

The
HENNA
ARTIST

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CHARACTERS WHO APPEAR

Lakshmi Shastri: 30-year-old henna artist, living in the city of Jaipur

Radha: Lakshmi's 13-year-old sister, born after Lakshmi left her village

Malik: Lakshmi's servant boy, 7 or 8 years old (he does not know which), lives in the crowded inner city with his Muslim auntie and cousins

Parvati Singh: 35-year-old society matron, wife of Samir Singh, mother of Ravi and Govind Singh, distant cousin of the Jaipur royal family

Samir Singh: renowned architect from a high-caste Rajput family, husband of Parvati Singh and father of Ravi and Govind Singh

Ravi Singh: 17-year-old son of Parvati and Samir Singh, in boarding school at Mayo College (a few hours from Jaipur)

Lala: long-serving spinster servant in the Singh household

Sheela Sharma: 15-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. V. M. Sharma, a wealthy Brahmin couple of humble origins

Mr. V. M. Sharma: official building contractor of the Jaipur royal family, husband of Mrs. Sharma, father of four, including his youngest daughter Sheela Sharma

Jay Kumar: bachelor school chum of Samir Singh from Oxford days, practicing physician in Shimla (at the foothills of the Himalayas, an 11-hour drive from Jaipur)

Mrs. Iyengar: Lakshmi's landlady in Jaipur

Mr. Pandey: Lakshmi's neighbor and another tenant of Mrs. Iyengar, Sheela Sharma's music tutor

Hari Shastri: Lakshmi's estranged husband

Saas: means "mother-in-law" in Hindi; when Lakshmi refers to her *saas*, she is referring to Hari's mother, and when addressing a mother-in-law directly, a woman would call her by the respectful "Saasuji"

Mrs. Joyce Harris: young Englishwoman, wife of a British

army officer who is part of the transition team in Jaipur for the handover of the British Raj

Mrs. Jeremy Harris: Joyce Harris's mother-in-law

Pitaji: means "father" in Hindi

Maa: means "mother" in Hindi

Munchi: old man from Lakshmi's village who taught her how to draw and taught Radha how to mix paints

Kanta Agarwal: 26-year-old wife of Manu Agarwal, educated in England, originally from a literary Calcutta family

Manu Agarwal: Director of Facilities for the Jaipur royal family, husband of Kanta, educated in England, related to the Sharma family

Baju: an old family servant of Kanta and Manu Agarwal

Maharaja of Jaipur: a figurehead post-independence, the highest ranking royal in the city, wealthy in land and money, possessing multiple palaces in Jaipur

Naraya: the builder of Lakshmi's new house in Jaipur

Maharani Indira: the maharaja's stepmother, married to the late Maharaja of Jaipur, childless, also referred to as the dowager queen

Maharani Latika: the current maharaja's wife, 31 years old, educated in Switzerland

Madho Singh: Maharani Indira's parakeet

Geeta: widow, Samir Singh's current mistress

Mrs. Patel: one of Lakshmi's loyal henna clients, proprietress of a hotel

A glossary of Hindi, French & English terms is listed in the back.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS



Aam panna: a refreshing mango drink

Accha: all right; very well

Almirah: a wooden cupboard for clothes

Aloo: potato

Aloo tikki: spicy potato pancake

Angrej: an English person, meaning a white person

Angreji: the English language

Anna: small coin equivalent to $\frac{1}{16}$ of a rupee; no longer used

Arré or *Arré Baap* or *Baap re Baap*: For goodness' sake!

Atta: flour dough

Auntie: respectful, affectionate address for an elder female acquaintance

Baap re Baap: For goodness' sake!

