

# The Place of *Lalle* (Henna) in the Hausa Sociocultural and Tradimedical Practices

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## Abstract

This paper explored the sociocultural, tradimedical, and religious relevance of henna in the Hausa land. The scope is limited to the old Sokoto province, now comprising three states. The research employed a survey method to obtain data from two strata sampled populations through one-to-one interviews. The research has found henna to be a shrub of enormous value and great relevance in the Hausa culture. That includes its relevance and values in different domains of life, including health, religion, as well as socio-economic dealings. However, despite the numerous uses of the henna plant in Hausa culture, it is observed that henna plant cultivation has greatly reduced. Its usage is almost substituted with modern artificial products. It is gradually getting extinct as its cultivation has greatly reduced in most areas of the region (Sokoto province). The paper finally suggested among others that the government and other relevant parastatals should see to the reviving and modernizing the traditional practices, including by supporting the local farmers, conducting clinical research on the product, as well as technologically processing it.

**Keywords:** lalle (Henna), Tradimedical Practices, Aesthetics, Hausa Culture, Hausa People, Hausa Festivals.

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## 1.0 BACKGROUND

The henna plant is believed to have originated from Egypt, Southwest Asia, and North Africa. Being a tropical plant, it is grown in most areas of Hausa land. Due to its resistance to a humid climate, it is grown even in the arid zones of the Hausa land. Its leaves are dried and powdered for aesthetic purposes by both Hausa women and maids during marital and other traditional ceremonies as well as for adornment of the body. Among other practices for health benefits, the roots are boiled and filtered. The active constituent is taken orally as medication for the treatment of certain ailments affecting the body. On the other hand, the plant is useful to the farmers for demarcating the boundaries of farmlands.

However, with the incursion and infiltration of alien cultures into the Hausa culture, coupled with the introduction of modern processed henna presented in tubes and its wider acceptance amongst the urban and semi-urban dwellers, less for a few areas, the henna plant is now endangered, gradually facing near extinction in most Hausa farmlands. That is despite its donkey years' vital religious, medical, and other sociocultural roles. It is against this backdrop that this paper wishes to explore the several traditional uses of

henna among a section of the Hausa people of northern Nigeria.

### 1.1 Conceptualization

Henna with the botanical name *lawsonia inermis* is generally known as *lalle* in the Hausa language. It is a tropical economic plant that does not grow tall like trees. It's rather a shrub plant that has multiple stems and a shorter height of about 2 – 6 meters [<sup>1</sup>] tall when allowed to grow. It is grown in most parts of Hausa land due to its economic and cultural worth. It is difficult to ascertain the exact period the plant was introduced into the land from its place of origin which is believed to be North Africa, precisely Egypt.

The fact that there existed contacts and religious ties between Egypt and Hausa land as far back as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it will not be out of place to say that the *lalle* plant might have found its way into the land through this contact. A version of the historical origin

<sup>1</sup> See this online material: "Henna Farming; Growing; Planting; Care; harvesting Guide. Retrieved on April 7, 2022 from: <https://www.agrifarming.in/henna-farming-information>.

of the people asserts that the Hausa people originated from Egypt [2]. If this view holds strong water, one can then safely suggest that Hausa people came to their present location along with the *lalle* plant and of course were well acquainted with its various uses, both as a medicinal and a natural dye plant for the adornment and beautification of the body.

The henna plant has a place in different domains of the lives of the Hausa people. These could be summarized to include:

- i. Economic benefits
- ii. Sociocultural benefits
- iii. Religious values
- iv. Health values

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY

The scope of this research is limited to the old Sokoto province which comprises the present Sokoto, Kebbi, and Zamfara States. To come up with tangible insight into the topic, the methodology used in the study was the survey method. Female respondents were obtained through stratified random sampling. The respondents were divided into two strata: women of sixty years and beyond as well as young maids and spinsters. The women of sixty years and beyond that formed the first strata, were engaged for getting insight into the use of *lalle* in the olden days before the introduction of the modern factory-processed henna. The other set of female respondents, the young maids and spinsters, that formed the second strata were interviewed for sourcing information on the dwindling traditional use of henna amongst the younger generations. Traditional medicine practitioners were also sampled to obtain insight into the usage of henna for curative medicine in Hausa traditional health care delivery. Information obtained from these groups is synthesized and analyzed through discussion.

