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The presence of Colours in Hinduism and Buddhism: An analysis of significance

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Abstract

Colour has always been an important element in human civilization. We mostly describe things by its colour, shape or smell. For example, Red flower, Yellow jacket etc. according to a Japanese text book, we can find how colors express certain imagery and feelings, such as cold, hot, heavy or light etc. For example black evokes the feeling of

heaviness, on the other hand the color white feels light in weight. Colors have also been imbued with religious significances. In Hinduism certain deities are portrayed through unique and specific color and meanings associated with that colour. The artists define the differences between deities and human in their paintings with the use of color.

Keywords: Colour, feelings, Hinduism, Buddhism, Boddhisatva

Introduction

When we talk about colours, different hues like Red, Blue, Green, Yellow and many more comes to our mind. But are they the real colour of the objects that are perceived as colourful? We can only see those objects which reflects light, therefore the object which looks yellow or blue, implies that it is receiving all the colours of the light and giving away only the yellow or blue which means, colours are a scientific matter of perception. In this way, if an object absorbs all the colours and does not give any back, it looks black. On the other hand, if the object does not receive any single colour and reflects everything back, then it seems white.

A social experiment was organised in Japan where some people were offered juice of three colours, red, yellow and blue on a hot summer day. Most of the people went with the blue one. The yellow one was less popular among the people and the red one was the least popular. Here, blue colour imparted cool feelings but on the other hand red implied a sense of warmth which would be discomforting on a hot day. In another similar study, two big boxes of same size and same weight were prepared and one was coloured white while the other was black. People undertaking the test felt that the black box was heavier than the white one. This shows that in our minds, we think that the colour black suggests something graver and heavier than the colour white and that is why people said that the black box is heavier than the white one even though the weight of the boxes were the same. Again, the colour of the walls and the chair tables in some restaurants are red, and it is because the imagery of the red colour is associated with the increase of appetite, so the restaurant owners use red colour in their restaurant to attract customers.

We are always told by our parents, grand-parents or teachers since childhood to always show our true colours in the things we love. It is assumed that, true colour means one's own originality and identity. While this is a true explanation, it also has an another meaning. For example, if one shows love for other people, people will know that person as a loving person, or if a person always speaks angrily to others, then people will see him/her as an angry person. In this way, a person is embodied by the temperament he/she imparts to his/her surroundings. In a similar manner of speaking a colour is the way to describe an object based on the way that it reflects light to its surroundings. It is also true that, if an object is red to human beings, it is not necessarily so for other living beings. For example, even a few years back, it was thought that dogs and cats see only in black and white, but recently it is proved that, they also have colour vision but not as good as that of the human beings.

Hinduism

As we all know that Hinduism is a religion or way of life which is based on pure science behind everything, from the planting of the *Tulshi* tree in the house to the art of Yoga. Sastras and Puranas display the glorious history of Hinduism. Hinduism talks about the chakras in our body, and each chakra has its own importance and colour. If one can open all the chakras, he or she will supposedly get enlightenment. Every chakra has its own 'Beej Mantra' or 'Mool Mantra', the chanting of which in a proper sitting posture can open up the chakras.

The seven major chakras from the lower part of the body are- Muladhara or rootchakra (red), Svadhithana or sacral chakra (orange), Manipura or solar plexus chakra (yellow), Anahata or heart chakra (green), Visuddhi or throat chakra (blue), Ajna or third eye chakra (indigo), and Sahasrara or crown chakra (violet or white). There are three granthis or knots known as Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi and Rudra granthi in our chakras.

Like other religion in Hinduism also colours play a very important role. All the colours have its own characteristics and meaning.

Why Krishna is blue?

Meaning of the word 'Krishna' is 'Black' or 'Dark' in Sanskrit language. There are many places where Krishna is worshipped in black or dark colour. Krishna is also known as 'Syama sundara' which means the beautiful blackish one. In Vedic references, Krishna is referred to as Megha-Varnam or coloured like the dark rain clouds. The Shyama Sundara form of Krishna shines through different aspects such as, the peacock feather on his crown which seems like the rainbow in the cloudy sky, and the pure white pearl necklace which can be seen as symbolizing the flocks of swans or ducks flying in the sky. One can easily find the beauty of nature in the form of Krishna's Shyama Sundara form.

The colour blue, is the colour of infinite and the

immeasurable or endlessness. It evokes the vast sense of the sky or the ocean. We know that Krishna is mythically considered as the avatar of lord Vishnu, and he has no end or no beginning, he is everything. Therefore, in the battle of Kurukshetra Krishna explained himself as 'I am the Self, O Gudakesa, seated in the hearts of all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all beings.'^[1] [Chapter 10, Verse 20] There are some other explanations as well. When Krishna was a small child, his maternal uncle Kans sent Putana to kill him, and Putana fed him poisonous milk. As Krishna is the Avatar of Vishnu who reclines on the Seshnaag the king of snakes, the poison did not harm him and only changed his colour into blue. Also, when he fought Kalia naag in Yamuna River his colour changed into blue due to the poison. Similarly, when Samudramanthan took place and the poison rose out of the sea, lord Shiva drank it to spare other beings from its effect and became known as Neel kantha (blue throat). The blue colour is used also for differentiating between deities and humans. For example, if we see the motif of one person holding the reins for another person in a chariot it is considered as a general scene, but if the person holding the reins of the chariot is blue in colour, the meaning of that depiction becomes transformed into the great battle of Kuruksetra, and it is assumed that the warrior on the chariot is Arjuna.

