer tells his trainee to carefully watch and mimic how he maneuvers the applicator cone. Just as Ganesh repeatedly reminded me to clean the excess henna paste from the tip of the applicator cone, trainers give their students useful tips throughout each lesson as the need presents itself. All market artists learn by doing. The trainer and trainee carefully watch each other during each lesson. The trainee studies how his trainer stabilizes his wrist by placing it on top of the fingers of his other outstretched, palm-up hand so that he can effortlessly guide each line of henna across the skin. Along with this, the trainee also learns how to control the thickness of the henna lines with pressure applied by the thumb as he glides his stabilized hand back and forth. The trainer watches his trainee carefully and stops him occasionally to refine his developing skills with additional application tips. As the artist-in-training learns new motifs and design categories, he begins developing his own trademark style.

“Mann se banaana” (Create from the Heart)

“Do you think you’ve learned something?” Ajay challenged me during my second lesson. I was taken aback. I had only just begun. He told me that I would now be tested on my design-making skills and instructed me to—without looking—create a *bel* similar to the one that I had been given to practice on my own the day before (Figure 75). He also forbade me from looking at the “three *bel*” variation that he had just finished teaching me. I hesitantly tore a fresh sheet of thick paper from my sketchbook. Ajay watched silently as I began to create a design. Trying desperately to hide my nervousness, I took a deep breath and made a paisley. My heart began to race. After each motif, I panicked momentarily, worried that the next motif would be the last one to come to mind. Ajay had just explained to me that “while applying [motifs] come to mind and the *design* is made.” I hoped that the same would hold true for me then.

“Now what should I do?” I whispered to myself after a couple of minutes. I had not yet completed the design, but I was fresh out of ideas. I looked at the motifs I had already applied and created the same series of framing motifs with different filling motifs. After several minutes, I managed to complete the design. I slid the sketchbook paper with my design over to Ajay and watched his face for a reaction as he analyzed my design (Figure 76).

“What is the matter?” I asked anxiously. “Does it not look good?”

“It looks good,” he said, expressionless. “You just need a bit of finishing in it.” He began pointing out the areas that needed improvement. In one motif the outline needed to be thicker and the filling should have been dense so that it could be seen from far

away, a lot of empty spaces should not have been left, and so on. After adding a few independent motifs and thickening a few outlines, Ajay continued the lesson.⁴⁹

Henna artists learn repertoire along with technique and begin developing their own trademark style concurrently from the first few lessons. This style follows the basic design categories and subcategories, but it can be distinguished from other artists' work with a trained eye. Although artists begin by copying designs made by other artists, they must learn how to spontaneously create designs of their own. The trainer shows his trainee all of the basic motifs in his repertoire. After repeatedly copying designs, motifs and principles of design gradually become committed to the artist's muscle memory. Building a repertoire is only part of an artist's training. The second part of his training is demonstrating his ability to spontaneously create multiple unique designs in each category. In the midst of the busy market, there is no time to copy designs from a photograph. Every henna artist must be able to quickly and cleanly create designs at a moment's notice. Otherwise, women will not go to him for their henna needs and the business will not survive. In the beginning, henna artists practice on sketchbook paper or cardboard scraps. The trainer critiques the trainee's designs, and over time, the trainee becomes able to critique his own designs with respect to the manner of application and arrangement of motifs.

In his study of Yugoslavian oral epic singers, Lord ([1960] 2003) argues that singers internalize a framework and set of themes and lines that enable them to become successful singers. The "whole basis of his art" is the singer's ability to adjust and create phrases during a performance (Lord [1960] 2003, 37). Lord argues that an artist would not be successful without this ability, for:

Were he *merely* to learn the phrases and lines from his predecessors, acquiring thus a stock of them, which he would then shuffle about and mechanically put together in juxtaposition as inviolable, fixed units, he would, I am convinced, never become a singer. He must make his feeling for the patterning of lines, which he has absorbed earlier, specific with actual phrases and lines, and by the necessity of performance learn to adjust what he hears and what he wants to say to these patterns. If he does not learn to do this, no matter how many phrases he may know from his elders, he cannot sing. ([1960] 2003, 37, emphasis in original)

This ability to make appropriate adjustments during the creation process is also at the heart of market henna artistry. Henna artists use the design styles and motif variations that they have internalized to create unique designs that follow traditional principles of design. Motifs and complete design are not *memorized*, but rather "emerge from habitual usage" (Lord [1960] 2003, 36). Henna artists practice forming and arranging motifs and receive feedback from customers and peers in order to develop an understanding of aesthetically pleasing final products. Designs exhibiting the same exact set of motifs and arrangements are boring. An artist must constantly practice, especially in the beginning stages of his training, to develop and maintain a wide range of motif variations. Rajkumari would often advise me during lessons to "keep applying and you will get it."

