

From a Life Filled with Colors to the Absence of Color. Black: A Joyous Journey to Coming of Age

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Abstract

The use of colours holds a pervasive presence within human culture, carrying assorted symbolic connotations and emotional connections attributed to each distinct hue. Colours serve as a means to convey sentiments, aesthetics, and cultural import in diverse facets of existence, encompassing art, fashion, design, and rituals. Nevertheless, the journey from a vivid, colourful life to one characterised by the absence of colours, notably the profound darkness of black, can represent a noteworthy coming-of-age experience within various cultures and contexts. During childhood, we all cherish the exuberance of colors, akin to a rainbow-like day filled with boundless joy, while night has consistently symbolised fear and malevolence in the majority of global cultures. As we mature, we undergo a process of self-adjustment, progressively comprehending the world's inherent darkness and endeavouring to fit into the social structure by learning about its multifaceted aspects.

This research paper delves into several key aspects:

1. The transition from a colourful existence to one devoid of colors, focusing on the profound darkness of black, symbol of a rite of passage into adulthood.
2. How this shift from a colourful world to the obscurity of black is perceived, experienced, and interpreted within Indian culture.
3. The psychological and emotional dimensions of this transformation, including the symbolism and connotations associated with the black colour, the emotional repercussions of the absence of colour, and the cognitive processes underpinning the perception and interpretation of black as representative of the absence of colour.
4. The potential consequences of this transition at individual and societal levels, including its influence on identity formation, self-expression, and social interactions.
5. The examination of the role of individual and cultural factors in shaping the perception and interpretation of this transition, and how it may diverge across various Indian cultures and religions.

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Introduction

In Indian culture, colours have great significance, symbolising spirituality, tradition, and artistic expression. They infuse every aspect of daily life, from festivals and religious rituals to traditional attire. The vibrant hues found in temples, artworks, and decorative elements evoke a sense of reverence, transcending mere aesthetics. Colours in Indian culture serve as conduits of emotions, representing virtues and establishing a deep connection with nature and the divine.

The meaning of colours in Indian culture has its roots in every sphere of life and has a great influence on people's daily decision-making. One of the most prominent representations of colour in Indian culture is the annual festival Holi, also referred to as 'the festival of colour', which celebrates the end of winter. During Holi, people crowd the streets by splashing brilliantly coloured dyes on each other (Kudrya-Marais 2022). Festivals like Holi and Diwali exemplify the joyful and inclusive spirit of Indian society, as people from diverse backgrounds come together in a riot of colours, laughter, and unity. The colourful attire worn by Indians reflects regional diversity and cultural heritage, acting as a vivid canvas that showcases the nation's kaleidoscope of traditions.

Another iconic representation of colour can be found in Indian food and its many species of vibrant colours. From red paprika to yellow turmeric, from orange saffron to golden masala, Indian cuisine is an explosion of flavours, smells and colours. Spices are used the same way artists use paint. In a well-cooked dish, very ingredients should be well-balanced, with no one spice or colour ever dominant over the others. Colours in Indian culture are more than aesthetic; they act as conduits of emotions, spirituality, and cultural heritage (Kudrya-Marais 2022).

Colours create a vibrant mosaic that celebrates life, fosters unity, and inspires individuals around the world. India's enchanting colours continue to captivate, and leave an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of those who explore their depth and meaning.

Methodology

Human beings continue to develop and evolve from childhood to old age. Developmental psychologists often divide our development into three areas: physical development, cognitive development, and psychosocial development (Child Development 2023). Preferences and choices we make for our social behaviour fall under psychosocial development. Erik Erikson, a German-American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst, proposed a comprehensive theory of psychosocial development consisting of eight stages. These stages are as follows: Infancy (0-1 year), Early Childhood (1-3 years), Preschool (3-6 years), School Age (6-12 years), Adolescence (12-18 years), Early Adulthood (18-40 years), Middle Adulthood (40-65 years), and Late Adulthood (65+ years). Each stage is characterized by specific conflicts or challenges that individuals must successfully navigate in order to achieve healthy psychological development (Understanding Psychosocial Development 2023).

