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The Significance of Five Sacred Colours in Jainism: A Symbolic Representation of Spirituality

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Abstract

Jainism, revered as one of the oldest religions originating in India, profoundly emphasizes core values such as nonviolence, self-discipline, and spiritual liberation, guiding its followers toward enlightenment and inner peace. Delving into the intricacies of its symbolic representations, the religious doctrine of Jainism venerates the five sacred colours known as Panchavarana, each carrying profound spiritual and philosophical undertones. These vibrant hues - white, red, yellow, green, and blue - are not merely colours but embodiments of the five supreme beings referred to as Panch Parmeshthi, signifying the virtues essential for spiritual evolution and growth within one's spiritual journey. The exploration of the historical, spiritual, and ritualistic significance of these colours within Jainism sheds light on the deeply rooted presence of these hues in various aspects of the religion, ranging from religious artifacts to the intricate architectural designs of temples, as well as their integral role in worship rituals and practices observed by Jain adherents over the centuries, thereby encapsulating a holistic understanding of their profound importance within the fabric of Jain belief and tradition.

1.1 Introduction

Jainism, a profound and ancient religion, is deeply entrenched in the principles of asceticism, spiritual purification, and the relentless pursuit of liberation, known as Moksha, which is sought through a harmonious blend of ethical conduct, profound knowledge acquisition, and unwavering self-discipline. Within the rich tapestry of Jain traditions, symbolism emerges as a guiding light, illuminating the path that devout followers tread in their quest for enlightenment. It is a symphony of colours, symbols, and rituals; the teachings of Jainism are brought to life vividly and tangibly.

Central to this visual language are the five sacred colours—white, red, yellow, green, and blue—each carrying deep significance and spiritual resonance within Jain religious practices. These vibrant hues are not merely decorative elements but rather powerful conduits through which the core tenets of Jainism are vividly portrayed and understood. From the fluttering Jain flag to the intricate motifs adorning temple walls, from the revered Siddhachakra to the meticulously crafted ritualistic offerings, these colours weave a rich tapestry of spiritual significance that transcends the visual realm.



Fig 1: Jain Flag Colours

In essence, the five sacred colours stand as tangible embodiments of the fundamental Jain principles, each colour symbolizing a unique facet of the Jain cosmology and its profound connection to the five supreme beings revered in Jain tradition: the enlightened ones known as Arihantas, the liberated souls known as Siddhas, the revered spiritual teachers known as Acharyas, the learned

scholars known as Upadhyayas, and the ascetic practitioners known as Sadhus or Sadhvis.

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Through the harmonious interplay of colour and symbolism, Jainism manifests its rich spiritual heritage, inviting adherents to explore the depths of its teachings and embark on a transformative journey toward spiritual enlightenment and ultimate liberation.

1.2 The Five Sacred Colors and Their Meanings:

White (Shukla): The Symbol of Purity and Peace

Due to its deep symbolic meanings, White is often celebrated as the symbol of purity and peace in Jain philosophy. In Jainism, white is not merely a colour but a representation of Arihantas, the enlightened beings who have transcended worldly desires and ego to attain spiritual enlightenment. These enlightened beings, who have conquered their inner passions, serve as guiding lights for others on the spiritual path. The color white embodies a profound sense of purity, truth, and spiritual detachment, inviting practitioners to strive for these virtues in their own lives.

Furthermore, white in Jain symbolism is closely associated with the ideals of non-violence and self-realization. It serves as a visual reminder of the importance of living a life free from harm and conflict, towards oneself and others. The pristine white hue signifies an aspiration toward inner clarity and freedom from negative emotions such as anger, greed, and attachment. By embracing the purity represented by white, Jains seek to cultivate a deep sense of harmony and balance within themselves and in their interactions with the world around them.

In Jain rituals and ceremonies, the colour white plays a pivotal role, symbolizing the highest aspirations of purification and liberation. Offerings made to the idols of Tirthankaras, the revered enlightened beings in Jainism, are often clad in white, mirroring the devotees' desire to emulate the pure and enlightened qualities embodied by these spiritual guides. Through these rituals, practitioners seek to purify their intentions and actions, aiming to align themselves more closely with the path of spiritual evolution and self-discovery that the colour white so eloquently represents.

In conclusion, white in Jain symbolism transcends a mere colour and becomes a powerful emblem of spiritual values and aspirations. It serves as a beacon of light, guiding practitioners toward the ideals of purity, truth, and inner peace, ultimately leading them on a transformative journey toward self-realization and liberation.

a) Red (Rakta): The Colour of Victory and Liberation

In Jainism, the red colour holds profound symbolism, often intertwined with themes of victory and liberation. Red transcends mere visual aesthetics to embody spiritual significance deeply rooted in the faith's beliefs and practices. Siddhas, the revered liberated souls who have broken free from the shackles of samsara, find their essence

resonating with the vibrant hue of red. This colour serves as a beacon of spiritual strength, a visual reminder of the triumphant conquest over mundane attachments, and a testament to the energy that propels individuals toward self-realization.