Badmash: no-good person, scoundrel

Bahu: daughter-in-law

Bawchi: seed that is cold-pressed to produce an ayurvedic oil for use on skin and hair

Beedi: an Indian cigarette, brown and cone-shaped, much cheaper than white English brands

Besan: chickpea or garbanzo bean flour

Betel nut: same as areca nut, a mild stimulant, from the areca palm

Bhagwan: God

Bhaji: a vegetable dipped in flour paste and fried; like a fritter

Bheta: son; also affectionate address to a young boy or younger man

Bheti: daughter; also affectionate address to a young girl or younger woman

Bilkul: extremely or absolutely

Bindi: a small round dot placed on the forehead using vermilion powder, signifying marital status

Bonjour: French for “hello”

Boteh: from the Persian word meaning “leaf,” it refers to a paisley design motif

Brahmi: an herb used to stimulate the mind

Bukwas: nonsense

Bulbul: a songbird of Asia and Africa

Burfi: a sweet made from milk, sometimes with various nuts

Burri nazar: an evil look or evil gaze

Bush-shirt: white T-shirt worn under man's half-sleeve or full-sleeve shirt

Caste: for centuries, Indians followed a rigid socioeconomic class structure that divided people according to their birth into four or five groups (the number is debatable): Brahmin (priests and teachers), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishya (merchants), Shudras (servant class) and the Untouchables

Chaat: savory snacks, freshly made, found at street stalls

Chai: hot tea

Chai-walla: one who sells hot tea

Chameli: Indian jasmine

Champa: fragrant flower often used in perfume and incense

Chapatti: round, flat, unleavened bread

Charanna: someone who earns four *annas*, equivalent to pennies

Charpoy: traditional Indian bed woven with rope or netting

Chole: cooked and spiced garbanzo beans

Choti behen: little sister

Chowkidar: gatekeeper, watchman

Chunni: a woman's head covering

Chup-chup: hush-hush

Chura: bangle

Coriander: popular herb used in Indian cooking; also called cilantro

Dal batti: cooked balls of wheat usually eaten with *dal* (lentil soup)

Dalit: an Untouchable

Devdas: a playboy

Dhoti: a rectangular piece of cloth, unstitched, usually white, five to seven yards long, wrapped around the waist and legs, worn by men; once he stopped wearing suits, Mahatma Gandhi always wore a *dhoti* to encourage Indian customs over British

Diya: an oil lamp made of clay

Doodh-walla: milkman

Frangipani: very fragrant, sweet-smelling flower; referred to as plumeria in other parts of the world

Gajar ka halwa: a dessert made from shredded carrots

Ghasti ki behen: sister of a hooker

Ghazal: a love ballad, often on the theme of love

Ghee: clarified butter or butter with the water removed

Gobi: cauliflower

Goonda: hoodlum

Gopi: girl who herds cows

Gori: a girl who is fair; also a woman's name (English officials were called *Gora Sahibs* during British rule, meaning White Masters)

Griha Pravesh: house warming

Gymkhana: place where competitive games are held

Hahn: yes

Hai Ram: Oh, God!

Jalebi: a fried orange-colored sweet covered in thick sugar-water

Jeera: cumin seeds

Jharu: broom

Ji: an address of respect. The addition of *ji* to a person's name (e.g., Ganesh-*ji*, Gandhi-*ji*) accords them respect and reverence

Jiji: big sister

Juey: fleas

Juroor: Of course!

Kajal: same as kohl, a black eyeliner

Kaju: cashew

Kathak: a popular form of highly energetic dance with ancient roots

Khadi: handwoven cloth, often cotton; after the English destroyed Indian mills so they could sell English cloth to Indians, Gandhi encouraged Indians to boycott English goods by producing and using khadi cloth for saris and dhotis

Kheer: a dessert similar to rice pudding

Khus-khus fan: made of vetiver grass, the fan is first dampened to release a cooling perfume as it is used

Kicheri: a rice and lentil dish, often served to children

Kofta: dumplings made from potato or meat

Kohl: same as *kajal*, a black eyeliner

Koyal: a bird from the cuckoo family, known for its beautiful songs; often called the Nightingale of India

Kulfi: ice cream

Kundan: jewelry designed with uncut diamonds and gemstones set in a highly refined molten gold; believed to have originated in the royal courts of Rajasthan

Kurtha: loose long-sleeved tunic worn over a *pyjama* bottom.

