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CALGARY HERALD

December

**neighbour**

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# Mehndi Mania

India native has turned her hobby into a rewarding profession

COLETTE DERWORIZ  
CALGARY HERALD

**S**urbhi Bhargava is turning one of her traditions in India into a rewarding profession in Calgary, after moving here last August.

The 23-year-old chemist designs mehndi, the traditional art of decorating the hands, feet and shins with a paste of henna.

Henna is a plant grown in the hot climates of India, Pakistan, Iran and Egypt. The natural dyes in the plant — when mixed with certain ingredients — temporarily stain the skin.

Bhargava charges \$5 for a small pattern and a maximum of \$30 for a more elaborate design. The "tattoo-like" designs last anywhere from one to six weeks,



'tattoo-like' designs last anywhere from one to six weeks.

pending on the quality of the henna, the recipe and the exposure to soap and water.

"I have my master's in chemistry," says Bhargava, but when she couldn't find a job with her degree from India, she says she wanted something to keep her busy in her spare time.

"It's a difficult thing, being alone all day," she says. "It was my hobby but now I am doing it commercially."

As a recent bride, Bhargava only moved from India during the summer so she says doing mehndi also helps her to meet people.

Back in India, Bhargava's hobby was also a tradition, using the fine, intricate lines to design lacy, floral and paisley patterns for special events — mostly weddings and festivals.

The historical art form varies from region to region. Each design carries particular meaning for different areas. The fingers and toes of Pharaohs in ancient Egypt were stained with henna prior to mummification. In Africa and South America, the designs are bold and geometric.

Here in Calgary, it's trendy. "There is so much interest in it," says Bhargava. "When I finished one girl, she started jumping for joy, shouting 'it's so beautiful.' If I can make someone happy, it's worth it."

And the most difficult design she created since she moved to Calgary wasn't the beautiful, traditional symbols of India. It was a scorpion.

"I have never made a scorpion, so I had to draw it after looking at a book," she says with a laugh. "It wasn't too difficult."



YOU'VE GOT TO HAND IT TO HER: Surbhi Bhargava applies a mehndi design to the hand of Dana Downey.

Working from home and at the university, Bhargava doesn't expect to become a millionaire with her henna.

She says, however, there is a lot of interest right now, with the Christmas and New Year's season — especially this year with all the millennium parties.

And she may as well enjoy her profession while she still can.

Before long, she may become too busy

to continue her fulfilling work. Bhargava recently applied to the University of Calgary to obtain her doctorate in chemistry.

Bhargava has a personal website at <http://members.xoom.com/dana> for anyone who would like more information. She can be reached by email at [dana@members.xoom.com](mailto:dana@members.xoom.com) or by phone at 403-243-1111. She can also be reached by phone at 403-243-1111.

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