The learning process does not end with the initial training period. Henna artists continue to refine their skills and add new motifs to their repertoire from their surroundings.⁵⁰ In the market, henna artists spontaneously create at least ten to fifteen designs on a daily basis and over a hundred designs during festival times; therefore, it is crucial to be able to learn and incorporate new motifs and arrangements with

old ones. New motifs can be an interpretation of a peacock from a woman's necklace or a paisley from a *dupatta* (scarf).⁵¹ Sitting on my veranda one day, Ganesh began studying one of my old *dupattas* that I was using as a decorative table cover. The scarf was green with cream-colored paisleys. He drew my attention to one of the paisleys and began explaining how this paisley could be used for a beautiful foot design. He said to first make the paisley in the center of the foot. One could then leave the central motif as a paisley or add a beak at the curl in order to make a peacock. Using an ink pen, Ganesh began drawing the peacock and then embellished the small outline with rectangular flags filled with *jaali*. He finished by saying that this design looks best if it is made to look like a sandal by adding a line of repeating motifs along the outer edge of the foot.

Every successful henna artist can spontaneously create unique designs according to each customer's individual aesthetic taste. Practice makes perfect. Technique is refined with regular practice, repertoire expands with the addition of new motifs taken from the artist's surroundings, and innovative arrangements come easily to mind with the frequent creation of new designs. Although constantly making new unique designs is the work of every henna artist, artists enjoy being able to show off their skills and to learn new and different designs to create. Henna artist Ravi once boasted that any one henna design is just a small sample of what he can do as an artist and that if you compared his entire repertoire to a hand, then one design would represent only a fingertip.

In her study of urban middle-class Indian artists who collaborate with village artists or artists from lower economic statuses in order to inspire their own new artistic creations, Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker argues that the artists of lower economic statuses "recognized that repetitive skillfulness rather than inspired creativity put rice in their bowls" (1999, 29). One such artist in her case studies was a henna artist. The author argues that artists from lower economic statuses are "more cautious in this approach to innovation, whereas urban artists eagerly absorb and appropriate aesthetic forms that they have known principally as popular art" (Milford-Lutzker 1999, 30). Although I agree that differences may exist in the way an artist approaches his or her art based on projected financial gain, I believe that the issue is more complex and warrants a more in-depth study. The author relied solely on the perspectives of the urban middle-class artists for her conclusions. Had she worked with henna artists directly, her conclusions may have been much different.

During the early stages of my fieldwork, market henna artists played down the creative and innovative nature of their craft. In initial interviews, artists in Jaipur brushed off their work, insisting that they only do it for the easy money. Over time, the artists became more comfortable with me and were eager to show me new designs that they had come up with, designs that they had not seen in the market to date. Some even used my hands to practice new design trends. Innovation is at the very root of their art form and is necessary for success. Artists cannot robotically produce identical motif sequences for every customer. Artistic risks combining old and new motif formations and arrangements must be made in order to impress current, onlooking, and potential future customers. They may begin a particular design with a familiar short sequence of motifs; however, a creative state of mind takes over and a unique arrangement of motifs flow from the hand. Creative, innovative designs are the desire of most women who employ market artists. Although every design is not necessarily more creative or innovative than the one before, truly exceptional designs are a source of pride for artists. Ganesh continues to regularly send me images of what he considers his best work for my critique and praise. During my fieldwork, the



Figure 75. Lesson with Rohit Sharma and Ajay: Rohit's step-by-step instruction of groom and bride figures and Ajay's Arabic *bel* design for the author to copy before the next lesson. December 23, 2011.



Figure 76. Lesson with Ajay: the author's first attempt to create an Arabic *bel* "mann se" (from the heart) during the second lesson. December 25, 2010.

artists at Rohit Mehandi Art would have me examine the designs just made on women's hands and judge which artist had created the best design.