Kya: What? What is it?

Kya ho gya: What happened?

Laddus: round balls cooked from sweetened lentils, ground chickpea or whole wheat flour

Lakh: unit in the Indian numbering system equivalent to 100,000

Lassi: a popular drink made with yogurt and often combined with mango pulp

Maang tikka: jewelry worn on a woman's forehead

Maderchod: motherfucker

Maharaja: the most powerful of all kings in a region

Maharani: wife of a maharaji; the most powerful queen of the region

Malish: a masseuse

Mala: a necklace

Mandala: a circular form, often drawn for ceremonial purposes

Mandap: a covered stage erected specifically for the bride, groom and the pandit who is marrying them

MemSahib: the respectful address for "Ma'am"

Mirch: hot pepper

Mutki: clay vessel in which water is kept cool

Nahee: no

Namaste: the popular Indian greeting made by bringing both palms together just below the neck

Namkeen: salty snack, usually fried

Nautch: dance

Nawab: Muslim nobleman

Neem: a type of evergreen tree used for a variety of health-related purposes

Nimbu pani: sweetened limewater

Oiseau: French for “bird”

Paan: a betel leaf laced with tobacco and betel nut paste, sold everywhere

Pakora: a fried savory, often filled with a single vegetable like onion or potato

Pallu: the decorated end of a sari, meant to be worn over the shoulder

Pandit: teacher, priest

Paneer: fresh cheese made at home by curdling milk

Pani: water

Paisa: coin, equal of $\frac{1}{100}$ of a rupee

Pilao: fragrant rice, often includes vegetables

Piyaj: onion

Puja: divine worship

Pukkah Sahib: a proper gentleman

Purdah: an ancient practice in some Hindu and Muslim communities of men and women living in separate quarters

Puri: a round, fried bread

Pyjama: bottom half (pants) of a kurta pyjama set for men

Rabri: a creamy dessert made from milk

Rasmalai: a dessert made from milk and cream

Raita: a cucumber yogurt condiment, served to cool the palate when spicy food is served

Rickshaw-walla: person who cycles a rickshaw

Roti: round flatbread made with whole wheat or corn

Rudraksha: a tree whose seeds are used in Hindu prayer beads

Rupees: Indian currency

Sahib: the respectful address for “Sir”

Saali kutti: bitch

Saas: mother-in-law (also *sassuji*)

Sadhu: holy man

Sajna: vegetable resembling a long green bean

Salaam: a greeting, in Arabic

Salla kutta: dirty dog, a derogatory expression

Salwaar-kameez: a tunic and pants set worn mostly by girls and younger women in 1950s; today, it’s more of a fashion statement worn by young and old alike

Samosa: a fried savory, often filled with potato, spices and peas

Sangeet: a singalong

Sari: common draped women’s garment, 5–9 yards in length

Sev puri: a salty, fried fast food

Shabash: Bravo! Well done!

Sharab: alcohol

Subji: any sort of curried vegetable dish

Tabla: a drumlike instrument, played with fingers and palms of the hand

Tiffin: stainless steel carrier with several containers that sit atop one another

Tikka: a mark on the forehead made of fragrant paste, like sandalwood or vermillion

Titli: butterfly

Tonga-walla: man who steers a horse-drawn carriage

Topa: hat or head covering for children

Tulsi: a sacred herb thought to have healing properties for a variety of ailments

Turban: a man's head covering made of a long piece of fabric

Turmeric: bright orange-colored spice, usually in powdered form

Uncle: respectful, affectionate address for an elder male acquaintance

Vata: foundational concept of the body's energetic forces in Ayurvedic tradition

Veranda: covered porch

Zamindar: landowner who has tenant farmers working his land

Zaroor: absolutely, certainly

THE STORY OF HENNA



For more than five thousand years, henna (or *mehendi*) has been used to adorn bodies. In the hot climates of India, Pakistan, China, the Middle East and North Africa, the *Lawsonia inermis* plant is abundant, growing to five feet high. The plant—whose leaves, flowers and twigs are ground to make henna powder—is easy to find and inexpensive.