### 2.0 Henna Cultivation in Sokoto Province

To plant *lalle*, the seeds are sown into the soil and watered for easy germination. In the alternative, its stem may be cut and propagated by transplanting in a moist field. The Sokoto province lies in the humid region of North-West Nigeria. The temperature and rainfall distribution within the area favor the cultivation of henna in commercial quantity in many Local Government Areas. In Sokoto State, for instance, henna is grown and produced in Gandi of Raḅah Local Government Area. In Gandi, henna is largely cultivated along the river Sokoto valley that traverses the area [3].

<sup>2</sup> For details on this view, see Adamu, (2011).

<sup>3</sup> A traveler passing through the road from Lambar Bakura in Zamfara state leading to Gandi and Raḅa in Sokoto State will certainly witness the cultivation of henna in this area as what will be glaring is either the sight of the henna plants in the farmlands or the sun drying of the harvested henna stems placed along both

To date, Gandi remains the largest producer of *lalle* in the entire province [4]. This is so because it is in Gandi that an individual farmer can cultivate over three hundred sacks of henna [5]. Henna is also cultivated in Dundaye area of Wamakko Local Government of the State. Other areas of cultivation include Milgoma in Bodinga Local Government, Bulaga in Yabo Local Government, and Barkini in Jabo district of Tambuwal Local Government. It is also produced in Kware, North of Sokoto along the road leading to Illela, an international border town with the Niger Republic.

The henna plant is also cultivated in Kebbi State in several places at subsistence levels. For instance, in Gwandu town of Gwandu Local Government Area, it is grown around the oasis where onion is also grown. In Augi Local Government of Kebbi State, henna is produced in commercial quantity around Awade, Tiggi, and Bangara in Argungu Emirate. Kashin-zama of Alieru Local Government is another community that grows henna though in subsistent quantity.

However, Zamfara State is widely known for food crop production most especially sorghum. This notwithstanding, henna is cultivated. For instance, Nahuce and Karakai of Bungudu Local Government produced the plant in subsistent quantity. There is also little participation of farmers in the cultivation of henna in Gummi and its environs though this has greatly reduced over time. This is due to the diversion of the community to the cultivation of pepper. The farmers felt that pepper cultivation is a more lucrative venture.

There are two ways by which the henna plant is cultivated in the areas. The first is planting the shrub across the whole area of farmlands. This does not in any way affect the cultivation of food crops like millet and sorghum in the same field (mixed cropping). The second way is the planting of henna shrubs along the edges of the farms to demarcate the boundaries between separate farmlands while yielding leaves for harvesting

sides of the road shoulders. Also, the presence of crowds of girls who engage in processing the dried henna by the roadside testifies to this fact.

<sup>4</sup> According to Muhammadu Sani Gandi, a respondent interviewed at Talata Mafara on Tuesday, 05/04/2022, *lalle* is harvested thrice a year at Gandi. The first harvest at the end of the rainy season is called *samagi*. The henna leaves at this time are larger and wider compared to those of the later harvests. The second harvest is called *baranda* It is done during the harmattan season. The last harvest is called *bunti* because the leaves this time are smaller, hence requiring large quantities to fill up a sack. The *bunti* he said is more expensive in the market because of its quantity and quality.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Muhammadu Sani Gandi same time as above.

at the same time. With the emergence and utilization of water pumping machines for irrigation purposes, some areas where henna is cultivated now make use of water pumping machines to irrigate henna fields during the dry season to enhance yield and bumper harvest even in the dry season when there is no rain for months [6].

### 2.1 Traditional Harvest and Processing of Henna

Traditionally, henna is harvested by cutting the stems of the crop using sickles. The cut stems are then sun-dried for two to four days or up to a week depending on the season. In the rainy season, drying takes close to one week due to atmospheric moisture. During the harmattan, however, drying takes fewer days due to the dry winds blowing throughout the day. Likewise, in the hot season around April, May, and June, drying takes less number of days. When the crop is dried, the leaves are separated from the stems by threshing with sticks. The labor is majorly undertaken by young unmarried girls and old women who are engaged by the farmers for a fee or a share of the produce, depending on the agreement reached. The dried stems of the plant are threshed and packed aside. They are used as fuel for cooking.

