The Tradition of Henna Night in the Hadrami Arab Community in Jakarta

Gina Aqila Chairunnisa[1], Febri Priyoyudanto[2]
[1,2]Universitas Al-Azhar Indonesia
Email: naqicha4@gmail.com

Abstract

The Hadhrami Arab is a community comes from Hadhramaut, South Yemen, and they still practice their traditions, one of which is the henna night tradition. This is an Arab tradition that is usually observed at weddings. The bride do henna the night before the wedding ceremony in this tradition. The Hadhrami Arab community in Tanah Abang district Jakarta is the subject of this study. The objective of conducting this research was to help the community understand the context of the henna night by providing new information about how the henna night tradition is still practiced by the Arab Hadhrami community in Tanah Abang Jakarta. A qualitative descriptive approach, a literature review, and interviews were used in this study. In this study, data was collected by processing library data and data from direct interviews with sources using seven questions related to the existing problem formulation. This study addressed two issues: first, what is the role of henna night in the tradition of the Arab Hadhrami community in Tanah Abang, Jakarta; and second, how is henna night conducted among the Arab Hadhrami community in Tanah Abang, Jakarta.

Keywords: *Tradition*, *Henna Night*, *Society*, *Arab Hadhrami*, *Tanah Abang.*

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A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the countries with a wide range of cultures, races, and ethnicities, religion and ethnicity. Many foreign countries enter Indonesia through trade routes. As a result, not only the diversity within Indonesia, but there is also a great deal of cultural diversity from outside of Indonesia, one example being the diversity of the Middle East region. Arabs arrived in Indonesia through trade routes, where some settled and even became citizens of the Republic of Indonesia.

The Middle East region consists primarily of Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, and Yemen. The Hadrami Arab Nation, which is a term for the indigenous people of Hadhramaut who live in Hadhramaut, South Yemen, is one of the most famous in this region of Indonesia. The descendants of Ya'rub bin Qathan and Ahmad bin Isa al-Muhajir, both migrants from Basrah, make up the Hadhrami Arab community (Berg, 1989: 7; Ibrahim, 2011: xxii, 18).

The Hadhrami Arab community is an Arab community that is still fiercely protective of its culture and traditions. Despite the fact that their minority lives in several regions of Indonesia, including the capital city of Jakarta, they always maintain their culture and traditions. Tradition is defined as knowledge, teachings, customs, and others, which means knowledge passed down from generation to generation. So, tradition is a method used by the community from the past to the present (Funk dan Wagnalls, 2013:78).

The tradition of henna night is well-known among the Indonesian Arab community. This tradition is still practiced in the Hadhrami Arab community. Some Indonesians are still unfamiliar with the tradition. As a result, the author uses this topic as research material to help Indonesians understand the tradition. This research can provide a rich and in-depth insight into the henna night tradition, as well as serve as a refresher or reference for other researchers who wish to address similar topics.

The tradition of henna night/malam henna, also known as malam pacar, is the night before the akad ceremony when the bride applies henna. The bride's henna is applied from her fingertips to her wrists, as well as her feet. Henna night is traditionally held at the bride's home or at a venue reserved specifically for the occasion. On the night of the wedding, the bride's family and close friends gather to decorate the bride's hands and feet with beautiful henna patterns. Female guests and close female friends decorate the bride's hands. The henna night tradition is usually carried out with great fanfare, there are Arabic decorations, and the invited guests usually follow the dress code that the bride and groom have established. As a result, the Hadhrami Arab community in Indonesia, more specifically in Tanah Abang, Jakarta, continues to practice this henna night tradition.

According to the explanation above, the problem formulations that must be addressed in this study are as follows: first, how does henna night play a role in the tradition of the Hadhrami Arab community in Tanah Abang Jakarta? Second, how is the Hadhrami Arab community in Tanah Abang Jakarta carrying out the tradition of henna night?

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

A journal by Abeer S. Almutairi and Gerhard Weikum is one of the previous studies related to this title. "*Henna in Arab Culture: History, Significance, and Traditions*" is the title of the journal. The journal's discussion is about the history, meaning, and traditions of henna use in Arab society, such as at weddings and Eid al-Fitr. The similarities in discussing Henna between the journal and this research are the same. The difference, however, is in the object of research, as this study focuses on the Hadhrami Arab community in Tanah Abang, whereas the journal focuses on all Arab communities.

The henna night tradition has long been an important cultural practice among Hadrami Arab communities, including those in Jakarta, Indonesia. Henna application is part of wedding and pre-wedding ceremonies celebrated across much of the Arab world. Research on henna traditions among Hadrami Arabs in Jakarta provides insights into cultural identity, diaspora communities, gender roles, and the significance of rituals.

