



# The Spiritual Language of Colour: A Case Study of Colour Symbolism in Hindu Community in South Africa

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## Abstract

This study investigates the symbolism of colour in Hinduism. With a specific focus on the Hindu community in eThekweni, South Africa, the case study employed a qualitative research method to investigate the roles and cultural associations of colour in Hindu religion, and how it has been adopted and integrated into the cultural practices. Two samples of population were selected using a purposive sampling technique: namely, 10 religious leaders from 10 eThekweni Temples and 10 senior citizens (ages 55 and above) in the Hindu community who visit Temples and practise Hinduism on a regular basis. The participants were interviewed using open-ended questions and the collected data was analysed using thematic analysis. Seven themes emerged from the data analysed which include 1) the main colours in Hindu religion; 2) avoided colours; 3) cultural norms of colour in the Hindu community; 4) personal attitude toward colours; 5) benefits of colour therapy; 6) use of chakras; and 7) the healing properties of colours. The findings additionally revealed that colour symbolism is still widely used among Hindu communities in South Africa. Hence, this study creates awareness and promote the application of the symbolism in professional practices, especially in design field.

**Keywords:** Colour symbolism, Colour therapy, Colour wheel, Semiotic theory, Hinduism.

## Introduction

Colours have a great influence on people all around the world. They evoke different emotions and hold meaning in any given religion and culture. The symbolism of colour suggests the application of colour varies across religions and cultural societies (Pavey, 2009). Each culture has its own colour associations which can also change over time. The same colour may have different meanings throughout the history of any selected community. Such change occurs in colour symbolism due to individual, cultural and universal values which are never constant. The meaning of colour also depends on the environment in which it exists and is strongly influenced by time and events which take place continuously (Kremers, Baraas & Marshall, 2016).

In many cases, colour is used to convey the beliefs and values of the world's major religions. Hinduism, one of the world's oldest religion still being practised today (Soundar & Fee, 2013), uses elements from nature – namely, water, sun and earth – causing the colours to become



the representations of these elements and adopting the symbolic meanings of these colours into religion. Particular colours are used to create specific meanings, such as the orange robes of holy priests, the blue skin of deities and the white clothing worn by the widows (Soundar & Fee, 2013).

However, religion, being a social consciousness that expresses values and regulates social value, communications and relations, has consistently been co-dependent and firmly related to globalization. Local and global cultures interact with and are shaped by each other which causes a partial loss of cultural identity among several cultures. As religious ideology is closely connected to cultural practices (Kumar, 2000), the knowledge of religious institutions is slowly fading away and being replaced by uniformity caused by globalisation (Ritzer, 2009). According to Tetreault and Denemark (2004), this uniformity has led to the disappearance of great knowledge of culture and religion in Hindu communities and the viewing of the communities through a Western lens. Among others, research shows that the knowledge and application of colour symbolism in Hindu community is slowly fading away (Ritzer, 2009).

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to explore the roles of colour in Hindu religion and its cultural associations in the Hindu community. The main goal of this study is to create awareness about the colour symbolism and promote its application as a tool for sustaining the cultural practices of Hinduism.

### **Hinduism and Spirituality**

Hinduism is considered the oldest religion and dharma, or way of life in the world, with origins dating back to the time of the existence of Proto-Indian civilisation (Lipner, 1998). According to numerous scholars, its roots and customs dating back more than 4,000 years. Hinduism now has about 900 million followers, and is thus the third-largest religion behind Christianity and Islam. Approximately 95 percent of the world's Hindus live in India (Sharma, 2003).

At the same time, Hinduism preserves the laws and foundations of life originating from ancient times. By its own account, Hinduism is one of the most widespread religions in the world and accounts for about 80 percent of India's population. (Lipner, 1998). In recent years, Hinduism has transcended national boundaries and become popular in several countries in Europe and America, claiming to be recognised as one of the world's religions. (Lipner, 1998). "As a religious phenomenon, Hinduism is complex and contradictory. A serious historical and cultural problem is the very definition of Hinduism" (Cobb, 2008: 58).

In terms of the content and boundaries of its concept, there is no satisfactory definition or explanation of what to attribute to Hinduism. According to Cobb (2008), throughout history Hinduism has developed as a synthesis of social organisation, religious and philosophical doctrine and theological views. It covers all spheres of life, such as ideological, social, legal and behavioural aspects. Hinduism is not only a religion but a way of life and an integral behavioural standard (Cobb, 2008).

The complex religious system of Hinduism combines the most opposite extremes and adapts itself to a variety of social and political conditions, while retaining an extraordinary variety, brightness and vitality. Hinduism can also be interpreted as a system of signs and symbols of culture that carry ancient traditions and develop and preserve them under different historical conditions. This feature of Hinduism is evident in many ancient philosophical writings as well as in religious instructions for the most important ceremonies in the life of a Hindu, such as birth, marriage and death.