Mixed with water, sugar, oil, lemon or other ingredients, the powder's color is intensified, and its medicinal and healing properties enhanced. Henna cools the body in hot weather and protects skin from drying. In India, men and women apply henna, instead of chemical dyes, to their graying hair, where it has a similar, soothing effect. It is common in some cultures to dip hands and feet whole in henna to stay cool.

Usually associated with weddings and bridal preparation, henna is also used on other significant occasions: engagements, birthdays, holidays, religious celebrations, naming ceremonies

and more. Ancient Egyptians applied henna to bodies before mummification. In Southern China, henna has been used in erotic rituals for three thousand years.

Today's henna artists continue to create increasingly elaborate, intricate and unique designs even in the absence of a special occasion. The ability of an artist to customize the design to the wearer, no matter their geographical location, allows the art of henna to transcend culture, religious beliefs or ethnicity.

RADHA'S RECIPE FOR HENNA PASTE



The leaves, flowers and stems of the henna plant are first dried, then ground into a powder, and tough bits, like veins, are removed. The action of grinding releases the bonding agent so when the powder is mixed with hot water, the resulting paste sticks to the skin for a considerable period of time and the fresh herbal fragrance lingers on the wearer.

The darker the color of the henna, the longer the design will remain on the skin. Acidic elements like lemon juice, vinegar or strong black tea help intensify the henna color from amber to dark brown. Same goes for tea tree, eucalyptus, geranium, clove or lavender oils, which have the ability to bind the stain to the skin more strongly. The soles of our feet and our palms, the thickest parts of our skin, absorb the henna stain best.

After mixing the paste, let it sit for six to twelve hours in a cool, dark place before applying it.

To prevent the henna from drying or falling off the skin before the dye has a chance to set, spray the damp design, carefully, with a sugar/lemon mix (or add sugar to the paste itself before application). Only use natural sugars, like non-acidic fruit juices of mango and guava, which also add to the color and intensity of the shade. The more fruit juice you add, the less water you should mix into the paste.

The wearer should not wash her hands right after the paste flakes off. Heat will help seal the design further, so massage the skin immediately after with clove or lavender oil. Within a few days, the color will darken from a light orange to a reddish brown. (For this reason, the wearer should have her henna painted a few days before a celebratory event, when the design will be at its peak.)

THE CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA



India's caste system is complicated and difficult to explain. Started a thousand years before Christ as a way to separate society into four distinct occupational categories, the system now identifies more than 3,000 castes and 25,000 subcastes.

Some believe that the original four castes were created from the body of Brahma, the God of Creation. From his head came the Brahmins, who were given the role of priests, educators and intellectuals. From his arms came the Kshatriyas, the warriors and rulers responsible for protecting the populace. Vaishyas, or traders, who ran businesses and lent money, came from his thighs. The fourth caste, Shudras, were laborers in the fields and servants in the home; they came from Brahma's feet.

The Dalits, or Untouchables, were denied any role in the caste system, working as butchers, latrine and street cleaners

and leather tanners; they also handled the dead. Children inherited the caste of their parents.

The Mughals, who ruled India for most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, retained India's caste system. Later, the British used the caste tradition as a convenient way to organize their colonial rule.

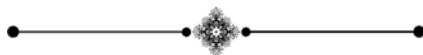
With India's independence in 1947 came a new constitution that banned discrimination on the basis of caste, acknowledging that the system had unfairly given privilege to some while holding others back.