Although most artists report that they have chosen this work because it is easy, their work during festival and wedding seasons is anything but. Artists must maintain focus and creative flow amidst chaos from midmorning well into the night. In the days leading up to occasions such as Karwa Chauth, Diwali, and Teej, artists sit and apply henna constantly from approximately 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 a.m. the next morning. Accepting one customer after the other, artists continue to work until the last customer's henna has been applied. Women walk up and down along the market sidewalks, critically judging each artist's speed and skill. When a woman chooses an artist, she reserves her spot in the queue of women hovering around him. Although they have selected him based on his current design in progress, each customer in his queue expects him to create a unique design made especially for her. Women in a wedding party hold the same expectation; each hopes to have the most beautiful, most unique design of the group.

During festival and wedding seasons, tensions are high. The market sidewalks are jam-packed with shoppers and clusters of women waiting for henna. Bride's and groom's homes are filled with close friends and relatives scurrying about and shouting back and forth to each other across the home, frantically trying to make sure that all of the wedding preparations are completed according to schedule. Whether they are interrupted by women asking for design rates in the market or by talkative aunts trying to make conversation at a Ladies' Sangeet, henna artists must do their best to remain focused on the design in progress on the hand in front of them. Henna artists try not to stop in the middle of creating a design. According to Ganesh, when you stop to talk while applying henna the design in your mind is lost and another one takes its place. Henna artist Ajay expressed a similar sentiment, stating that he refrains from talking to his customers while he is applying because the design will end up ruined. In my experiences applying henna for extended periods of time at private bookings and during festival seasons in the public market, I noted that I would disconnect from or tune out the deafening traffic sounds, shuffling, and chattering around me as I seamlessly formed motif after motif. Responding to customer questions and comments required leaving the creative zone and returning to the temporarily suspended social reality.

While at work, henna artists must battle the noisy chaos that surrounds them as well as their own fatigue. They sit hunched over hour after hour, trying their best to maintain enough focus to create a satisfactory design. Demanding and aggressive customers oftentimes add even more pressure to this already stressful work environment. Ganesh related one such instance at a groom's booking. Ganesh had gone with all of his seniors to apply henna for the women of a groom's family.⁵² Around 11:30 p.m., nearly all of the women at the event had completed henna designs drying on their hands, except for the sister of the groom. Three artists had already tried and failed to create a design up to the groom's sister's expectations. As the sister of the groom, her henna was to be traditionally more elaborate than that of the other women on the groom's side. Not liking the first few motifs, she quickly washed the paste off of her hand to prevent staining and moved on to the next artist. Ganesh at this time was outside applying henna in the cold night air. All of the artists, including Ganesh, were exhausted after a long day's work, but their work would not be done until the groom's sister's henna was completed to her satisfaction. Ganesh's seniors approached him outside and assigned him to the task. Ganesh went inside and sat in front of the sister. She looked at him and sternly warned that if she was displeased with his design too

then she would not pay them for any of the work they had done. She demanded the most exceptional design of all, one like no one had ever seen before and one that he had never applied before. Ganesh was nervous that he would not be able to deliver. He thought to himself, “What should I do?” He worried that all of the possible designs in his head had already been applied to the other guests. He took a deep breath and silently prayed to God that such a design would come to mind. Unsure of what design was to come, Ganesh began applying and his hand formed a thin *bel* horizontally across her arm in what would become a unique variation of the *chudi* style with alternating bangles of *bels* and *jaali*-filled bands. All of the guests present and Ganesh’s seniors were taken aback by his design (Figure 77). The groom’s sister was most impressed, so much so that she later hired him to apply her bridal henna.

Such instances show how crucial the training process is. Artists must be able to rely on their skills despite physically and mentally exhausting circumstances. Whatever the circumstances, they must do their work. It is because of their training that they are able to continuously create new and unique designs over long stretches of time. Equipped with a large stock of motif variations and a practiced hand, henna artists execute their skills to create designs tailored to each customer’s individual specifications, whether trendy or traditional. Customers commission henna designs on the spot; therefore, henna artists do not have time to sketch and carefully plan out the arrangement of motifs. They must be prepared to create designs from a wide range of categories and subcategories with only a moment’s notice. By internalizing basic motifs and arrangement patterns while simultaneously developing the ability to produce variations of and incorporate new motifs with those in the existing vocabulary, henna artists secure their position in the market as a convenient outlet for traditional, innovative henna designs.

Part 6: Conclusion

In 1979 Jogendra Saksena called out to his fellow scholars and Indians to preserve the traditional designs of henna artistry. He feared that women were beginning to neglect the art form and that it would eventually cease to exist. Several Indian women of the older generation in both the United States and India have echoed Saksena’s diagnosis of the state of henna artistry. They too explained to me that girls of the younger generation do not know how to apply henna or understand its meaning.