The leaves are packaged in grain sacks and ready for short time storage or to be taken to the market for sale. If the Product is stored for a relatively long period, the texture is affected. The greenish leaves turn brownish in color and the value price of such a product drops [7].

### 3.0 The Traditional uses of Henna for Aesthetics amongst Hausa People

To process the henna for traditional use, the leaves are crushed and ground into fine powder through the use of a local pestle and mortar. The ground leaves are continuously sieved until a fine powder is obtained. If the powder is to be applied to the body for beautification, it is mixed with water to form a paste. The paste is rubbed and applied on the hands and legs to smoothen and brighten them, thereby looking attractive.

The dried leaves are sometimes soaked in water overnight and perfume is added to them. The fermentation of leaves makes water turns reddish and it is used for bath. This is done to achieve clear, bright, tender as well as smooth skin when used for some days.

The significance of the henna plant cannot be over-emphasized both in the mundane and religious life of the Hausa people. Henna is used extensively in the first two of the three important rites of passage in

human existence. These are marriages and births, the third of which is death. Pre-marital intimacy between a man and a woman is vehemently abhorred in the Hausa culture even before the advent and acceptance of Islam as a religion and way of life among the Hausa people. Marriage, therefore, is held in high esteem by the Hausas. Its occurrence is heralded with pomp and pageantry.

The use of henna during marriage and naming ceremonies among the Hausas is imperative as the culture dictates. During marriage festivities both the groom and the bride make use of henna either for beautification of the body or for easy notification of the public on achieving the height of getting married which is no mean feat in Hausa culture. In this section, the paper intends to delve into the two aspects separately because of their significance.

### 3.1 The Place of Henna in the Hausa Marital Traditions

Hausa scholars have attempted to define marriage from the perspective of Hausa culture. Ibrahim, (1982: 162) posits that marriage is “an agreement reached between a man and a woman to live together with the consent of their guardians and witnesses.” Alhassan *et al.*, (1988: 8) state that, “Marriage is a lawful and consensual living together of a man and a woman.” It is done to provide legitimacy, parental care, and proper upbringing of offspring. From the above conceptions, it will be safe to define marriage from Hausa cultural perspective, to mean a mutual agreement or a contract of understanding reached between a male and a female, witnessed by two or more people under defined principles, to live legitimately as husband and wife for companionship, conjugal relationship, and for procreation while guided by some religious and cultural regulations.

Traditionally, Hausa marriage is characterized by a series of cultural events. One such important event on the side of the bride is the ‘*sa lalle*’, which literally means ‘putting the henna.’ Proximate to the time of *sa lalle*, the groom or his family will send *kayan sa lalle*, mostly a gift of some items like soaps, pomade, detergent, shoes and some quantity of dried henna leaves to the family of the bride. In most Hausa communities, it involves secluding the bride for a week or two in the house of one of her maternal aunts. On arrival at the house, mostly in the evenings, an elderly woman called *arwanka* [8] will sprinkle henna-soaked water on the head of the bride to mark the beginning of the seclusion and indeed all other marriage activities that follow [9].

<sup>6</sup> The information was obtained from Malam Zubairu Awade of Awade village of Augi Local Government in Argungu Emirate, Kebbi State. He was interviewed on Sunday, 10/04/2022 in Argungu.

<sup>7</sup> See Muhammad, (2018).

<sup>8</sup> The role of the elderly woman called *arwanka* in the entire period of bride seclusion is to supervise the whole process to ensure its effectiveness.

<sup>9</sup> This information was obtained from a female respondent, Maimuna Garba of Kanwuri area, Gummi

Within this period, the bride is well fed with a proper diet and she is made to undergo daily evening baths with water in which henna leaves and *jema* (scent grass) roots were soaked overnight. Before taking the bath, her female friends (girls) visit her twice per day, in the morning and evening for  *cudanya* (scrubbing). This activity involves girls scrubbing henna paste all over the body of the bride. After some moments, she cleans the henna paste off her body by taking bath with the henna-soaked water. This is repeated daily for onwards of a week or more, depending on the regal status of the bride's parents. The purpose of this is to beautify the bride's entire body by making her light in complexion, as well as have tender, elegant, and soft skin, free of rashes. In addition to these, she also smells of a nice fragrance and the body becomes free of any bad odor [10].