## Colour Symbolism in Hinduism

The meaning of colours in Indian culture has its roots in Hindu religion and has a great influence on people's decision-making in their everyday life. One of the most prominent representations of colour in Indian culture is an 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. Another iconic representation of colour can be found in Indian cuisine 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 in the same way as artists use paint. A well-cooked dish should represent a perfect balance of all ingredients, with no single spice or colour ever dominant over the others (Olson, 2007).

The image of the world's significant forces, the constituent pieces of the universe, was a triadic tone in antiquated India. This positively influences shading imagery: Tama is constantly connected with the dark tone, the shade of refusal; Raja is related with the red tone, the most seasoned throughout the entire existence of humankind; an individual is related with blood, fire and love; Sattva is related to white, communicating help from any obstruction, addressing the exact opposite of dark. The Indian practice of communicating with colours corresponding to the emotional state gives white colour the properties of goodness, as it is described by a caste of priests (Brahmins). This has stayed the unchanged tradition for centuries (Olson, 2007).

The same principle can be traced in the Upanishads triad Which is a series of Hindu sacred treatises written in Sanskrit c. 800–200 BCE, which explain the Vedas in chiefly mystical and monistic terms. In "Chandogya Upanishad" it is said: "Red colour is the colour of fire. White colour is the colour of water; and black is the original colour of the earth. So, in the fire disappears all that is usually called the fire modification. This is just the name appearing in the speech, and only three colours (form) are true". According to the Chandogya Upanishad, the whole world is three-coloured (Olson, 2007).

Research of colour exemplified the highlights of Indian culture throughout the entire existence of India because of its unique status. Colours in Indian culture are consistent and long-lasting. In this way, the most popular embellishments such as yellow or red spots are available in regular culture. These include Tilak, which ladies put on their brows and adornments made with red paint which they put on the palms and on their feet (Olson, 2007). Burton (2009) argues that attention has been paid to culture differences in perception of colour and these can result in visual communication failures. Colour does not only evoke physical, physiological and aesthetic reactions, but also causes a series of particular intellectual reflexes and responses. Colour can also be perceived as a message and have associations with a particular event, an object and an emotion while being perceived on a subconscious level. Colour semantics and its effects on perception and persuasion are widely used in visual communication across the world.

Hinduism uses the art of symbolism with an amazing effect. No other religion in the world can be compared to this ancient religion, which is overflowing with symbols, colours and rituals. (Khaled, 2007). All Hindus are subjugated by this symbolism that is spreading in one way or another throughout life. The main Hindu symbolism is presented in the Dharma Chakra. The main Hindu symbols are AUM, which represents the universal name of the Lord and surrounds its creation; SWASTIKA, which symbolises the eternal nature of Brahman throughout Eternity. There is a right-facing symbol (clockwise) (卐) called swastika, which symbolizes surya (the "sun"), prosperity and good luck, while the left-facing symbol (anti-clockwise) (卐) is called sauwastika, and this symbolises the night or tantric aspects of Kali (Quinn, 2005). The Lotus Flower represents the true soul of the worshiper; Purnakumba, which refers to the mother

earth or the gracious goddess of fertility, and Lakshmi, and Saffron Colour, the colour of the deity Agni or fire, symbolising the Highest Grace that has descended upon man (Khaled, 2007).

### Chakras, Colours and Hindu Gods

The work of Harding (2018) provides a detailed guide to chakras used in practice of yoga and the principles of Ayurveda from India. When applied, the appropriate colours enable the body to restore its harmony and well-being (Harding, 2018). Just as our physical bodies require a variety of foods for healthy balance and function, our bodies require a continuous balanced energy flow to facilitate harmonious development (Harding, 2018). This energy originates within light, which is separated into the colour spectrum. The colour spectrum frequencies are associated with “Consciousness” which in turn can help balance and bring harmony to subtle levels within our system (Harding, 2018). The application of colour helps bring about harmony within our subtle and physical levels, affecting our cells’ consciousness.

Each of the seven main chakra centres in our body is represented by a colour (Harding, 2018). Around this connection, one can assign a whole world of meaning to each colour based on the chakra to which it is tied (Harding, 2018). The energy centres correspond with certain emotions and physical body parts. Recognising each colour’s meaning is useful when it comes to channelling colour in everyday life to manifest emotions and healing (Harding, 2018).



**Figure 1:** Hindu Chakras  
Source: Harding (2018)

The word ‘chakra’ is derived from Sanskrit and means wheel or circle of life (Harding, 2018). Referring to Figure 1 above, they comprise seven basic energy locations found in the body and are associated with a range of sounds, images and Hindu gods. In Hinduism, the constant flow of energy through all the chakras is referred to as “Shakti”. Harding (2018) writes that the idea of chakras was first mentioned in the ancient Hindu sacred texts, the Vedas, and plays an important role in Tibetan Buddhism. Chakras are located along the spine and influence various nervous systems and organs with their energy. These energy vortices emanate from Brahman according to Hindu beliefs. Shakti currents are believed to emanate from one chakra point and then move to the next as they empty the body and soul (Harding, 2018). The energy stored in the foundation of the spine (root chakra) is called Kundalini. The spiritual goal is to release the Kundalini to achieve a more pronounced consciousness and union with the infinite consciousness of Brahman. Through meditation and Kundalini Yoga, the energy can rise back up the spine until it arrives at the highest point of the head (crown chakra), creating a supernatural encounter (Harding, 2018).