When I began my informal study of henna artistry almost a decade ago, I started out with the desire to learn how to apply henna and understand the meanings of the designs. I began taking lessons from professionals in India and asking everyone I met what henna designs mean and whether they are fashionable or traditional. What I discovered was that henna designs are both fashionable and traditional. They are fashionable in that they are constantly evolving according to market trends; they are traditional in that certain motifs (e.g., paisleys, flowers, leaves, checks) and design principles (e.g., solid fingertips, application on the palms) continue to be used. In fact, I discovered that the tradition of henna artistry lies not in the designs but in the practice of applying henna (or having henna applied) to the skin for the purpose of producing a stain that is culturally valued and situationally appropriate to the special occasions that are central to the lives of many Indian women. The design is not important; the stain is important. Only after the intensity of the stain is judged will the design be considered. Henna is both an element of select rituals and a symbol of celebration. Simply covering the tip of one finger satisfies henna’s ritual necessity—a full or elaborate design is not required or even appropriate in some instances. For



Figure 77. *Chudi* designs for the sister of the groom by Ganesh Kumar. Photo provided by the artist.

example, it would be considered disrespectful to decorate one's hands with eye-catching designs following the death of a family member. For up to one year following a relative's passing, women of the family will observe the henna component of a ritual with simple designs such as a thin *bel* or covered fingertips.

On the one hand, Saksena is correct that changing lifestyles have led to a decline in the number of women and girls practicing or learning the art of henna. Many women, including Varanasi henna artist Anubha Agrawal, have lamented to me that they enjoy applying henna on themselves, but their work and family responsibilities leave them little time to let the paste sit long enough to produce a dark stain. However, the joy of henna application is not shared by all. Artist Ganesh Kumar reports that some of his students—younger girls urged to take henna lessons by their mothers—are more interested in texting their friends than learning how to create henna designs. However, this perceived decline in interest in practicing or learning the art of henna does not necessarily predict the extinction of henna artistry; rather, it creates opportunities for professional artists to cater to a growing customer base. The desire for henna and the obligation to apply it during festivals and religious occasions remain. In the midst of hectic daily responsibilities and special occasion preparations, local women report that they like having the walk-in option of getting henna applied in the market. Market henna artists maintain a standard of quality and convenience for their customers, promising an intricate, cleanly executed design of unique motif variations in under twenty minutes with a dark color guarantee.

Considering the number of women who have henna applied at any one stand by any one artist on a day in the off-season (10–15) and a day in the peak season (100–150), I would argue that the tradition of henna artistry is not in decline. The tradition has adapted to include professional henna artists who work in relatively stable places of business in main market areas. In fact, the presence of these artists has helped keep the henna tradition alive. Moreover, the degree of innovation required in market henna artistry has enriched the tradition with variations of classic motifs, figures of increasing complexity, and arrangement patterns that test the boundaries of existing design categories. These innovative designs create and respond to new trends, maintaining—if not increasing—henna’s popularity in India (and perhaps worldwide).

Henna is a part of celebrations—religious and secular—and creates a positive atmosphere of happiness and community. As midnight approached on the eve of Karwa Chauth in 2011, I sat in Johari Bazaar with artist Ganesh Kumar among a group of ten to fifteen women still waiting to have henna applied. The chaotic shouting, honking, and scurrying in the market a couple of hours prior had finally stilled. Women who just moments before were aggressively securing their positions in the queue were now chatting amicably among themselves. They took turns apologizing to Ganesh and me for keeping us so late, but Ganesh heroically replied that he would stay there until the last woman’s henna design had been completed, even if it took all night.

The training that market henna artists receive prepares them to endure hours of continuously creating designs, each with a unique arrangement of motifs per each customer’s specifications. Without this training, henna artists would not be able to cater to the volume or range of customer demand. Salah Hassan writes that although it is “a communally-oriented art with sets of traditional symbols and designs, henna is largely an improvisational art where originality and individuality are highly appreciated” (1998, 114). In the Jaipur market, we see just that. There are elements of continuity in the designs (solid fingertips, basic motifs, application on the hands, etc.), but there is also innovation. The tradition of henna artistry is not in the designs themselves but in the actual act of applying henna on the skin to produce a stain.