This practice has now changed over time. The brides presently make use of body creams and soaps to achieve the same purpose. It is however pertinent to note that most Hausa old women folk believe that the use of chemical and artificial soaps and creams is hazardous. The use of natural substances like henna is more natural, cost-effective, and free of health hazards.

The groom is not left out in this cultural practice, though slight differences suffice. The groom is expected to be taking bath with a similar concoction of water in which the henna leaves and the roots of *jema* (scent grass) are soaked overnight. Scrubbing henna paste on the entire body is only restricted to the bride as her body is considered more delicate and therefore requires proper treatment and care.

Another marriage activity that has a direct bearing on henna as per as traditional Hausa marriage is concerned is the *kunshi* (dying). This involves the application of henna on the feet and hands to dye these areas, in order to look more beautiful. In doing this, the henna paste is applied to the desired parts and is wrapped with a piece of cloth. It is then allowed to remain for some hours. Sometimes, it is done overnight so that the desired result is achieved. As for the hands, when the henna paste is applied, the hand is tucked into a local oblong, conical-shaped gourd called *zunguru* which serves as the receptacle.

As for the groom, he is traditionally expected to apply henna paste on either both or one of the hands as an indication that he is newly wedded. *Kunshi* also

in an interview on Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2022 at her residence. She is aged 72.

<sup>10</sup> Hajiya Kakale Galadima of Kofar Tawai area, Gummi, in an interview in her residence on 12/04/2022 explained that during their time, all brides undergo the process before being taken to the house of the groom which is the climax of the actual wedding. She is aged 82.

includes braiding the bride's hair into styles of different patterns to look attractive and elegant. *Kunshi* is not only peculiar to a wedding alone. Hausa women whether married or maids, generally engage in henna application to decorate the feet and hands, including braiding the hair from time to time.

Traditionally, it is considered fashionable, good, and a healthy habit. However, during marriages, out of the days intended for the pre-wedding activities, a day is set aside for this. It is called *Kunshi day*. The practice had stood the test of time. To date, it is still in practice all over the Sokoto provincial area and beyond.

Among the dwellers of the cities and urban areas, the practice of *kunshi* recently involves the use of artificial or foreign factory-manufactured substances presented in tubes. They draw or tattoo flowers and several other artistic designs and patterns on both the legs and hands including the palms. This practice came about as a result of the infiltration of Arab and Indian culture relating to the henna application. It is copied from watching Asian films, most especially Indian ones. There is a reasonable number of different brands of the product on sale. An example of a brand obtainable in the market includes 'Rani', a henna cone, a product that is made in Pakistan.

### 3.2 Henna and the Hausa Traditional Naming Ceremonies

The Hausa culture attaches a greater premium to birth, as it is a thing of great joy and jubilation to both the families of the husband and wife blessed with a child irrespective of the gender of the baby. In Hausa culture, children are regarded as a blessing from God. No matter the number of children the couple produces, they always happily welcome the arrival of a new baby in the family.

Naming in Hausa culture is the christening or selection of a name for the child and its proclamation before a gathering of a crowd of people consisting of the relations of the parents, their neighbors, as well as well-wishers who converge at the parent's residence in the morning of the seventh day of the birth. During the occasion, a ram is slaughtered and prayer is offered by an Islamic cleric. The baby is also given a clean shave by the family's local barber. During the occasion, the celebrants served their guests kola nuts and different delicacies including nonalcoholic drinks. The local praise singers are not left out. They entertain people with their musical instruments and songs to make the event more colorful.

However, before the seventh day, when the christening or naming of the child comes up, the mother is expected to adorn herself and the child with henna so that they appear neat and elegant. The mother is to apply henna paste on both legs and hands. Nowadays, artistic patterns of beautiful flowers are designed on the

desired parts. Likewise, the baby is adorned with henna on both the hands and feet. Mostly the baby is not decorated with henna designs; only the skin is dyed with henna so that its fingernails look reddish.