- i. **Muladhara:** The root chakra - located at the base of the spine. It is associated with the colour red. It influences confidence, trust in life and self-esteem. The baser instincts arise from here – the need to survive or fight. This chakra represents Lords Ganesha and Brahman (Harding, 2018).



- ii. **Swadhisthana:** The sacral chakra - located below the navel. It is associated with orange. It influences sexual desires, attraction and the need to procreate. Other emotions such as anger, fear and hatred originate in this chakra. This chakra represents Lord Vishnu (Harding, 2018).
- iii. **Manipura:** The solar plexus chakra - located on the underside of the sternum. This is associated with bright yellow. It influences the lower back, digestive system, liver and gallbladder. Feelings associated with this chakra include determination, self-acceptance and willpower. This is where instinctual feelings are transformed into more complex emotions. This chakra represents Lord Shiva (Harding, 2018).
- iv. **Anahata:** The heart chakra - located in the centre of the chest. It is associated with green. Emotions associated with this location are love, compassion, emotional security, forgiveness and loving kindness. This chakra represents Lord Ishvara (Harding, 2018).
- v. **Vishuddha:** The Throat Chakra - located at the throat, above the larynx. It is associated with blue. It is the source of the ability to communicate and express creativity and individuality. This chakra is associated with Lord Sadashiva (Harding, 2018).
- vi. **Ajna:** The Third Eye Chakra - located at the front of the head between the eyebrows. This is associated with indigo. The mind as an organ of sense and action is associated with this chakra. Feelings associated with this chakra are spirituality, consciousness and sense of time. This chakra is associated with the god, Ardhanarishvara (Harding, 2018).
- vii. **Sahasrara:** The crown chakra - located at the top of the head. It is associated with violet or gold. All others emanate from this chakra. It relates to pure consciousness. and is known as the highest centre of contact with God (Harding, 2018).

In the seventeenth century, ideas about the nature of colour were changing. The basics of modern scientific concepts about colour were introduced to the public by Isaac Newton in his work *New Theory of Light and Colour*, published in 1672. (Seiler-Hugova, 2011). For the first time, Newton divided the science of colour into two parts; namely, the objective, referring to the physical perception, and the subjective, related to the sensory perception. He discovered that light has a complex composition and consists of radiations with various indices. Having understood the solar spectrum and explaining its nature, Newton laid the beginning of the linear theory of colour arrangement (Seiler-Hugova, 2011). He divided the colours into primary and derivatives and was the first one to introduce experiments in optical mixing of colours. His colour classification system laid the basis for the colour system in our time.

Gage (1999) writes that from the middle of the twentieth century applied colour sciences received great development in the studies of psychologists, physiologists and ergonomists. At this time, it was proven that colour is an essential component of the habitat and human environment. These studies have spurred a huge amount of research and experiments in this area (Gage, 1999).

With the design and success of the humanities in the twentieth century, colour became the object of study in various areas of humanitarian thought, such as linguistics, psychology, cultural studies and art. In linguistics the issues related to word formation were investigated – names of colours, features of colour semantics and the vocabulary of colour values were introduced, as was the categorisation of colours (Gage, 1999). In the psycholinguistic aspect of study, different questions related to the symbolic and sub-textual nature of colour were researched in relation to language (Gage, 1999). In cultural studies, special attention was paid

