



Al Dukhan

Other names:

Body Smoking

The bench



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Domain

CUSTOMS RELATED TO HOME AND FAMILY PRACTICES

Body Smoking

COMMUNITY GROUPS AND LOCATION



Community groups

Women- from most Sudanese societies and cultures.



Practitioners

Sudanese Women



Purpose / Use

For health and beauty purposes.

It is both cosmetic and medical, as the smoke of sage and lavender contains phenolic or phenol substance that helps in stabilizing skin protein and works on removing the outer layer of the skin. One of the benefits of smoke is that it rids the body of toxins, excess salts, and retained fluids in the body by expelling them through the skin pores in the form of sweat. In addition to treating problems related to joint inflammation or rheumatism and relieving the pain resulting from them. It is a treatment for viral or bacterial diseases and infections such as influenza and colds sometimes, in addition to treating urinary tract infections manifested in burning during urination, continuous itching, difficulty urinating, indigestion, and annoying gases resulting from it, which may occur due to poisoning, cold, bacterial infection, and others. Moreover, smoke helps in eliminating signs of aging, such as wrinkles especially on the face or hands, which can be achieved through regular use. Smoke is also a treatment for scars on the body, which may be due to burns or wounds, as it works on removing them over time by exfoliating the body and removing dead skin cells, resulting in obtaining a smooth-textured skin by getting rid of dark pigmentation and spots that appear on the skin due to continuous exposure to sunlight.



Knowledge / Skills

The smoke requires knowledge of the types of wood and the quantity used inside the pit, as well as some scents and oils used in it, where the woman wipes her body with them before sitting over the smoke pit. Wedding smoke differs from birth smoke and from the usual incense smoke in between them.



Transmission

Inherited and passed down through generations.



Tools, Equipment, Services

The 'Birish' and the 'Shamla', oak or cypress wood, along with aromatic oils such as myrrh or frankincense.



HISTORY

The smoke hole does not have a specific date, but most studies confirm that it is a Sudanese tradition that has been around for hundreds of years.

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, anyone inspecting the exterior courtyard of most homes in Sudan or its suburbs, especially in the old popular neighborhoods, would notice a hole in one corner of the house, with a depth ranging between 50 and 70 centimeters, lined with a clay vessel in a circular frame, known as the "smoke hole." On top of it, a traditional covering is placed, which is a circular mat made of palm leaves with a circular opening the size of the hole. This is part of the longstanding beauty rituals among Sudanese women, especially before marriage and after childbirth. The smoke is a steam bath without using water, completed by the smoke emitted from burning a quantity of acacia, jujube, or eucalyptus wood in a hole underground, where the girl sits facing the opening from which the smoke emerges into a small tent made of goat wool in the past or a modern blanket covering the entire body. Modernity has influenced Sudanese traditions and customs in various forms, with some disappearing completely except for the smoke hole, which has resisted modernization and maintained its cosmetic significance among Sudanese women, known for their interest in perfume and incense, as noted by the anthropologist Amira Ahmed. She raised questions related to this particular interest, suggesting that this close connection between Sudanese women and their perfumes may provide insight into understanding and analyzing gender politics and relationships in Sudanese society. Further exploration of this case may reveal meanings and implications of perfume beyond its material and sensory value, as it represents an important element in the Sudanese heritage system. The question remains about the significance and role of perfume in a conservative society like Sudan, governed by patriarchal culture in regulating women's relationship with society. In other words, can these rich rituals in preparing, manufacturing, and using traditional perfumes be considered a means for Sudanese women to create a private space to compensate for their historical isolation, marginalization, and exclusion, and if this hypothesis holds true, can perfumes, with their material and symbolic value, be a tool for resisting the oppression targeting women? Can we go further to deduce that perfume, with its charm and benefits, might have served as a weapon for the Sudanese women's revolution against the patriarchal system, colonialism in the past, fascist regimes, and dictatorships that have plagued the country, and what is the potential of perfume in fostering solidarity and collective action among women in Sudan? Feminist researcher and physician Nahed Mohamed El-Hassan addresses some of these questions, stating that body care rituals are part of building the home, where the smoke hole and sometimes the smoke canopy help in digging and preparing them, sometimes assisted by men, and they are not just sauna rooms but a comprehensive system of rights. The moment a woman sits in the smoke hole is the moment she calms down from the day's noise, gathers herself, immerses in herself, and relaxes. Smoke is an aromatherapy treatment to alleviate spiritual and physical pains, cleanse the body, and get rid of cooking and household odors. Smoke is a non-verbal communication language with neighbors, guests at home, and sometimes relatives. It sets boundaries, restricts movement and visits, and is also a form of communication with the husband, about the need for love and affection. It is a detachment from a time that belongs to her. It is the way she lives for herself and demands her rights without speaking. Those who see smoke as scandalous or outdated and replace it with a sauna or similar must pay attention to its other purposes, especially among women still within the confines of traditional institutions. Smoke is their voice of assertion and defense of their private spaces in the house.

Cultural Value:

Part of the marriage customs, childbirth practices, and beauty rituals specific to Sudanese women distinguish them from women of other regions.

Associated Practices:

Marriage, childbirth, social events.

Cultural Expressions

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VIABILITY

Threats:

The vegetation cover in the country has decreased after losing 60 percent of the trees over the past three decades, as forest areas are rapidly eroding due to indiscriminate tree cutting for quick profits.

The vertical development of modern architecture, there are less outdoor spaces to practice the dukhan, body smoking.

Natural Resources used

Oak and cypress wood. Mix sheep fat with cloves water and some perfumes.

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