### 3.3 The Place of Henna in Hausa Festivities

Before the advent of Islam and its wider acceptance among the Hausa people, there were several traditional festivals that were celebrated in the Hausa land. For instance, there was the *kalankuwa*, a festival celebrated to mark a bumper harvest at the end of the farming season. There was also the *budɪn daji* which was a festival celebrated by the hunters and members of the *bori*-cult. During the occasion, a forecast is made on both the good things and the calamities that may befall the people within the year. It is ascertained whether there will be a bumper harvest or famine.

There was also *gyaran ruwa* festival which involves some water rituals held by the chief priest of the *bori*-cult and the *Sarkawa* (fishermen). The event involves sacrifices to avert destructive seasonal floods and to seek harmony between the water spirits and the populace so that the former would cause no harm to the latter [11].

However, with the advent of Islam into Hausa land and its acceptance as a religion coupled with its subsequent revival by the jihad movement of the revered Shehu Usmanu Danfodio, almost all the paganism festivities were gradually eroded, and this paved way for the observance and celebration of Islamic festivals of the *eidul fitr* and *eidl adha*, known in Hausa as *karamar salla* and *babbar salla* respectively. The former is observed to mark the completion of fasting of the month of Ramadan, the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the Hijri calendar. The latter is celebrated on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of *Zulhijjah*, the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the Muslim calendar [12]. There is also the *takutuha*, known in Daura and its environs as *sallar gani*. It marks the birthday celebration of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (S.A.W.), which falls on the 12<sup>th</sup> Rabi'ul Awwal.

In observance and celebration of each of these festivals, Hausa culture requires women both old and young to use henna to beautify themselves to look fashionable for the occasions. In the past, even young boys are adorned with henna but on their hands only. However, it is now not commonplace to sight a boy whose hands are dyed with henna during these festivals. This is due to an increase in awareness regarding

Islamic injunctions which forbids males from resembling females in both outlook and appearance.

### 3.4 Use of Henna for Religious Purpose

Spirit Possession, known as *bori*, ancestral and idol worship (*maguzanci*), were the predominant traditional religions of the Hausa people before the coming of Islam into the Hausa land around the 14<sup>th</sup> century [13]. *Bori*-cults involve the possession of spirits for ritual purposes. The adherent becomes possessed by a spirit. The spirit so possessed is revered and held in high esteem. In addition, sacrifices were offered to it in return for receiving healing and supernatural powers.

In Hausa *bori*-cult traditional practices, the spirit is regarded spiritually as the 'husband' whilst the *doki* (horse), one possessed by the spirit, is regarded as the wife spiritually [14]. By this belief, a male adherent becomes the wife because he receives favors from the spirit. Being the wife of the spirit, the male adherent has to appear feminine by way of tying a wrapper around the loin and applying henna on both hands, which is exclusively the practice of most non-adherent Hausa females. Due to this religious belief, most Hausa male adherents of *bori*-cults imbibe the habit of applying the henna paste on the hands most of the time, to darken the hands and dye the nails to look reddish, due to the traditional religious doctrine.

Islam as a religion has therefore been in practice in Hausa land for centuries. However, over time, its practice has degenerated resulting in the prevalence of syncretism among Hausa adherents. This led to its revival by the reform movement of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Even after the establishment of a caliphate in Sokoto, there remained scores of followers of the *bori*-cult in Hausa land most especially in the rural or remote areas [15].

<sup>13</sup> Historians have divergent views regarding the time of the advent of Islam into Hausa land. Some believed the time to be the 14<sup>th</sup> century. However, some scholars are of the opinion that King Bagauda of Kano is the first Hausa Muslim king who reigned in the later part of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. For more literature on the advent of Islam into the Hausa land, see: Gobir & Sani, (2019).

<sup>14</sup> This information on the doctrinal creed of the male cult members was obtained from Prof. Yakubu Aliyu Gobir of the Department of Nigerian Languages, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto who is an expert in the area of Islamic exorcism. He has researched extensively in the area of spirit possession and exorcism both in Hausa culture and the Islamic perspective.

<sup>15</sup> Presently, the practitioners of *bori*-cult have significantly reduced in number due to the onerous efforts of Islamic missionaries and the efforts of great number of Islamic clerics and organizations. Notable amongst which are the Dariqa and the Izala movements.

<sup>11</sup> For more details on this, see Harris, (1942)

<sup>12</sup> It is celebrated in commemoration of the attempt made by Prophet Abraham to make a sacrifice as commanded by God. Animals ranging from camels, cows, sheep and goats are slaughtered and the meat shared to the poor and the needy people in the society.