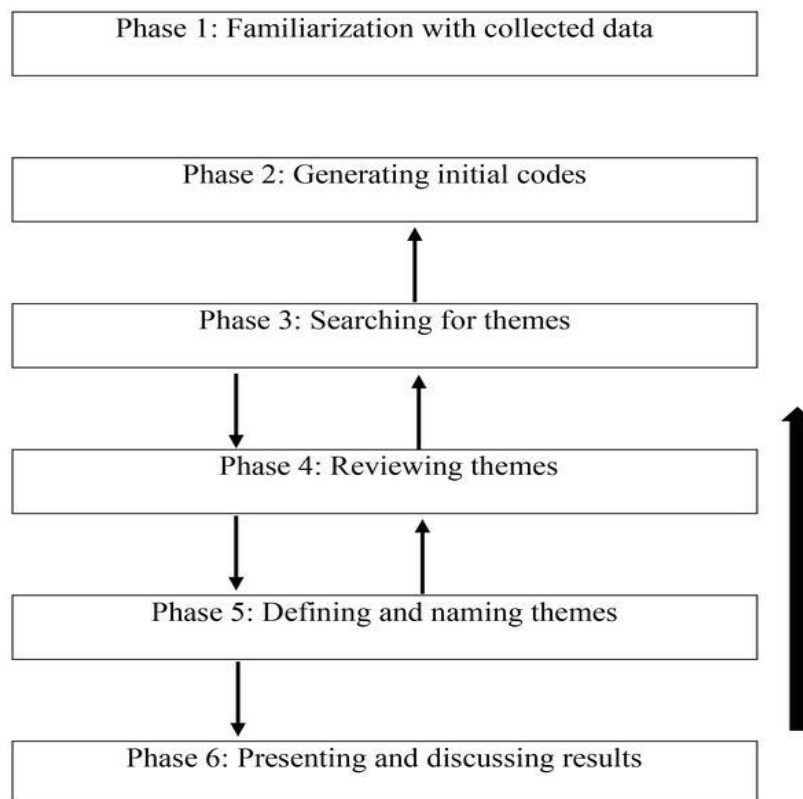


to the issues of semantics and the symbolism of colour in different cultures. In aesthetics, colour was seen as a concept of harmony and beauty. In psychology studies, the effects of colour on physiological and emotional states were analysed, along with the psycho diagnostics of colour and its possibilities (Gage, 1999).

The emerging trends in the use of colour in recent decades allowed the shaping of the manifestation of an international colour culture. Achievements of colour culture, creative experience and the results of scientific research increasingly targeted different countries with regard to the colour design of the surrounding subject-spatial environment.

### Research Methodology

The research methodology chosen for this study is the qualitative research methodology, as it is more common in the social science field and asks questions such as, “how and why” rather than “how many” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The population of the study is the Hindu Community within a 30 km radius of eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, South Africa. This population has been specifically selected in order to produce rich and detailed data from the participants and provide detailed insights for the questions asked. Ten (10) spiritual leaders and ten (10) senior citizens of the Hindu community were selected from the population using a Purposive sampling technique. The twenty participants were interviewed using Semi-structured and open-ended questions. To practice social distancing, all interviews were conducted via video calls at a convenient time for each participant. Each interview took approximately one hour. The participants also had an option to skip any question they did not wish to answer. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured before, during and after the interview process was complete, and data provided by participants was digitally voice recorded and by taking notes.



**Figure 2:** Thematic Analysis Process  
Source: Davies and Hughes (2014)



The collected data was transcribed and then analysed using thematic analysis approach which has six steps as shown in Figure 2. The first step is to become familiar with the entire dataset, discovering the repetitions and finding thresholds for the amount of data that makes up a theme. At the second step, initial codes are generated to organise the data at a detailed level, after which the third step examine the coded and collected data extracts for possible themes of overarching significance (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

At step 4, the preliminary themes identified in the previous phase were reviewed, modified and developed, thereafter, a detailed analysis of each theme was developed and the scope and focus of each theme was described at step 5. The last step interwove the analytical narrative and the data extracts, and also contextualise the analysis in relation to the existing literature.

## Discussion of Findings

Table 1 below summarises demographic data of participants including status and religious knowledge. It serves as an important part of the study to make sure the findings are trustworthy and can be used to produce the correct answers to the research question

Table 1. Demographic data of participants

Pseudonym	Status	Religious Knowledge
Participant 1 (P1)	Priest	Excellent
Participant 2 (P2)	Senior Citizen	Good
Participant 3 (P3)	Senior Citizen	Excellent
Participant 4 (P4)	Priest	Excellent
Participant 5 (P5)	Senior Citizen	Good
Participant 6 (P6)	Priest	Good
Participant 7 (P7)	Priest	Excellent
Participant 8 (P8)	Senior Citizen	Good
Participant 9 (P9)	Senior Citizen	Good
Participant 10 (P10)	Priest	Excellent
Participant 11 (P11)	Priest	Excellent
Participant 12 (P12)	Priest	Excellent
Participant 13 (P13)	Senior Citizen	Good
Participant 14 (P14)	Priest	Excellent
Participant 15 (P15)	Priest	Excellent
Participant 16 (P16)	Senior Citizen	Good
Participant 17 (P17)	Senior Citizen	Good
Participant 18 (P18)	Priest	Excellent
Participant 19 (P19)	Priest	Excellent
Participant 20 (P20)	Senior Citizen	Excellent

The process of analysing the interview responses involved carefully evaluating the responses of participants and then formulating themes based on their answers. This was possible through voice recording device and taking notes during the interview sessions. The recorded interviews were later transcribed and read, and categories were then identified. Table 2 shows a summary of themes derived from the interviews. The patterns in the collected data were identified and seven main themes were generated.