Unfortunately, it took several decades, and repeated Dalit demonstrations, before India provided substantial "reservations" (akin to the Affirmative Action program in the US) that allow Dalits to be admitted to universities and hold public sector jobs.

Caste continues to play a major role in arranged marriages, food preparation and religious worship. Intercaste marriage can blemish the reputation of both families involved and often result in the couple being ostracized. Some castes refuse to eat meat while others insist on it. Indians are tolerant of religious practices different from their own, but each caste continues to practice its own religious rituals.

Because the caste system is so deeply rooted in India's culture, and has been for thousands of years, it will take time for its people to let go of long-held beliefs in the power, privileges and restrictions of castes. Social media has increased the population's exposure to and communication with the non-caste Western world, which is changing some of those beliefs. Similarly, more education and career opportunities for women and lower castes have led to many caste taboos being challenged. Nonetheless, caste-like systems continue not only in India but also Sri Lanka, Nepal, Japan, Korea, Yemen, Indonesia, China and certain countries in Africa.

MALIK'S RECIPE FOR BATTI BALLS



An authentic Rajasthani meal, *dal batti churma* is a hearty dish, both savory and sweet, served at weddings and many other ceremonies. *Dal* is a simple curry that can be made from green, yellow or black lentils as well as dried garbanzo beans, and seasoned with cumin, turmeric, coriander, green chilies, onions, garlic and salt. There are as many recipes for *dal* as there are for *chapattis*.

Batti, a whole wheat flour rolled into a ball and baked in a charcoal fire or oven, accompanies the *dal*. It can be served whole, dunked into *dal*, or it can be crushed and mixed with sugar or jaggery to make the sweet dessert *churma*.

Following is a recipe for the *batti* balls, which Malik deep-fries in *ghee*, but which can be baked in an oven for a healthier dish.

INGREDIENTS:

Whole wheat flour: 2 cups

Fennel seeds: 2 teaspoons

Salt: 2 teaspoons

Melted *ghee* (or canola oil): 4 tablespoons (more, if frying the batti)

Whole yogurt: $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (do not use low fat or nonfat)

Lukewarm water: 2 tablespoons

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
 2. Add the fennel seeds, salt and *ghee*/oil to the wheat flour and mix well.
 3. Stir the water in the yogurt until smooth. Add to the flour mixture.
 4. Knead the dough until all the flour is well mixed. It should feel firm, like cookie dough, not cake mixture.
 5. Roll the dough between your palms to make 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch round balls.
 6. Place the *batti* balls on a cookie tray, 2 inches apart, and bake for 15 minutes. The balls should be a golden brown on the bottom. Turn them over for another 15 minutes to cook the other side.
 7. To test, break one ball apart and make sure it's cooked all the way through.
 8. Serve with *dal*.
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MAKES 4 SERVINGS

THE PALACE RECIPE FOR ROYAL RABRI



An easy-to-make dessert, *rabri* is creamy, rich and wholesome. It's time-consuming, but definitely worth the effort. Read a book while you're stirring—maybe even this one!

INGREDIENTS:

Whole milk: 10 cups

Heavy whipping cream: 2 cups

Sugar: $\frac{4}{5}$ cup

Cardamom seeds, crushed: 1 teaspoon

Toasted sliced slivered almonds: 2 tablespoons

Saffron: 6 threads

Rose or kewra essence (optional): 1 teaspoon

DIRECTIONS:

1. Combine milk and cream in a deep saucepan. Boil for 2 hours on low heat, stirring continuously. Scrape the cream that collects on the sides of the pan, adding it back into the mixture. Do not let the milk burn.
2. Set aside 2 tablespoons of hot milk mixture in a bowl and soak the saffron threads in it.
3. Add sugar to the pan.
4. When the milk mixture is creamy and reduced to half its volume, remove the pan from heat. Let cool.
5. Fold the saffron essence, crushed cardamom seeds and almonds into the mixture.
6. Chill for 4 hours.

MAKES 10 SERVINGS