Several studies examine the broader history and diaspora patterns of Hadrami Arabs across the Indian Ocean region (Ho, 2006; Manger, 2010). Hadrami Arab immigrants from southern Yemen began settling in Indonesia in the 17th century for trading purposes. Over generations, Hadrami communities became established in

coastal cities like Jakarta. Maintaining cultural traditions like henna nights has been important for cultural identity and belonging.

Henna nights mark a young woman's passage into marriage. The ritual allows female family and friends to gather, apply henna designs to the bride-to-be, and share in celebration (Al-Attas, 2014). Researchers analyze gender dynamics and social expectations encoded in henna night traditions. Freeman (2019) argues henna nights symbolize women's virtue, fertility, and marital duties in Hadrami culture.

The diaspora experience may transform cultural practices across generations. Hakimi (2017) found third and fourth generation Hadrami Indonesian youth have adapted certain traditions while retaining a sense of Hadrami identity. For many families in Jakarta, henna night remains an important pre-wedding custom, though modified to suit modern contexts.

Several works examine henna's global popularity and its origins in Arab and Islamic cultural zones (Knysh, 1999; Mobini-Kesheh, 1999). However, more research is needed on the contemporary significance of henna traditions among Hadrami Arab communities in Indonesia. Further studies could provide deeper understanding of cultural change, ethnic identity maintenance, and gender ideals.

Overall, existing research recognizes the henna night as a time-honored tradition connecting Hadrami Arab communities in Jakarta to regional cultural roots and heritage. The ritual continues to hold social and symbolic meaning for diaspora families through its embodiment of marriage, womanhood, and belonging.

C. METHOD

The descriptive approach method was used in this study. Data collected from interviews as well as literature searches. This research yielded a detailed and complex description of the phenomenon under investigation. Because it is more subjective and general, the qualitative descriptive approach has its own limitations. As a result, the findings of this study are somewhat limited. The data for this study were gathered by processing library data and the results of direct interviews with sources, who were asked seven questions about the formulation of existing problems, so the following is a list of interview questions:

1. When is the henna night is conducted by Hadrami community?
2. What do the colors on the bride's henna (red and white) represent?
3. What does the symbol or motif of the henna makeup on the bride's hands mean?
4. What did the bride wear to the wedding?
5. What are the advantages of henna night for the bride and her guests?
6. Is there any Arabic food, decorations, or entertainment required at the henna night?
7. How is the henna party planned?

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The role of henna night in shaping the identity of the Arab Hadrami community in Tanah Abang

The evolution of henna night in Hadrami Arab community in Indonesia has a long history. Many Hadrami Arabs originated in Hadramaut, a Yemeni region, and later migrated to various parts of the world, including Indonesia. The Hadrami Arab community in Indonesia brought their traditions and culture with them, including the use of henna as a decorative art on special occasions. According to Koentjaraningrat, marriage has functional characteristics in the sense that people marry to meet needs. This is done in order for them to be able to perform their role and function in marriage (Koentjaraningrat, 1992:93).

Henna Night is a celebration of the rich culture and strong heritage of Hadrami Arab community in Jakarta. This tradition is about more than just celebrating happy moments; it is about nurturing social relationships, togetherness, building solidarity within the Hadhrami community, and establishing new relationships with other Hadhrami communities.

Henna Night, held in a warm and cheerful atmosphere, is a memorable event for the Hadrami Arab community in Jakarta. They maintain their cultural identity while respecting the changing times through this tradition. Henna night is a way for them to remember their forefathers and pass on their rich culture to future generations. In the original Hadrami tradition, several distinct traditions are carried out during the wedding ceremony. According to a Hadhrami community resident in Tanah Abang with the initials R, in the Hadrami community, the selection of spouses in marriage frequently involves families and relatives who are involved in bringing the bride and groom together. The selection of spouses is based on ethnicity, religion, and family origins, which are deemed important in maintaining relationships and carrying on family traditions. According to a resident of the Hadhrami community in Tanah Abang with the initials A, there are many Hadhrami Arabs who are matched in choosing their spouses, the goal being that they do not make a mistake in choosing a candidate and that the existing lineage is not disrupted, so it begins with a way of ta'aruf.

Before the wedding, there is a proposal ceremony called "*Khatam al-Khitbah*." During this ceremony, the groom's family pays a visit to the bride's family to express good wishes and discuss the terms of marriage. If an agreement is reached, the groom's family pays the dowry or masawin to the bride's family as a sign of seriousness and honor.

The Hadhrami Arab community in Tanah Abang Jakarta continues to practice the henna night culture. According to them, the event is very important because it helps to preserve the traditions of the Hadhrami Arab community. According to Roome (2014: 20), everything has blessings, but at different levels. According to a resident of the Hadhrami community in Tanah Abang with the initials A, the henna plant is considered the Prophet Muhammad's favorite flower and, as a result, is

thought to have many blessings. As a result, the plant is revered in Islamic tradition and is used by Muslims for blessings, protection, and purification.