Table 2: Themes Generated

Research Question	Themes
What are the roles and cultural associations of colour in Hindu religion?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Main colours in Hindu religion</li><li>● Avoided Colours</li><li>● Cultural norms of colour in the Hindu community</li><li>● Personal attitude toward colours</li><li>● Benefits of colour therapy</li><li>● Use of chakras</li><li>● Healing properties of colours</li></ul>

### ***Main colours in Hindu religion***

Nature forms the core of Hindu religion and is interwoven in all the rituals and beliefs. Many Hindus follow a lifestyle which is fully in tune with nature and have a great respect for Mother Earth (Olson, 2007). As Hinduism is closely connected to nature and uses many natural elements in religious practices, many colours mentioned by participants represent the essence of nature and symbolise all the elements of planet Earth, such as green for trees and vegetation, yellow for the sand, blue for the sky and red for the Sun (Olson, 2007). "Reverence for life, awareness of the forces of nature such as earth, sky, air, water and fire and awareness of the various orders of life such as plants, trees, forests and animals are the beliefs embedded in the Hindu view of nature. Nature is seen by Hindus as a gift from God that can heal the soul" (Olson, 2007: 42).

Colours play an important part in the life of Hindus and, apart from decorative values, every colour has its significance in Hinduism. The main colours used in Hinduism are red, yellow and blue. Hindu deities are also coloured and dressed according to their attributes. According to Khaled (2007), red is seen in most religious and sacred occasions, such as weddings, births and religious festivals. During ceremonies, a red mark or tilak is placed on the forehead. Red marks are referred to as bindi or pottu and are generally made of kumkum, which is a paste made of turmeric powder. In general, forehead markings in Hinduism identify a person's third eye, or the centre of a person's nervous system, and this is the area in which a person can see spiritual truths. This practice dates back to ancient people who existed in southern Asia about 2500 BCE.

This colour also represents fertility. Goddess Durga is often associated with the colour red. Yellow is the colour of sunshine and has a healing power. This colour activates the mind, energy and intelligence. It symbolises happiness, peace, meditation, competence and spiritual development. Lord Vishnu's dress is yellow and symbolises his representation of knowledge (Khaled, 2007). Lords Krishna and Ganesha also wear yellow dresses. Blue represents power and life, such as the sky, oceans, rivers and lakes. It resembles the qualities of bravery, manliness, determination, the ability to cope in difficult situations, a stable mind and depth of character (Khaled, 2007). Lords Rama and Krishna spend their lives protecting humanity and destroying evil; hence they are blue in colour.

Out of 20 participants, 17 (P3-P11, P13-P20) identified red, yellow and blue as the main colours used in Hindu practices. Three participants mentioned other colours such as green, orange and white and 18 participants highlighted that red represents the Sun, while Moon represents the balance such as yellow. According to 15 participants, the colour blue was the colour mostly found in nature such as water and sky. Red was found to be the most widely





used colour among different linguistic groups and was also associated with many religious practices and traditional ceremonies mentioned by all 20 participants. White colour was mentioned by 5 out of 20 participants as one of the main colours in Hindu religion. Below are excerpts of responses from P3, P11, and P15:

The main colours are blue, which if you look at some of the moerties in the temple, you will see that Vishnu Bagwan (god) is a light hue of blue. Lord Ram is also blue in colour and the same for Shiva Bagwan who is blue. Blue is like the sea or sky, that should fill you with peace and serenity, it is not an aggressive colour, but a soft colour. Then you have red, like our flags. Red for Hanuman. When we raise a red flag with his insignia on it, we raise it in honour of his victory. Red denotes wholesomeness, something that enhances life. Then we have yellow for Shiva Bagwan. Vishnu Bagwan statue is put on a raised platform, draped in red. Like Hanuman and Lakshmi who is his console can be red, which is a sign of prosperity, wholesomeness of life. Ganesh is also yellow. (P3)

Yellow is the colour of enlightenment. Red is a lush colour, the colour of richness. Blue is also enlightenment, growth & the predominant colour. (P11)

I think your most widely used colours are Bright colours such as red, yellow and green. Some of these colours reference to energy, the energy you can attract when dressing up, the goddesses and gods, who use the colours, certain colours are associated with different Gods. (P15)

Table 3 below represents the summary of answers regarding the main colours used in Hindu religion based on the answers of the participants.

**Table 3.** Summary of main colours used in Hinduism

Main colours in Hindu religion	Red	Yellow	Blue	Orange	Green	White
Number of participants	17 of 20	17 of 20	17 of 20	3 of 20	4 of 20	5 of 20
Participants' names	P3-P11, P13-P20	P3-P11, P13-P20	P3-P11, P13-P20	P1, P2, P12	P1, P2, P12	P4, P7, P9, P13, P18

### ***Avoided Colours***

The colour black in India has connotations of undesirability, evil, negativity and inertia. It represents anger and darkness and is associated with 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. And while white in the West stands for all that is desirable, in India it has a more sinister connotation. Many participants (P4, P5, P8, P9, P10, P13, P6, and P20) identified black as the most avoided colour as it represents death or evil as shown in the responses of P4, P6, P13, and P20 below:

P4: All colours are good, except plain black when a prayer is conducted.