Like Saksena, I also began my study of henna artistry with the understanding that particular designs were traditionally applied for any given occasion. In campaigning to preserve the creative artistry in the *designs* applied by the Rajasthani women he interviewed, Saksena overlooked the artistry in the *process* of creating designs. Furthermore, Saksena’s understanding of tradition assumes henna artistry to be a particular set of motifs, arrangement patterns, and design categories that he observed in his fieldwork during the 1940s–1970s. He therefore understands the tradition of henna artistry to be in danger of extinction. Tradition as it is understood in folklore studies today is not a static entity; it is a continuous process of reinventing the past. Henna is not in danger of extinction, for it is not characterized by a fixed set of motifs, arrangement patterns, and design categories. It is characterized by the creation of a stain on the hand with henna paste. If we understand the tradition of henna artistry by this definition, then we will see that it is not in decline. Whether it is a woman at home applying solid fingertips to please her mother-in-law or a professional artist in the market applying an innovative *bel* with peacocks hidden among flowers for a customer to show off to her husband, henna artistry is and will remain a popular, fashionable tradition able to adapt to ever-changing needs and demands. ▪

Glossary

bajuband—"arm band"; a piece of jewelry or category of henna design across the width of the arm just below the shoulder.

baraat—the procession of the groom, his family, and his friends to the site of the wedding ceremony.

bel—"creeper"; a subcategory of the Arabic category of designs in which motifs extend from the wrist or forearm to one or more of the fingertips.

bindi—"dot"; the smallest unit of design in henna artistry. *Bindi* also refers to the dot worn by Hindu women on the forehead in the space between the eyebrows.

chudi—"bangle"; a subcategory of the Arabic category of designs in which *bels* and/or bands are applied horizontally across the arm to give the appearance of bangle bracelets.

haath phool—"hand flower"; a category of henna design that mimics the piece of jewelry by the same name, which consists of a thin bracelet around the wrist, a large shaped piece of precious metal (often inlaid with precious stones), rings, and thin chains connecting the three.

jaali—lattice work or grid pattern used as a filling motif in Indian henna artistry. *Jaali* is also commonly found in Mughal architecture and chikan embroidery.

kalash—an earthen pot used in many Hindi rituals, including the marriage ceremony.

lengha—a woman's garment (often heavily embroidered and worn during the marriage ceremony) consisting of a long skirt, a blouse piece, and a scarf that is draped over the head.

mehandi ka tel—"henna oil"; an oil used to prepare the skin for henna application. This oil is not derived from the henna plant. Brands of this oil available in India do not label its ingredients, but smell suggests that it is or contains eucalyptus oil.

paan leaf—betel leaf; a framing motif mimicking the heart-shaped leaf of the betel vine.

swastik—an auspicious symbol dating back to Ancient India that consists of an equilateral cross with each of the four arms bent at right angles and slightly curved tips. A bold, straight-tipped form of this symbol was adopted in the early 1900s by the Nazi Party in Germany and has since led to negative associations outside of South Asia that overshadow the symbol's historic auspiciousness.

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Notes

1. *Bhaiya* (older brother) is an address used by customers in the marketplace that simultaneously communicates respect for and an informal relationship with male shopkeepers.
2. Other such cities include Delhi and Mumbai.
3. I began as a self-taught artist in the US, using online video demonstrations and design galleries for inspiration. In 2005 I took a fifteen-day course at Shakti Beauty Parlor in Varanasi, India, with Anubha Agrawal and Lata Joshi. I was then hired for bookings through the parlor and local word of mouth. From December 2010 to January 2011, I received training from seven henna artists at three stands in Jaipur. When I returned to Jaipur in August 2011, I continued to receive tips and training from these artists and worked alongside them at their stands in the market and at private bookings.
4. This definition is articulated to students in Shukla's introductory courses at Indiana University, Bloomington. For an expanded definition of body art, see Shukla 2008, 389–391.
5. Catherine Cartwright-Jones used postcards, photographs, paintings, and manuscripts in her analyses of North African (2006) and Persian (2009b) henna designs from 1900 to 1930 and the late fifteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, respectively.
6. For more information regarding henna's medicinal properties, see Al-Rubiay et al. 2008, Endrini et al. 2002, and Khokhar and Gulati 2000.
7. In Jaipur, for example, I have observed henna “socks” on white horses ridden by groomsmen in their *baraat* (wedding procession). I have also observed henna “tags” on sheep and goats, presumably to indicate ownership. In Jaipur, there is a goat *mela* (fair) where goats are bought and sold in the days prior to the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha—known locally as *Baqra* (goat) Eid. In the Jaipur goat *mela* of November 2011, some goats were marked with splotches of henna, while others were marked with the name of God (Allah) or the number “786” (a numeric representation of *bis-millah* used by South Asian Muslims) in henna. Some stalls in the *mela* had banners advertising that their goats were marked with the name of God. For more information on henna's cosmetic use around the world, see Goodman 2005, Micaud 1970, Rose 1917, and Werbner 1986.
8. In addition to the sources cited, see Cohen 1987, Gode 1948, and Miczak 2001 for more information regarding the history of henna.
9. For more information on henna's cosmetic use around the world, see Goodman 2005, Micaud 1970, Rose 1917, and Werbner 1986.
10. Pomegranate shells and nutshells are reportedly used in Yemen (Sharaby 2006).
11. An untitled painting shows a finely dressed Indian woman having henna applied by another woman using the end of a peacock feather (Pande 2011, 158).
12. This advertisement plays in both Hindi and English, depending on the language