Adolescence (the Identity vs. Role Confusion stage) is the fifth stage during which individuals embark on a journey of exploring their personal identity, encompassing aspects such as values, interests, and appearance. During this critical period, teenagers strive to establish a sense of self and often engage in experimentation with different styles and expressions. It is also a transitional phase as teenagers transition to the next stage of early adulthood, commonly referred to as 'coming of age.' Their preferences for colour and various other choices undergo significant changes to align with those of adults.

For this paper, the author has undertaken a study in an attempt to understand the various factors that drive adolescence, especially a preference for certain colours like black. The aim of this study is to explore colour preferences among adolescents and the underlying reasons behind their choices. Given its greater prevalence in the social science field, a qualitative research methodology has been selected for this study. The population of the study consists of 73 adolescent students (both male and female, ages 12-19 years) from a private school in Delhi, India. This population has been specifically selected in order to collect comprehensive and detailed data from the participants and seek and explore detailed insights for the questions asked.

To maintain social distancing measures, the data was collected through a Google form, thus giving a convenient time to each participant. They were given the option to skip any question they did not wish to answer. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured before, during, and after the submission of the data.

Analysis

The study has revealed that adolescents who embrace darkness and enjoy watching horror movies (it indicates that they are in control of their fear and can easily overcome it) (Clasen 2021) tend to incline towards black clothing. They predominantly opt for black attire, particularly when they are with their friends. According to these adolescents, the primary motivation behind choosing black clothing is its versatility, as it complements other colours and exudes a stylish and trendy aesthetic. Furthermore, wearing black clothing instills a sense of confidence in them. Those adolescents who do not wear black clothing often perceive individuals who do as stylish and fashionable.

The preference for black clothing can be interpreted in various ways, indicating different meanings and desires. For some, it may represent a yearning for individuality, rebellion against societal norms, or a sense of identity and belonging to a specific subculture or group. Selecting black as a preferred colour reflects a conscious effort to express uniqueness, a refusal to conform, or a longing for introspection and self-reflection.

Psychology of black

Color can repair and heal the body when its frequency aligns with the emotion needed to activate the microparts so healing can take place. Using colour in visualization is both very effective and easy for beginners, given that color has a very strong radiating effect on the whole body. Every other form of color therapy is fundamentally symbolic (O'Connor 2011). The psychology of colour explores how different colours impact human emotions, behaviours, and cognitive processes, including the unique psychological implications of black, despite the fact that it represents the absence of colour. When used in contrast with other colours, black enhances visual perception by creating distinct boundaries and increasing attention and focus. It also creates an illusion of depth and space, evoking feelings of mystery and intrigue in artistic compositions and interior design. The cognitive associations of black with darkness, night, and the unknown influence individuals' perceptions and emotional responses. Black is commonly associated with elegance, formality, and sophistication, conveying refinement and exclusivity in fashion and luxury brands. It also evokes curiosity, fascination, and anticipation, representing the mysterious and unseen. Additionally, black is linked to power, authority, and control, instilling a sense of empowerment and confidence, particularly in business, law, and politics.

Emotional aspects of black

In the vibrant tapestry of Indian culture, the black colour assumes profound symbolic significance across multiple domains. First and foremost, it is believed to possess protective qualities, serving as a powerful deterrent against evil spirits and negative energies. The sight of black threads, charms, and amulets adorning wrists, necks, and doors is a common sight, representing a quest for spiritual protection and overall well-being.

Moreover, black carries a sense of reverence and mysticism within certain religious and spiritual practices, acting as a conduit to connect with divine and cosmic forces. Priests, monks, and spiritual leaders often don black attire, which serves as a visible manifestation of their unwavering dedication to their faith and the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment.

Additionally, black symbolizes strength, power, and authority. It evokes qualities of resilience, determination, and unwavering confidence. In traditional art forms like Kathakali, as well as martial arts, black costumes are worn to embody characters with heroic attributes, capturing the essence of valour and might.