P6: Black and navy blue is avoided, symbolic of death & negativity.

P13: Black signifies death and darkness. Black outfits are deemed bad, especially for

Weddings.



P20: I would say black, it is associated with evil.

However, the black colour is still a widely used colour among Hindus in their everyday lives: For example, the colour of clothing for work, decor elements of their house and choice of the car colour, purely for practical purposes. Many have mentioned that black was also used as a blending colour as well as breaking up other colours to make the matching outfit more attractive.

### ***Cultural norms of colour in Hindu community***

The meanings of colours in Hindu religion have their differences and similarities when compared to the Western world. For example, the colour white is mostly used in Western wedding ceremonies, while in Hinduism it is used for funerals and is considered a mourning colour. The colour red is considered the most religious colour in Hinduism, while in the Western world it is considered to be the colour of danger or anger. The colour blue has the same meaning in both contexts and represents calmness and peace. Cultural norms of colour use in the Hindu community were also documented in some of the participants' responses. Of 20 participants, 15 (P1-P9, P12, P14-P15, P18-P20) spoke about the slow merge of Eastern and Western cultural norms regarding the cultural norms of colour use in the Hindu community. According to P2:

The symbolism of colour must be reflected in all aspects of our life. Not everybody follows these norms, because of Westernisation. For each day you have different colours, depending on what occasion it is. Sunday is associated with Surya (Sun god). Tuesday is associated with Mars (Red). (P2)

In a historical context, many Hindus always used bright colours in religious practices and everyday life. According to P7:

If you go to a religious function/festival, you will dress appropriately. You will be disrespectful if you dress in western attire to a religious function. You normally wear specific attire for that specific function, whereas for weddings, people just go lavish in different colours. (P7)

P20 stated that:

Red is used for Lakshmi day. Yellow for the porridge prayer. They hoist the flags which are yellow and I think some are green, as well.

In recent years, there has also been a trend where Hindus prefer to choose more subtle colours for their home interiors and also their colour choices when selecting an outfit. However, the religious use of colour remained the same and bright vibrant colours are still used for rituals and prayers. According to P9:

For prayer, I would wear a red sari, or punjabi. If the prayer is devoted to Mother Durgha, or Mother Kali I would wear red. I dress both mother Durgha and Kali accordingly, the yellow goes for Mother Durgha, who symbolises those things and Mother Kali symbolises the red. When going to a funeral, we will wear white, as to Christians, who will wear black. A widow who is sitting by the coffin will wear a white sari, or punjabi". According to P12, "Natural white, or highly saturated colours, closer to nature. Unless a specific ritual, then that colour will dominate. Red flag for power, honour & courage. For spiritual meditation they will go for saffron. White dominates the life of students. It depends on what the occasion is, red for weddings represents passion, which is the starting level. One colour may not be appropriate at one function, but it will be appropriate at another. (P9)



### ***Personal attitude towards colours***

During the interview process, all 20 participants mentioned their favourite colours. An interesting finding has emerged during data analysis – there were many similarities of colour choices among participants. Although participants were both male and female, 14 out of 20 participants (P2-P8, P10-P13, P18-P20) mentioned similar favourite colours. Like females, all males have their favourite colours in the bright family of colours. Hindu people seem to have a preference in their everyday life, similar if not the same as the main colours used in religious practices. The most favourite colours were yellow, blue and red mentioned by 14 participants (P2-P8, P10-P13, P18-P20), as represented in the responses of P2, P13, P18 and P 10 below.

**P2:** I love all the colours of the rainbow. Especially if you look at the Holy ceremony (festival of colours).

**P13:** Mine is normally blue, but when it comes to cars, silver.

**P18:** I like white, blue, red and vibrating colours.

**P10:** Blue. Otherwise, red for courage.

### ***Benefits of colour therapy***

Since the main purpose of becoming aware of the chakra system is to help the individual achieve a state of harmony within himself, chakras play an important role in decision making and correspond to the conditions in people's lives. All seven chakras each have their own colour, which together represent the colours of the rainbow – violet, indigo, green, yellow, orange, blue and red. Seven participants (P1, P3, P11, P13, P12, P18 and P20) identified the importance of chakras in their lives. They spoke about their meanings and their application in everyday life. Many participants have highlighted that colour has a direct effect on their behaviour and emotional state. Some colours, such as blue and green, have a calming effect, while red and orange stimulate mental and physical activity. As colours are perceived on a more subconscious level, one does not realise the full impact of colours on lives. As revealed by participants, colours influence body and mind and have specific healing properties associated with them. Many participants mentioned using colours for healing purposes as alternative treatments to traditional medical practices. According to P13:

Chakras represent the power centres in the body. The chakras and colours are linked. There are seven chakras and they are given different colours to denote actual feelings. Muladhara Chakra - Root chakra - Red Colour - Spine the physical needs. Svadhithana chakra - Sacral chakra - Yellow - Centre of emotions, feelings & stimulates pleasure Manipura chakra - Naval chakra - Yellow - Provides a source of personal power & self-esteem. Anahata chakra - Heart chakra - Green - Opens the heart (love, forgiveness and compassion). Vishuddha Chakra - Throat chakra - Light blue - Responsible for communication, self-expression, and speaking. Ajan/Agya chakra - Bowl chakra - Violet colour - spiritual 3rd eye (intuition, awareness, etc). Sahasrara Chakra - Crown chakra - Lilac colour (highest level) - individuals center of spirit, enlightenment, wisdom, etc. (P13)

Of the participants, 12 (P1-P5, P11-P14, P17-P19) also mentioned the relationships which exist between chakras and planets. According to Vedic Astrology, each chakra has a corresponding planet with its unique nature and characteristics of the ruling planet. Seven chakras, when placed together in the body, are viewed as something similar to the Solar system. The energies found in the universe are symbolised with those of the system of the body. According to P1:



The 9 planets are also part of the entire chakra as well and we use certain colours for the 9 planets. Certain colours represent certain fortunes. Like the colour shaming, meaning the lady of Shukran. There we use the colour black, when black comes in there is darkness and negativity in life. The colour orange is also part of the chakra, for surya “the god of sun”. Various other colours also fall in, but I am not sure as to what each one follows. (P1)

### ***Use of chakras***

Chakras and colours have formed an important healing practice since ancient times and were widely used in Asia, Europe and the Middle East (Harding, 2018). It combines the use of light and colour to treat physical and mental conditions. Each of these seven chakras vibrates at a specific frequency related to its colour. The choices one makes and how those colours are perceived and interpreted are controlled by the vibrations of the chakras. Chakras can be considered as the subtle energy points that get charged when the internal energy synchronises with the natural energy around us. Five participants (P5, P9, P10, P17 and P19) highlighted the examples of the use of chakras and colours. These examples include using a particular colour to either suppress or evoke a particular emotion, such as calming or rejuvenating, not using black colour at all due to its negative aspect and using nature as a guidance for selecting a specific colour for a desired environment at home. These examples are shown in the responses of P5 and P10 below:

Yes, Red gives you wholesomeness which affects you psychologically. Blue is the colour of the ocean, the sky etc. which denotes peace and serenity. Black is negativity which is used as a destructive aspect. Kali Mata is dressed in black to inform you two send all your negativity onto her, so that you can fill yourself with positivity. (P5)

You see sometimes you get a cut on your skin, or hand somewhere, you paint with orange powder. It heals and does not get septic. Let's say you are poked by a rusty nail and it turns septic. You quickly put some paraffin, some whole hardi and smash it up, you take chilly powder, put some oil and heat it up and make a paste, with turmeric. Double hot means, the heat from the stove and the other hot, from the chilly. It burns the area. It was even used for fractures in ancient days. The throbbing ness will pull the pain, and guaranteed, it won't get septic. We use sandalwood which is creamy, as a dot on the forehead. That is the eye of intuition, the 3rd eye is there. Sandalwood is used for medicine use, you put it on your skin. It is very calm, soothing, cooling, and protective...better than lotion, it protects the skin. (P10)

Light is said to have healing properties attached to it, including the seven main colours contained in the visible colour spectrum. The presence or absence of light can influence physical and mental health. The use of chakras' healing properties has a few of the various benefits, such as being safe and pain-free, restoring the natural balance in the body, having a positive influence on the mental and spiritual levels and helping with relaxation and emotional blockages. Among its many benefits, the proper use of colours can also improve awareness and help individuals understand the necessity of incorporating certain colours into their lives, which promotes overall well-being.

### ***Healing properties of colours***

The seven chakras play a crucial role in everyone's lives. A few participants (P8, P19, P14 and P19) explained their personal use of chakras and colours in everyday life. According to P14, “Yellow is a soothing colour which is associated with the sun. Yellow, cream and white as well - Peaceful. Blue - cooling. Red is not advised, as it is not calming, a soothing colour”.

According to P19, there are emotional healing properties associated with colour:



I look at the colour blue because it is the symbol of water, the sea that washes away your problems. Green for healing & balance in nature. Turmeric is of a yellow colour, which we use for healing and cleansing. You make a paste out of the Turmeric powder and put it on the cut to prevent infection. Turmeric is also used to smear on the bride and groom on the day before the wedding to cleanse them. (P19)