Islam has also enjoined female adherents to always differ in appearance from the male folk. In a hadith [16] narrated by An Nisa'i, A'isha, the wife of the prophet of Islam reported that:

*Once, a woman handed over a letter to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) from behind a curtain. The Prophet held his hand and asked whether the person (handing over the letter) is a boy or a girl. The person replied that she was a woman. The Prophet then said, "If you were a woman, you would change your nails (meaning dyeing them with henna)." Sunan Abu Dawud, Hadith 4163.*

Though some Islamic scholars doubt the authenticity of this hadith, it is a tradition of the Prophet that encourages Muslim women to imbibe the habit of applying henna on their hands to dye their fingers to look feminine as against bare hands which is a male appearance from the Islamic perspective. Hence, this accounts for the reason why Hausa Muslim women frequently adorn themselves with henna on their palms to abide by the exhortation of the Prophet.

### 3.5 Henna in the Hausa Tradimedical Practices

The Hausa traditional medicine practices involve among others, the use of plants' roots; backs; stems, and leaves to prevent and cure ailments afflicting the body of both human beings and animals. Hausa culture allows the utilization of henna roots and leaves for the treatment of ailments in the traditional way. The ailments treated by the use of henna include:

#### 3.5.1 Treatment of Whitlow (*Kakkarai/Dankakkarai*)

"Whitlow is a very painful and infectious viral disease of the thumb and fingertips" [17]. It is a purulent infection that usually affects the end of a finger and sometimes toes in the area surrounding the nail. This ailment is called '*kakkarai*' or '*dankakkarai*' in Hausa.

It is a kind of ailment that causes excruciating pain around the infected area of either the finger or the toe. The pain becomes more intense at night, such that the afflicted person may not have adequate and pleasant sleep, most especially at the early stage of the infection.

The Hausa people have multiple ways of curing whitlow infection. One of the ways is the application of henna paste on the site of infection for onwards of three to four days. To obtain the medicine, dried henna leaves are ground into powder. It is then mixed with water to obtain a thick paste. The paste is then applied all over the affected part. A clean polythene or piece of cloth is then wrapped around the affected area to cover it. This is done to allow the

medication applied to firmly stick to the affected finger or toe and to prevent it from getting fell off easily when it dries. This is repeated once daily for at most, three to four days.

#### 3.5.2 Treatment of Dysentery (*Basir/Dankanoma*)

Dysentery is defined as an infection of the intestines that causes diarrhea containing blood or mucus [18]. The Hausa people have over time, employed the use of henna roots as an alternative medicine for the cure of dysentery. The roots of the henna plant are obtained and washed thoroughly to remove the sand particles that may accompany it. It is then intensely boiled with a desired quantity of clean water. The '*balma*', a dark-colored salt is added to the boiling roots to enhance the taste of the concoction. The patient is expected to take a measure (one cup) of the medicine once per day for two or three days. It is however pertinent to note that this concoction is not to be taken by a woman in the first trimester of pregnancy. This is because it may be harmful or injurious to her health.

#### 3.5.3 Treatment of Dysmenorrhea/Menstrual Cramp (*Ciwon Mara*)

Some women experience pain around their lower abdomen during menstruation. Traditionally, it is believed that the condition is brought about by infection; hence Hausa alternative medicine practitioners hold the belief that infection has to be treated, to provide a cure for menstrual cramps in women of reproductive age. The problem, if not treated, is likely to inhibit the chances of worsening.

To provide a remedy for the health issue, henna roots are obtained and washed thoroughly to remove sand and other undesired particles from it. It is then boiled in clean water. *Jar kanwa* (saltpeter) is added to the boiling substance. It is allowed to boil thoroughly for a while. When the concoction becomes cold, it is filtered and taken orally. The patient takes one cup per day for three days. When taken, it is believed to have the efficacy to clean the lower abdomen. It is however likely that the consumption of this medication might cause the passage of soft stool when the toilet is visited.

## 4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The usage of henna largely by Hausa women folk in the past has helped in its widespread cultivation throughout the Sokoto province. This has greatly impacted its large-scale production in commercial quantity. However, it is pertinent to note that the wide acceptance and utilization of foreign factory-processed henna has brought about a reduction in its traditional

<sup>16</sup> Hadith is the sayings, practices and the tacit approval of prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). It is the second source of Islamic jurisprudence, next to the holy Qur'an.