spoken in the channel's programming. It was first observed in winter of 2011–2012. 13. If one pays close attention, however, one will notice that a hand model was used, for Katrina's hands are bare in the rest of the advertisement.

14. Such titles include *Hindi: A Complete Course for Beginners* (Living Language 2007); *Dangerous Designs: Asian Women Fashion the Diaspora Economies* (Parminder Bhachu 2003); *IndiaColor: Spirit, Tradition, and Style* (Mitchell Crites 2008); *Gender, Sex, and the City: Urdu Rekhti Poetry in India, 1780–1870* (Ruth Vanita 2012); *Sex & Samosas* (Jasmine Aziz 2011); *The Dowry Bride* (Shobhan Bantwal 2007); *For Matrimonial Purposes* (Kavita Daswani 2004); *The Forbidden Daughter* (Shobhan Bantwal 2008); and *The Home and the World* (Rabindranath Tagore 2005).

15. These dolls are available at US retailers and online at <http://www.hearts4hearts-girls.com> (accessed September 9, 2012).

16. Patangay has a website for her cake business, Crème Delicious (<http://creme-delicious.com>), and her henna business (<http://www.hennastudio.com>). An October 19, 2011, entry on the *Kathy Romero: Weddings and Events* blog includes images of Crème Delicious mini-cakes featured in Martha Stewart Weddings' 2011 Bridal Market Party in New York City. More information about and images of Crème Delicious confections can be found in a February 8, 2011 entry on the KikiEats blog titled "Exotic Valentine."

17. More information about Kattaura and her business, Keyuri's, was published in an October 31, 2007 *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Jim Merithew titled "Hot Stuff: Playing with Fire—Or, Rather, Henna Candles." Keyuri's website has the following URL: <http://www.keyuris.com/henna-candles.html> (accessed July 8, 2012).

18. A Rajasthani woman living in Bikaner fondly remembered she and her sister pestering their mother for henna when they were children. Their mother would place the henna paste in their palms and bind their fists closed while they slept. In the morning, after unbinding their hands and scraping off the dried paste, they were excited to see the pattern that was created.

19. Some argue that the red color on women's hands in these paintings is a dye made from lac, known locally as *aalta* or *mahaavar*. *Aalta* has been applied cosmetically to women's hands and feet since at least 642 BC (Chandra 1973). It is more popular in eastern India and is also applied by classical dancers for performances. I have read sources and talked to local people who argue both sides. For example, Basham reports that the fingertips, toes, palms, and soles of the feet were dyed red with lac in Ancient India. He does not mention henna but does claim that "exposed parts of the body were often painted with complicated patterns" (Basham 1959, 213). He does not believe the patterns to be tattoos, stating that there is no clear evidence of tattooing. Depending on their complexity, the patterns he references could be henna, for the liquid nature of *aalta* as it is used in modern times is difficult to manipulate into shapes. 20. Bhandari's study of adornment in Rajasthan includes a photograph of a woman in Jodhpur that shows the back of her hands stained with henna. There is a thick *bindi* (dot) in the center and two parallel lines across the right hand just below the knuckles (Bhandari 2005, 152, photo 270).

21. I have observed countless women, especially during festival times, with a similar pattern on their hands. The women I have asked about this design respond that the tips of the fingers at least must be covered with henna for special religious rituals and the line across the back of the hand is applied for the long life of the woman's brother.

22. This particular setup routine was observed on December 29, 2010, at Anil Mehandi Art located outside of the Metropolitan (MGF) Mall in Jaipur (Figure 6).