Lastly, black is embraced for its enigmatic allure, evoking an air of mystery, sophistication, and timeless elegance. It finds its place in formal attire, such as black sarees or suits, donned during special occasions and formal events. This choice reflects a desire to emanate style, refinement, and an enduring sense of beauty.

These facets of the black colour exemplify the multi-layered symbolism and deep-rooted cultural significance it holds within Indian society, intertwining spirituality, protection, strength, and aesthetic appeal into a rich tapestry of interpretation and expression.

Symbolism and meanings associated with black in Indian culture

The black colour in India has connotations of undesirability, evil, negativity, and inertia. It represents anger and darkness and is associated with a lack of energy, barrenness, and death. Black is used as a representation of evil and is often used to ward off evil. For example, an infant is traditionally blessed with a small black dot on the chin or under the ear to ward off the evil eye (Kudrya-Marais 2022). Colours in Indian culture hold symbolic significance throughout different stages of life, from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. Throughout their lives, the vivacity of vibrant colours has been deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of India. Even though, in Hindu culture, black is often regarded as inauspicious, however, it is also believed to possess protective qualities against evil forces.

- According to Hindu mythology, Lord Shani, associated with planet Saturn, is linked to black colour in India. Black symbolizes Shani's presence and is used in depictions and offerings. Black represents Shani's qualities of discipline, justice, and introspection, while also offering protection against negativity and malefic influences, aligning with Shani's role as a dispenser of justice and karma. (Bhatia 2020)
- Goddess Kali, a prominent deity in Hinduism, embodies the dissolution of ego, primordial energy, and the power to conquer evil. The black colour symbolizes transcendence, the mysterious potential of creation, and Kali's fierce nature. It also represents deep meditative absorption and her transformative and divine attributes in Hindu worship. (DALMIYA 2000)
- The Sabarimala Temple, located in Kerala, India, is a prominent pilgrimage site dedicated to Lord Ayyappa. The symbolism of wearing black clothing in Sabarimala is closely associated with the pilgrimage traditions and the devotees' commitment to their spiritual journey. Wearing black clothing during the pilgrimage is a significant aspect of this

observance. The black colour is considered symbolically purifying and represents the renunciation of worldly attachments. It is believed that black absorbs negative energy and purifies the mind and body of the devotee. The black clothing worn by the devotees, known as "Ayyappa Mala," typically consists of a black dhoti (a traditional Indian garment) and a black shirt or shawl. The black attire embodies humility, simplicity, and surrender to the divine. The symbolism of wearing black clothing in Sabarimala represents austerity, renunciation, purification, humility, unity, and a deep connection with Lord Ayyappa. It reflects the devotees' commitment to their spiritual journey and their willingness to let go of worldly attachments to attain spiritual enlightenment. (Osella n.d.)

Discussions and conclusions

In Indian culture, colours not only hold symbolic meanings in religious rituals and festivities but also carry significant associations with different stages of life, from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. In childhood, colours play a vital role in stimulating imagination, creativity, and learning. Bright and vibrant colours are often associated with this stage, representing innocence, joy, and playfulness. Shades of yellow, orange, and pink are commonly used to create a cheerful and stimulating environment for children. These colours evoke feelings of happiness, energy, and curiosity, encouraging exploration and fostering a sense of wonder. During adolescence, colours take on a more nuanced symbolism. As young individuals undergo various physical and emotional changes, colours can represent personal growth, self-expression, and identity. Teenagers often gravitate towards bold and contrasting colours that reflect their evolving personalities and desire for individuality. Vibrant shades like purple, blue, and green are commonly associated with adolescence, symbolizing creativity, introspection, and the pursuit of dreams.

In adulthood, colours can carry deeper meanings, reflecting societal roles, responsibilities, and emotions. Earthy tones like brown and beige are often associated with stability, maturity, and grounding. Blue, representing trust and reliability, is commonly embraced by professionals and individuals in positions of authority. White represents purity, clarity, and wisdom, often sought after in spiritual practices and personal growth. Additionally, rich and regal colours like gold and red symbolize prosperity, success, and passion, resonating with the ambitions and desires of adulthood.

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