2. **The Implementation of Henna Night by the Hadhrami Arab Community in Tanah Abang**

According to the information from members of Hadhrami Arab community in Tanah Abang with the initials R, the Henna Night event depends on the person who has a desire, sometimes there are those who make the event one week before the marriage contract, then there are those who are two days before the marriage contract, and there are also those who are one day before the marriage akad. According to the information of Hadhrami community members in Tanah Abang with the initials A, the Henna Night event is not only held at the bride's house, but there are usually those who rent special places for the event. That night, the bride's family and close friends gather to adorn the bride's hands and feet with beautiful henna patterns.

3. **The meaning of the red and white colours of the henna used by the bride**

There are meanings and significance associated with the red and white colors commonly worn by the bride during henna night in the tradition of using henna on the bride, especially on henna night, namely the red color of henna symbolises joy, happiness, and love. In many cultures, the color red is also associated with good fortune and blessings. Furthermore, henna in an intense red color represents feelings of joy and excitement during the wedding ceremony (Al-Baddai, S., & Al-Tameemi, K. W., 2019:7).

White henna is frequently used as a contrast or additional pattern to enhance the design. White in henna is often associated with purity, cleanliness, and purity, despite the fact that it does not have a specific symbolic meaning like red (Al-Baddai, S., & Al-Tameemi, K. W., 2019:7).

Meanwhile, a Hadhrami community member in Tanah Abang with the initials N claims that the color of Henna has no significance. Many Hadhrami Arabs in Tanah Abang prefer white henna because the white color is more bodypoint, and usually because the bride wants the henna to fade quickly. Henna is also classified into three types: Henna Natural, Henna Instant, and Henna Bodypoint. Bodypoint henna has the most superior advantage of the three types of henna because it only uses glue and white bodypoint and does not require a long time to make, whereas natural henna and instant henna require a long time, which is about 48 hours, so that the color of the henna is more real and sharp, and natural henna and instant henna also require more materials.

4. **The meaning of henna symbols or motifs on the hands of the bride**

Depending on the culture and tradition followed, the symbols and motifs decorated with henna on the bride's hands have different meanings and significance. The most common motifs in henna designs are flowers. Flowers in henna drawings

represent beauty, life, and purity, as well as joy and hope in marriage (Terzioglu, G., & Cetlin, G., 2019:3).

The leaf motif is associated with fertility, growth, and new life. Twigs represent strength, survival, and good fortune. Flowers also represent beauty and tenderness, and the most commonly depicted flowers are roses, lotus flowers, and dahlias (Terzioglu, G., & Cetlin, G., 2019:3). Geometric motifs such as triangles, squares, and circles can represent perfection, balance, and harmony, and the Fatima hand motif, also known as khamsa in Arabic culture, is a symbol of protection and good luck (Terzioglu, G., & Cetlin, G., 2019:3).

Meanwhile, a resident of the Hadhrami community in Tanah Abang with the initials L claims that the symbol on the henna is determined by the storyline of the two brides, such as describing where they met or other details. Not only that, but some people describe their religious symbols, which is common in the Indian and Pakistani communities. For the Arab community, floral symbols or gulf designs are commonly used.

5. The outfit used by the bride at the henna night event

On henna night, the bride usually wears a special, brightly colored outfit, such as a Jalabiya, a loose-fitting outfit inspired by Arabic traditions. Dresses with ethnic embellishments or embroidery inspired by Arabic culture. The takchita is frequently embellished with beautiful embroidery, beading, or embellishments, as well as striking designs in a variety of colors. Personal taste and preference are usually considered, as well as the traditions and culture of the families involved in the henna night event. So, the bride looks very elegantly luxurious during the henna night and avoids the typical Middle Eastern look.

6. Arabic food, decorations and entertainment on Henna Night

The decoration and arrangement of the event during the henna night is no less interesting than the dress code worn during the henna night. Chandeliers with Arabic designs, such as mosaic lamps or chandeliers with artistic carvings, can create a lovely and distinct ambiance. Using colorful fabrics and traditional weavings to decorate tables, chairs, or tents can add an Arabic touch. According to a resident of Hadhrami community in Tanah Abang with the initials R, the decorations at the henna night event were very luxurious, with a strong Middle Eastern flavor.

According to Hadhrami community members in Tanah Abang with the initials A, the food at the henna night event is Arabic specialties such as Cane, mezze, kebab, baklava, and shawarma. As well as mint tea and Arabic coffee with cardamom, cumin, flowers, ginger, milk, coffee, or tea.