23. I use the term *stand* to refer to the place of business in the market instead of the literal translation of the word used by henna artists, *dukaan* (store). *Stand* connotes

the temporary nature of the physical place of business, whereas the general Hindi term does not.

24. In the short documentary *Mehndi: An Ancient Indian Body Art* (2002) of the series *Asian Masters: Cultural Traditions, Esoteric Arts*, henna is identified as a changing tradition that is “now a commodity sold on the street.”

25. During my most recent visits in 2012, I have noticed that henna stands are no longer set up outside of this mall.

26. Artist Ganesh of Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art now makes a habit of introducing himself as Sitaram Ji in order to reduce confusion with a nearby shop by the name of Ganesh Mehendi Art. He remembered a customer asking his name so that she could return to have henna done by him after she finished her shopping. Unfortunately, the woman made the mistake of going to Ganesh Mehendi Art, assuming that it was his shop.

27. When I would visit henna stands during my fieldwork, the henna artists would not sit with me at the stand unless I was having henna applied. For example, Ganesh from Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art would seat me inside the neighboring shop while the other artist would assist customers. Ganesh explained that sitting inside the shop not only prevented interruption from curious passersby but also prevented people from drawing false conclusions about our relationship.

28. A few artists even have a small pair of folding scissors on a key chain kept on their person.

29. Many artists also wipe excess henna paste on the hair at the back of their heads, as nearly all artists have black hair and use henna on their hair.

30. During critiques of my designs, market henna artists would correctly point out lines where I had not lifted the cone while applying.

31. Moroccan market henna artists also develop a prominent stain on their hands, but the stain develops on the hand that holds the applicator syringe. Patricia Kelly Spurles (2004) reports that some artists are proud of their stains while others are not. One artist reportedly washed her hands in a weak solution of bleach and water to prevent staining.

32. At the time of writing, Sitaram Ji Mehendi Art's Facebook page could be found at the following URL: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sitaram-Ji-Mehandi-Art/290900904267566>

33. One henna artist admitted to raising the price for nonlocal—especially foreign—customers. He also admitted to being less likely to give a discount to women wearing expensive shoes, his rationale being that only women who can easily afford such footwear would risk wearing them while walking through the market.

34. INR is the abbreviation for Indian rupees.

35. Some henna businesses occasionally shift locations.

36. Henna artists in Jaipur reported using “black henna” cones purchased in the market. These cones may contain an ingredient—para-phenylenediamine (PPD)—used in black hair dye. For more information regarding the effects of applying black henna containing PPD to the skin, see Aydin et al. 2011, Gunasti and Aksungur 2010, Lăuchl and Lautenschlager 2001, and Thami, Kaur, and Kanwar 2001.

37. In some communities, such as Marwari communities, grooms will also have henna applied, from just a large solid circle in the center of the palm to elaborate full designs—just as intricate as the bride's henna—that extend up the arm past the elbow.

38. Yael Guilat (2006) found that Yeminite Jewish women employ the same motifs in their embroidery that are used in bridal henna designs.

39. In July 2011, Ganesh applied checks on my fingertips, saying that it was a new henna fashion trend requested by his customers (Figure 15).

40. The stem of the flower is not included in contemporary henna designs.

41. When shown photos of his designs, artists at other stands were critical, saying that there were too many flowers.
42. An Indian website (<http://hennamehandi.in>) offers video tutorials on how to draw henna designs. In these tutorials, an artist creates designs with a pen rather than henna paste. The website also sponsors an online design contest in which participants are instructed to use a micro-tip pen or gel ink pen in order to create a legible drawing.
43. Bhandari's study of Rajasthani adornment includes a photograph, dated c. 1950, of a young married Jodhpur woman heavily adorned "in full regalia" (2005, 122, photo 199). The back of her right hand shows a henna design under her *haath phool* ornament. There appears to be a central motif around which smaller motifs are scattered haphazardly. The fingertips are solid, and the thumb appears to be adorned with a straight vine motif down the center.
44. Other than the fish motif, I have observed none of these motifs being applied in Jaipur.
45. Excerpt from a lesson on January 4, 2011.
46. Excerpt from a lesson on December 31, 2010.
47. There are a few henna designs in which repeating motifs are desirable, such as the flower design and black henna.
48. The woman could not have henna applied to her hands the day before because she was carrying her infant child.
49. Excerpt from a lesson on December 25, 2010.
50. In her study of *phulkari* embroidered textiles, Devayani Mitra Dutta discusses the social and ecological factors that contribute to regional variations in embroidered motifs. She proposes that "since the artist is a social being and happens to be the product of a given space and time, it is quite likely therefore that the cultural expressions of this region would manifest in all works of art and craft in this region" (1985, 9). This phenomenon is apparent in henna artistry too.
51. A *dupatta* is a long, rectangular scarf draped across the chest and back over the shoulders or around the head. It is worn as part of the *salwar kameez* (tunic top and trousers).
52. The term *senior* is used in reference to those who have been doing a particular work or academic program longer than one has been doing it. This term is commonly used in northern India in both educational and occupational contexts.