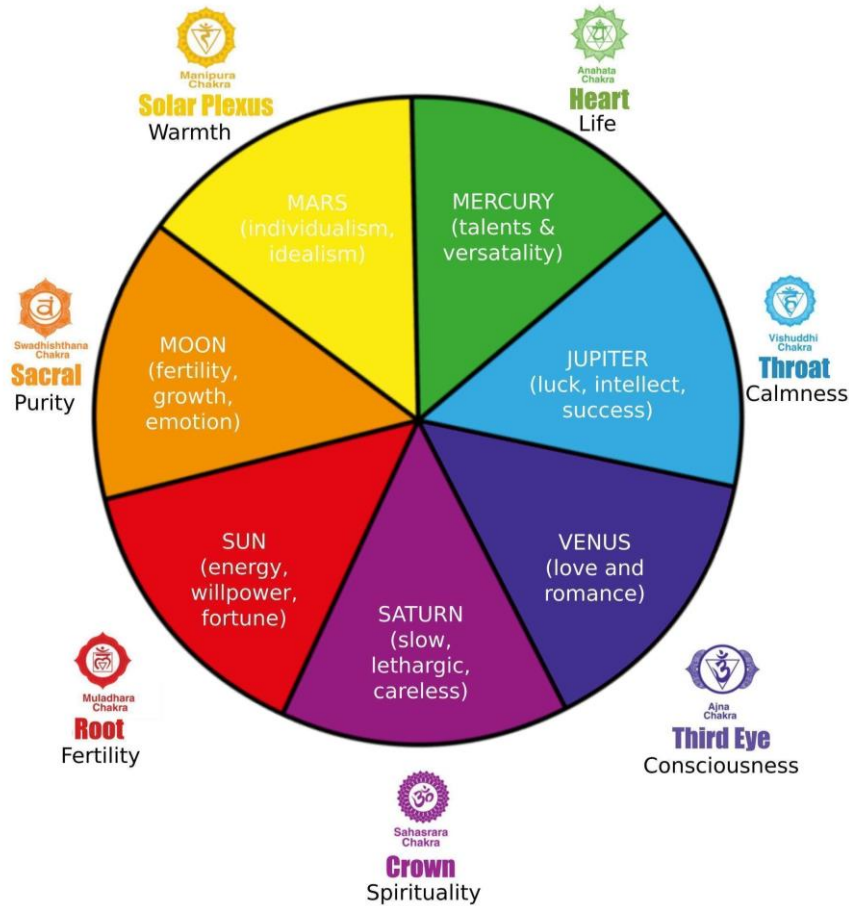
The excerpts above represent colour healing practices commonly used by members of the Hindu community. They use the concept of colour and associated meaning to evoke particular responses and to reach a desired emotional state. The concept of chakras is widely known around the world and is also widely used by Western people. By using a particular colour or a combination of thereof, one can reach calmness or gain the needed energy to continue in daily activities. As chakras also represent a particular part of a human's body, the correct use of colour can improve one's health in a particular body part which is reached through the process of meditation (Harding, 2018). The associated colours of chakras have the same meanings as colours in Hinduism. Red, the most widely used colour in Hinduism, is represented by the lowest part of the body and its respective chakra, while violet is considered the most sacred one and is depicted in the highest chakra. According to Harding (2018), chakras also represent the seven main colours of the rainbow and follow the scientific representation of the colour spectrum where the longest wavelengths are positioned at the bottom and are represented by the colour red and the highest frequency wavelengths are presented in the violet colour.

## Conclusion

In Hindu teachings, colours are closely connected to deities, planets and chakras. It can be said that this co-existence of colours and their meanings follow almost the same principles found in traditional Colour Theory. Figure 3 represents such relationships and combines the traditional colour wheel with the values associated with colours in Hinduism. By examining the wheel, one can notice that the planetary placements and position of chakras follow a logical order. The main planets in Hinduism such as the Sun, Jupiter and Mars are depicted in primary colours, while the other planets represent the secondary colours of the wheel. The same principle is applied to chakras and their placement according to their positions in the human's body.

The meanings of colours in Hindu religion also have their differences and similarities when compared to the colour symbolism of the Western world. Furthermore, it seems that most members of the Hindu community still follow the religious guidance of colour use for their colour choices in everyday life. The study also revealed the benefits of using the healing properties of colours by exploring the concept of chakras. Based on a particular quality and the vibrations produced, a specific colour is selected for a particular healing purpose. The data presented by the participants has confirmed that chakras play a crucial role in everyone's lives and have a great influence on the mental and spiritual level of an individual's well-being. It helps with relaxation and emotional blockages and enables a person's overall well-being to develop.





**Figure 3:** Traditional Colour Theory and Hindu colour logic  
 Source: Kudrya-Marais (2022)

While this study has been able to reveal interesting discoveries about colour symbolism in Hinduism, it is important to note that the findings reported are qualitative, where the answers of participants represent what they know and feel rather than determining how many do so in this way. Although the participants were carefully selected based on their cultural and religious knowledge, such findings cannot be explicitly used as the basis for statistical generalisation and this is therefore a limitation of the study. Instead, the findings must be viewed as a working model in a particular context and are subject to quantitative validation. Hence, future studies are recommended that explore differences and similarities in colour symbolism and application in other Hindu communities around the world.

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