<sup>17</sup> Extracted on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2023 from <https://www.physio-pedia.com/Whitlow>.

<sup>18</sup> Extracted on the 31<sup>th</sup> of December 2022 from [https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dysentery/#:~:text=Dysentery%20is%20an%20infection%20of,sick%20or%20bing%20sick%20\(vomiting\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dysentery/#:~:text=Dysentery%20is%20an%20infection%20of,sick%20or%20bing%20sick%20(vomiting)).

usage for ornamental purposes. This has heavily impacted negatively by narrowing down its cultivation. The cultivation of the plant is now hanging in the balance as it is facing near extinction in most farmlands. The widespread nature of its cultivation in the past is now a glory of the past.

The factory-processed henna is now being used to make tattoos around the hands and legs by most spinsters and middle-aged ladies in urban and semi-urban areas. This, therefore, gives room for henna importation to thrive, due to the readily available large market. The scenario is likely to have a negative impact on the foreign reserve of the country because of its importation.

Before their contact with the western world, the Hausa people employ the use of the henna plant in the treatment and cure of different ailments. Even in this age of modern medicine, the use of henna as medicine among the Hausa people cannot be ruled out. Its efficacy may be one of the reasons that its usage strives up to the present time. This paper has brought to the fore, some uses of the henna plant in the alternative healthcare delivery of the Hausa people. The treatment of dysentery, whitlow, and dysmenorrhea has been highlighted as is practiced by the Hausa tradimedical practitioners.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Henna has been, and will continue to be, an important plant in Hausa culture, both in terms of adornment and its application in the treatment of illnesses in alternative ways. It is the view of this paper that this important plant must not be allowed to go extinct. Due to its economic, cultural, and medicinal values, its cultivation should be encouraged. Farmers should be supported to venture into its cultivation by the provision of improved seedlings and other inputs. Financial support should also be rendered to them. It could be in the form of soft loans at a single-digit interest rate. This will greatly improve yield and thereby, empower the farmers financially. The aforementioned will inevitably contribute to the growth of the nation's economy especially if it is processed in a modern way. It will also provide job opportunities for the primary producers and the investors, as well as the likely employees. It is also the hope of this paper that pharmacognosists will endeavor to study the henna plant to find out its medicinal properties; determine its effectiveness and the correct dose to be administered or consumed. This is one of the shortcomings of the alternative medical practice. Doing this will further improve the health delivery system of the country.

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### List of Informants/Respondents Interviewed

- Muhammad Sani Gandi, a henna merchant from Gandi of Rabah Local Government area, Sokoto state, aged 65 years. Interviewed at Talata Mafara on Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2022.
- Malam Shehule Bulaga, a henna farmer and merchant from Bulaga, Yabo Local Government area, Sokoto state, Nigeria., aged 72. Interviewed at Gummi market on Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2022.
- Malam Zubairu Awadé, a henna farmer from Awadé in Augi Local Government, Kebbi state. He was aged 68. Interviewed over the phone on Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2022.
- Malam Abubakar Cika, a henna farmer from Kofar Tawai of Gummi Local Government, Zamfara state. Interviewed on Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2022.
- Maimuna Garba, a female respondent/informant from Gayari of Gummi Local Government, Zamfara state. She is aged 70. Interviewed on Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

- Malama Hajo Buda from Bulaga of Yabo Local Government, Sokoto state. Aged 74, she was interviewed on Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2022.
- Hajiya A'ishatu Aliyu from Jegawa of Sokoto town, Sokoto state. She was aged 71. Interviewed on Wednesday, 11th May 2022.
- Zainabu Sani, from Kabobi area, Gummi Local Government, Zamfara state. She is aged 19. Interviewed on Saturday, 14th May 2022.
- Shehu Di'o Abdullahi (Late), a farmer and traditional medicine practitioner. He was aged 68 years. Interviewed on Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2022. He died in December 2022.
- Muhammadu Auwal, Fadaman Kurfa, a professional fisherman and herbalist from Gayari. He is aged 86. He was interviewed on Tuesday, 17th May 2022.