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Appendix: List of Surveyed Design Booklets

The following design booklets were purchased in Jaipur between December 2010 and April 2012 (with the exception of those marked with an asterisk [*], which were purchased in Varanasi between August 2005 and May 2006) and surveyed in order to discern the motifs and categories of designs marketed to women applying henna at home. Publication dates are not printed in any of the booklets. I have arranged these booklets alphabetically by publisher and then alphabetically by title. The name of the author (henna artist) is indicated where provided. The prices of the booklets appear in Indian rupees (INR). The approximate rate of exchange at the time of purchase was INR 50 = USD 1.

Aanand Prakashan: Delhi

Kajol Mehandi, Rajool Jain, INR 12

Kirti Mehandi, Rajool Jain, INR 12

Madhuri Mehandi, Rajool Jain, INR 12

Navanveli Mehandi, Rajool Jain, INR 12

Rachnatmak Mehandi, Meera Mittal, INR 12

Rajasthani Mehandi, Rajool Jain, INR 12

Ajay Pocket Books: Delhi

Jyoti Arabic Mehandi, INR 25

Lakshmi Prakashan: Delhi

Dilbahaar Arabic Mehandi, Amna, INR 10

Kareena Mehandi, Asha Agrawal, INR 10

Khubsurat Arabic Mehandi, Amna, INR 10

Lajawab Arabic Mehandi, Amna, INR 10

Marwari Mehandi, Amna, INR 10

Priyanka Mehandi, Asha Agrawal, INR 10

Rangeeli Mehandi, Asha Agrawal, INR 10

Shilpa Mehandi, Asha Agrawal, INR 10

Suhag Mehandi, Amna, INR 10

Urmila Mehandi, Asha Agrawal, INR 10

Manoj Pocket Books: Delhi

Dulhan Mehandi, Seema Gupta, INR 15

Khubsurat Mehandi, Seema Gupta, INR 15

Rajasthani Mehandi, Ruby Gupta, INR 15

Sajilee Mehandi, Seema and Ruby Gupta, INR 10

Sajni Mehandi, Ruby Gupta, INR 15

Mohan Prakashan: Delhi

Dulhan Mehandi, INR 20

Nazakat Arabic Mehandi, INR 20

Piya Mehandi, INR 20

Rajasthani Rachni Mehandi, INR 20

Navneet Publications: Mumbai

**Aashiqui Arabic Heena Designs with Designs of Tattoos & Bindees*, Heena Mistry, INR 40

Andaz Mehandi Ka: Instant Jewellery Designs, Chiral Patel, INR 40

Charming Arabic Heena Designs, Yasmin Shaikh, INR 85

**Choice of Bridal Mehandi Designs with Designs of Tattoos and Bindees*, Kokila Parikh, INR 55

Golden Mehandi Creations: Special Bridal Mehandi, Kundan Patel, INR 50

Kohinoor Arabic Heena Designs, Arifa Mansuri, INR 40

Manmohak Mehandi Designs, Kala Devi, INR 23

Mehandi Haathon Ka Sringar: Ultramodern Mehandi Designs, Pushplata Bangur, INR 70

Nova Arabic Heena Designs, Yasmin Shaikh, INR 70

Priyanshi Indo-Arabie Mehandi Designs, Kundan Patel, INR 50

Saniya Arabic Heena Designs, Yasmin Shaikh, INR 80

New Standard Publications: Delhi

Film Staron ki Mehandi, INR 5

Simran Publications: Jalandhar

Niveta's Mehandi Designs: Book 10, Tripti, Nirmal, and Niharika, INR 60

Niveta's Mehandi Designs: Book 11, Tripti, Nirmal, and Niharika, INR 60

Niveta's Mehandi Designs: Book 12, Tripti, Nirmal, and Niharika, INR 60

Niveta's Mehandi Designs: Book 13, Tripti, Nirmal, and Niharika, INR 60

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