<p>अहमात्मागुडाकेशसर्वभूताशयस्थितः अहमादिश्वमध्यंचभूतानामन्तएवच॥</p>	<p>aham ātmā guḍākeśha sarva-bhūtāśhaya- sthītaḥ aham ādiśh cha madhyaṁ cha bhūtānām anta eva cha</p>	<p>O Arjun, I am seated in the heart of all living entities. I am the beginning, middle, and end of all beings. Chapter 10; Verse 20</p>
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Swami Vivekananda says,

"... It is a natural law that anything sublimes and infinite is associated with blue colour. Take a handful of water, it is absolutely colourless. But look at the deep wide ocean; it is as blue as anything. Examine the space near you; it is colourless. But look at the infinite expanse of the sky; it is blue."

Sadhguru says,

"... Anything which is larger than your perception tends to be blue because blue is the basis of all-inclusiveness. It is based on this that so many gods in India are shown as blue-skinned. Shiva has a blue skin, Krishna has a blue skin, Rama has a blue skin. It is not that their skin was blue. They were referred to as blue gods because they had a blue aura..."

There are also explanations where the blue-coloured body of lord Rama and Krishna explained as an aspect of their protection towards mankind and destruction of evil.

The red colour

The colour red is associated with Shakti or power in Hinduism. It is known as the colour of Adishakti or supreme goddess. Red is used in every Hindu auspicious occasions such as, wedding ceremony, the birth of a child etc. Women's use sindoor in their hair parting for the longevity of the husband, as well as to receive the blessings of the supreme goddess can also be considered as an example.

Red is the colour of love, affection, passion; therefore, red creates positive feelings and also attracts people. Some

Hindus tie a red thread on the right (for men) and left (for women) hand as a protector. It is known as kalava, and its purpose to get blessings and protection. The red swastika symbol is also frequently seen in Hindu households. It is drawn to bring prosperity to house. We also offer red Kumkum to the mother goddess to get the blessings and the grace of the mother.

The saffron colour

Saffron is a colour consisting of the golden-yellow and red. Since this hue has a fire-like quality it has an inner meaning of purity which comes after burning. Hindu sadhu or monks wear this saffron robe to eliminate the impurity or evil. The Saffron also represents wisdom.

The Indian saffron or bhagwa robes are used by the Hindu monks, therefore the Theravada Buddhist monks use the lighter saffron robe to create a difference. Sometimes, they use maroonish robes (followers of Vajrayana). The saffron is also the colour of rising sun which removes the darkness, and it also represents selflessness. Red is colour of worship; yellow is worn by the priest not monk and saffron is worn by those who has renounced everything.

Buddhism

In Vajrayana sect of Buddhism, we can see the five Tathagatas or the five great Buddhas. Their representative colour may vary but the number is always five. Among them Vairochana is known as the 'Adi-Buddha' or the first Buddha. Both the representative colour and the way of meditation carries difference. Vajrayana Buddhism is popular in Japan and it was founded there by Kukai. Each

¹ <https://asitis.com/10>

colour has its own significance as well as importance.

- a. Vairochana: White
- b. Ratnasambhava: Yellow or golden
- c. Akshobhya: Blue
- d. Amitabha: Red
- e. Amoghasiddhi: Green

White is for the transformation of ignorance into wisdom, yellow is about transforming the pride into wisdom of sameness, blue is transforming the anger into wisdom, red is for dissolution of attachment into wisdom of discernment, green is about elevation into wisdom of accomplishment.

The Red

Red is the colour of power, passion, strength etc. In Japan red is associated with the Happiness. In Tibetan Buddhism, it is one of the five sacred stones, which is supposed to elevate the energy of life force. People believe that red can protect them from the evil or bad spirit.

The Black

Black is the colour of darkness. Black started being used as a colour in the spectrum of Buddhism after many decades. Black is considered as the colour of darkness, hate, ignorance.

Yellow or Saffron

The colour yellow or saffron seems very close to the light of the sun. This is one of the reasons the Buddhist monks use the yellow or the saffron robe. This colour also represents the feeling of a person detached from the materialistic world. It is a colour of desire-lessness and humanity.

Conclusion

Colour always plays a significant role in religious belief. The colours describe the state of mind, Buddhism believes that when meditating, focusing on a particular colour can help the individual to achieve the grace of that colour. For example, blue is the colour of the emotion of envy, but when someone meditates on blue the emotion changes into wisdom, thereby emitting its grace. Similarly in Hinduism, meditation is conducted to open the chakras in our body.

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