Jain temples, resplendent in their architectural grandeur and sacred aura, enshroud themselves in the warm embrace of red. From the fluttering flags adorning the temple spires to the intricate decorations adorning sacred spaces, the omnipresence of red reverberates with echoes of devotion and aspiration. Each brushstroke and each fabric swathe, saturated in the enchanting red pigment, serves as a silent testimony to the pilgrims' unwavering commitment to the path of self-purification and enlightenment.

Thus, when one encounters the crimson hues adorning Jain temples, one is urged to reflect not only on the vibrant visage before them but also on the profound narrative that unfolds through the language of colour. Red becomes a living metaphor, a canvas upon which the struggles and triumphs of the human spirit are painted with an intensity that transcends the physical realm. It beckons the faithful to journey inward, to embark on a quest for spiritual metamorphosis that leads one from the shadows of ignorance towards the radiant dawn of self-realization.

Yellow (Peet): The Emblem of Wisdom and Knowledge

Yellow is a colour that holds significant symbolic meanings in Jainism, especially as it pertains to the revered spiritual figures known as Acharyas. These spiritual leaders play a crucial role in the Jain community as guides and mentors to monks and lay followers on the path of righteousness and self-discovery. The colour yellow, representing Acharyas, embodies the virtues of wisdom, discipline, and a deep-rooted commitment to upholding the teachings of Jain scriptures. Through the vibrant hues of yellow, a sense of enlightenment is evoked, reminding believers of the ethical conduct and moral principles central to Jain's philosophy. It is not just a colour choice but a profound symbol ingrained in religious manuscripts and the traditional attire worn by spiritual leaders. It is a visual testament to the significance of knowledge and spiritual guidance in the Jain faith. Thus, the yellow in Jainism is a powerful reminder of the enduring values of wisdom and learning that underpin this ancient spiritual tradition.

b) Green (Harita): The Representation of Growth and Learning:

Green, commonly associated with the concept of growth and learning, holds significant symbolism in the Jain tradition. Beyond its representation as a color, green is intrinsically tied to the revered figure of Upadhyayas, spiritual guides entrusted with the critical task of disseminating scriptural wisdom and shepherding followers along their path of enlightenment. Within this spiritual

framework, the hue green embodies profound meanings, encapsulating the ideals of self-discovery, cognitive advancement, and ethical maturation.

In the rich tapestry of Jain rituals and practices, the presence of green is not merely aesthetic but profoundly symbolic. It serves as a visual reminder of the ceaseless quest for knowledge and the evolution of spiritual consciousness. This vibrant colour, with its deep-rooted connections to growth and vitality, acts as a beacon guiding adherents toward a state of heightened awareness and intellectual expansion.



Fig 2: Jain Emblem

During Jain religious ceremonies, the use of green becomes both ritualistic and profound, underscoring the enduring commitment to learning and the continual enrichment of spiritual discernment. It is a visual metaphor for the perpetual journey towards enlightenment, where each act of worship and reflection becomes a stepping stone towards greater wisdom and understanding.

Thus, within the context of

Jainism, the colour green transcends its visual appeal to become a potent symbol of perpetual growth, encouraging devotees to embrace the transformative power of knowledge and the ever-expanding horizons of spiritual wisdom. Its presence in ceremonies echoes the belief in the inherent connection between learning and spiritual evolution, inviting practitioners to delve deeper into the mysteries of existence and emerge with a renewed sense of enlightenment.

a) Blue (Neel): The Essence of Devotion and Detachment

Blue, a colour deeply imbued with spiritual significance, holds a special place in Jain culture, symbolizing profound concepts of devotion and detachment. This serene hue is often associated with Sadhus, the devoted monks, and Sadhvis, the pious nuns, who dedicate their lives to a path of asceticism and renunciation. Through its association with these spiritual aspirants, blue becomes a visual embodiment of the ideals of self-control and detachment from materialistic desires. In Jain symbolism, the presence of blue is a powerful reminder to followers about the crucial importance of cultivating self-discipline in their lives and embarking on a journey toward inner peace through the

practices of meditation and spiritual introspection. Embracing the essence of blue evokes a sense of calm and a deep-rooted connection to the spiritual realm, guiding individuals on a path of self-discovery and enlightenment. Just as the vast expanse of the sky holds the promise of infinite possibilities, the colour blue in Jain tradition symbolizes the boundless potential for spiritual growth and transformation within each individual who seeks to walk the path of devotion and detachment.