Not only are the food and decorations lavish, but there is usually entertainment on henna night, such as traditional dances and music. Belly dances, dabke dances, and Sufi dances are commonly performed at henna night events.

Live or recorded traditional music such as Zaffat Wedding Song - Arabic Traditional Music, Habibi Ya Eini - Amr Diab, and Ahibbak - Fairuz. There is also playing traditional Arabic music such as Oud, qanun, or rebab.

When there is live music, many invited guests stay up late, according to a resident of the Hadhrami community in Tanah Abang with the initials L, and usually music featuring gambus or belly dance.

7. The Arrangement of the Henna Night Event

The arrangement of events on henna night may differ depending on the traditions and cultural preferences observed. As for the usual arrangement of events in the Hadhrami Arab community of Tanah Abang during henna night according to the information of Hadhrami community members in Tanah Abang with initials L, namely:

a. **Welcome and Opening Ceremony:** A master of ceremonies or a designated family member opens the ceremony. Congratulatory greetings for the bride.
b. **Application of Henna:** One or more skilled henna decorators, according to a Hadhrami community member in Tanah Abang with the initials A, apply henna to the bride's hands and feet. Henna paste is made by crushing the dried leaves of the henna plant into a fine powder. This henna powder is then combined with liquid ingredients like water, tea, or essential oils to create a thick paste. The henna paste is then applied with a small cone or a specialized tool known as a "*jacquard bottle*". The henna application process can alternate between the bride and female guests who wish to participate in the henna application.
c. **Prayers and Wishes:** Family, relatives, and guests offer prayers and well wishes to the bride. Guests may offer advice and wishes, wedding gifts, and wishes from family, relatives, and invited guests in a loving environment. There is usually a joint recitation event at the time of the prayers and wishes, which is intended as a prayer for the event to run smoothly and for the two bride and groom to be married.
d. **Closing and Farewell:** The host thanks everyone who came and ends the henna night by wishing the bride success and happiness. There is no set order for this event, so it can be arranged according to the wishes of the families involved. However, many people shorten or even extend the henna night. Not only that, but according to a resident of the Hadhrami community in Tanah Abang with the initials N, typical Arabic fragrances will be burned in the room during the henna night event, the fragrance is very soft and very fragrant. At the time of the event, male invited guests, and occasionally women as well, are ready to drink coffee, and this is usually when the recitation event begins.

8. The Benefits of henna night for the Arab Hadhrami community of Tanah Abang

The henna night provides emotional, cultural, and social benefits to the bride and her guests, and it aims to strengthen family relationships. Respect for family members and togetherness are also important family values. In the context of weddings and Hadrami Arab community traditions, the event creates an atmosphere of joy, honor, and unity. According to a resident of the Hadhrami community in Tanah Abang with the initials A, the henna night is no longer limited to weddings. Henna parties are now commonly held at large family events such as circumcision (sunnatan), Eid al-Fitr, and other celebratory nights. Furthermore, regardless of cultural background, the use of henna is becoming increasingly popular among Indonesians in general. Many Indonesian women enjoy applying henna to their hands and feet for special occasions such as weddings, festivals, and other celebrations. The advancement of technology and the availability of information have also influenced the growth of henna nights in Hadrami Arab community in Indonesia. More henna designs are now available, either in the form of guidebooks, magazines, or on the internet. This enables people to learn more diverse and creative henna designs. According to a Hadhrami community member with the initials A in Tanah Abang, there is a henna night event to create new relationships with fellow Arabs, which is expected so that their lineage is not disrupted. Finally, henna night has become an important part of Hadrami Arab culture in Indonesia, particularly in the context of marriage.

E. CONCLUSION

The henna night tradition is prevalent in the Arab community, including the Hadhrami Arab community in Tanah Abang Jakarta. The tradition of henna night is the use of henna on the bride on the night before the contract. This tradition is still followed by the Hadhrami Arab community in Tanah Abang, and the event is identical to that of the Hadhrami Arab community in Hadhramaut Yemen. However, according to some Hadrami Arab communities in Tanah Abang, the tradition of henna night is not only one day before the marriage contract, but many people do it a week before. The Hadhrami Arab community in Tanah Abang also stated that the henna night event can be held in locations other than the bride's home, such as halls or multipurpose rooms that are rented out. The color of the bride's henna has no significance, but the symbols formed with henna have a very deep meaning, as many people know that the symbol on the henna is a picture of flowers, but it turns out that the symbols that are widely used are exactly like the picture of the first place where the two bride and groom met, or the first item given by the groom.

So, this henna night tradition is important for the Hadhrami Arab community, particularly those in Tanah Abang, because it provides emotional, cultural, and social benefits to the bride and guests, as well as maintaining close family relationships. Not only that, but the tradition of their implementation varies greatly, from the beginning to the end of the ceremony.

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