1.3 The Historical and Philosophical Context of Panchavarana

The Historical and Philosophical Context of Panchavarana in Jainism delves deeply into the ancient Indian traditions where the significance of colours holds a profound place. Throughout history, colours have been perceived as potent symbols capable of influencing one's spiritual consciousness. This belief, deeply rooted in Indian culture, paved the way for the narrative of Panchavarana within Jain texts. The concept of Panchavarana symbolizes the various stages of spiritual transformation and growth, portraying a fascinating journey towards enlightenment.

Within Jainism, the utilization of colours transcends mere aesthetics, it serves as a powerful tool to convey complex philosophical ideas and spiritual principles. Each hue in the Panchavarana carries a symbolic weight, representing pivotal stages in the seeker's quest for spiritual emancipation. The linkage between these vibrant colours and revered spiritual entities underscores the disciplined progression towards profound spiritual truths within Jain doctrine.

Furthermore, the intricate colour symbolism in Jainism mirrors a structured roadmap delineating the aspirant's progression from ignorance to profound wisdom. The journey embodied by Panchavarana encapsulates the gradual evolution of consciousness, marked by the assimilation of spiritual knowledge and the eventual attainment of transcendent enlightenment. It is a rich tapestry of spiritual significance, weaving together the diverse hues of the Panchavarana into a cohesive narrative of spiritual growth and transformation.

In essence, the historical and philosophical underpinnings of Panchavarana in Jainism transcend mere chromatic symbolism; they embody a profound philosophical reflection on the human journey toward spiritual realization. Through the vibrant palette of Panchavarana, Jainism paints a vivid portrait of the seeker's progression through the stages of spiritual evolution, culminating in the ultimate realization of spiritual liberation. Thus, exploring the depths of Panchavarana unveils a nuanced understanding of Jain

philosophy, where colours serve as profound conduits for conveying intricate spiritual truths and guiding aspirants on their transformative quest toward enlightenment.

1.4 The Role of Five Colours in Jain Rituals and Worship

The five sacred colours are not just symbolic; they play an active role in Jain religious traditions. The significance of the five sacred colours cannot be overstated. These hues are not mere symbols but actively participate in the religious customs and practices of Jainism. Each colour holds a profound meaning that is intricately woven into various aspects of Jain traditions:

First and foremost, the Jain Flag, known as Panchrang Dhvaj, is a visual representation of the five supreme beings and their corresponding virtues. The five stripes adorning this flag of the divine entities central to Jain belief systems. Moreover, during the sacred Siddhachakra Puja, practitioners engage in a spiritual ceremony where coloured rice or powders are meticulously arranged to symbolize the revered Panch Parmeshthi. The vibrant colours find expression in the embellishments and murals adorning Jain temples, infusing these sacred spaces with a visual resonance that echoes the profound spiritual teachings of Jainism. From intricate architectural details to elaborate artistic elements, these colours enliven the sanctuaries and create an ambiance of spiritual vibrancy.

Thus, the five colours in Jain rituals and worship transcend mere aesthetics; they represent a spiritual significance that permeates every facet of Jain's religious life, enriching the devotees' connection with their faith and its profound teachings.

1.5 Conclusion

In Jainism, the significance of the five sacred colours extends far beyond mere visual appeal or aesthetics. These colours are deeply intertwined with the core tenets and practices of the faith, acting as profound symbols that resonate with the spiritual journey of adherents. Each colour, with its unique vibrancy and symbolism, plays a vital role in reinforcing fundamental principles such as self-discipline, knowledge acquisition, and detachment from worldly attachments.

Delving deeper into the symbolism of these colours, we find that they offer a multi-layered approach to understanding Jain's beliefs and practices. Through their presence in religious texts, temple art, and daily rituals, the colours are a constant reminder of the spiritual hierarchy within Jainism. They guide followers' self-realization, emphasizing the importance of ethical living and the pursuit of enlightenment.

Moreover, the use of these sacred colours reflects the intricate tapestry of Jain cosmology and philosophy. Each hue evokes a sense of reverence and contemplation, inviting devotees to reflect on the intricate interplay between the material world and the spiritual realm. Whether through vibrant displays in temple decorations or subtle incorporations in personal devotions, these colours create a harmonious resonance that fosters a deeper connection with Jain teachings.

Ultimately, the five sacred colours lie in their ability to transcend the boundaries of time and space, resonating with believers across generations. Their presence in Jain practices as a unifying force, bridging the gap between traditions and present-day experiences. By immersing themselves in the symbolism and significance of these colours, followers can cultivate a profound sense of spiritual awareness and commitment to leading a life guided by Jain principles.

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