

# BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to give a detailed description of the color black. Its history and reasons for the color having negative connotations. An attempt has been made to consider the psychological theories regarding colors and trying to ascertain that associations with the black color are influenced by experience, culture, religion, gender, nationality, etc.

**KEYWORDS:** Crones, fallibility, Cistercian, Benedictine, Gender Schema Theory, Ecological Valence Theory.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The significance of the color black is very aptly summarized in the following poem [1]:

### BLACK : A COLOR POEM

Black is the color beyond all colors  
Black is the void,  
The void of my heart,  
The void of my soul,  
Black is the feeling of everything  
Black is the feeling of nothing  
The small of death is the color black  
When you feel overloaded with emotion,  
Yet, you feel no emotion at all ...  
That is black. Oh so very black  
Fear is black when it clothes your mind.  
You can't even think as it overcomes you.  
Black is not intensity, but intensity itself.  
Black is what controls us all;  
Black is the feeling of being controlled.  
Black is the color of shadows,  
Shadows of a moonless night.  
Black is what makes us shiver without the wind.  
Black is the only thing that won't leave us in the end.

- Emma (June 2016)

## II. RELIGIONS AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS WITH DARKNESS

In the context of the Bible: In the beginning, God created heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light: and there was light. And God called the light 'Day' and darkness he called 'Night' (The Nuremberg Chronicles, (1493) written by Hartmann Schedel).

In the Koran also it is said "God created His creation in darkness, then on the same day He sent His light upon them. Whoever was touched by His light on that day will be guided and whoever was missed will be led astray." (Parabola Vol.43, No.2 "The Miraculous," Summer 2018.

In Hindu's the following mantra from Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.3.28) is a commonly used prayer in schools and during spiritual gathering and worship.

Om lead us from Unreality (of Transitory Existence) to the  
Reality (of the Eternal Self)

Lead us from the Darkness (of Ignorance) to the light (of Spiritual knowledge)

Lead us from the Fear of Death to the  
Knowledge of Immortality.

Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

Since the beginning of time when people first became aware of the division of their world into day and night, light and dark, the day brought with it light, sun, warmth, and visibility. The night was colder and darker, it was threatening fearful, full of unseen dangers and hidden threats. This ancient opposition between day and night, light and dark became a common motive in life too.

It is due to the constant association of darkness that 'black' took its form as the darkest color owing to the absence of or complete absorption of light. Unlike white and other hues, pure black can exist in nature without any light. Black is not a primary, secondary, or tertiary color. It is not considered a color, as it is the absorption of all colors [2].

## III. HISTORY OF BLACK COLOR

All the words humans use have a mysterious past. Just like any living entity words change their function and meaning over time. This is true in the case of the word 'black' which can be traced back to five thousand years to the Proto-Indo-European word 'bhleg' meaning 'to burn with black smoke' or 'to burn black with smoke'. Black was used in the English language from 450 A.D. onward as an adjective to describe 'color about the matter that was colorless'. It was not till the sixteenth century, however, that black acquired a figurative meaning and a very bad reputation from blackening and its literal meaning to stain black came the new meaning to stain someone's reputation or defame. This eventually extended to having 'black' describe malignant or deadly intentions or even death itself 'black curse' (1583) 'black babbling' (malicious or slanderous gossiping, 1624) 'black boding' (ill omen 1742).

The incorporation of 'black' as a negative adjective resulted in saying such as 'black looking man' which referred not to the physical description of a man, but to the speaker's belief that the man looked like he had bad intentions. This severely clashed with one of the earliest uses of black's literal meaning – to describe a

person with dark skin. By the nineteenth century terms like ‘black boy’ (Black boy servants) and black fellows (Australian Aborigines) were commonly used – terms which are highly offensive in Modern English. By the mid-twentieth century. Doctor Martin Luther King’s slogan ‘Black is Beautiful’ caused a significant change in how ‘Black’ and Black self-awareness King changed Black into the preferred appellation for most African Americans.

The only literal meanings that are still in use for black in Modern English are now greatly exceeded by its figurative counterparts. However, one can still refer to the suit of spades or clubs as black (late 17th century) coffee served without milk or cream as ‘black’ (late 18th century) and also refer to economic profit by being ‘in the black’ which inevitably came from the bookkeeping practice of writing in ‘black ink’ on the credit side of a ledger.

#### **IV. NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS OF BLACK**

The greatest relevance for the metaphorical meaning of black is the association with death. Death means absence from life (absence of light). Light embodies the quality of life itself and the possibility to constantly develop because, without sunlight, human or vegetable life would be impossible on earth. Black is associated with emptiness and lifelessness. This view is supported by wearing black clothes at the funeral to remember the dead person and at the same time to express one’s mourning.

Besides, pessimism and bad luck are connected with black. When people see a black cat or a black raven they associate a bad day for themselves with it. Another example of this pessimism is the expression: the future looks black which means that times are about to get tough. Moreover black is said to announce a disaster.

Illegal things are also termed with black e.g. the black market. In this case, black carries connections of illegal, forbidden things. Usually work is a respectful activity but if it is done illegally it is associated with black. It now becomes obvious that black has to negate features.

#### **V. BLACK HUMOR**

There exists a special kind of humor called ‘black humor’ jokes about serious subjects, especially death is connected out of a tragic event or situation. Interestingly it is also connected to magic. Black magic like in Harry Potter implies horrible barbarous methods usually to kill someone. In these movies/books, all good people are afraid of its consequences and would only use it in case of an emergency. On the other hand, bad characters use it to assume power. The term black corrupts magic.

Likewise, black is also used in the context of being in a bad mood or depression. Hence, if someone is very upset and full of anger usually it can be described as ‘she gave (me) a black look’. Further popular expressions are ‘too black out’, which describes losing consciousness and ‘a black sheep’, an outcast from a family or society. The shopping day after Thanksgiving is known as ‘Black Friday’ since 1950. It is considered a day when their profits were in the black or profitable.

#### **VI. DARK ROMANTICISM**

In literature, Dark romanticism emerged as a genre steeped in complex emotions and expressions of individualism. Dark Romanticism is distinguished from Romanticism in its emphasis on human fallibility and sin (they are pessimists) whereas Romantics believe in human goodness (they are optimists). According

to Dark Romanticism, even good men and women drift towards sin and self-distraction and there can be unintended consequences that arise from well-intended social reforms. Dark Romantics focus on human fallibility, self-destruction, judgment, punishment as well as the psychological effects of guilt and sin. There is an even darker side of the Dark Romantics: Gothic literature which involves sheer terror, personal torment graphic morbidity, and the supernatural novel. The gothic novel was invented by Horace Walpole, his work. 'The Castle of Otranto' (1764) contains all the elements of the genre set in a castle, mystery, suspense, ancient prophecy, omens visions, supernatural or inexplicable events, high emotions, women in distress, and metonymy of gloom and heroic. To match the atmosphere suitable vocabulary is used where words like darkness, dismal, shaded night, and black are commonly used.

## VII. BLACK AND ITS USE

Black has in art also, Black was one of the first colors used in art [3]. Prehistoric artists used black charcoal and iron minerals to create a black pigment that they used to paint on cave walls. The paleolithic, drawings found in caves represent humans, abstracts symbols, and animals. The Greeks developed a highly sophisticated technique for painting black silhouettes on clay pottery. In Latin, the word black 'ater' is associated with cruelty and evil. Atrocious and atrocity are derived from this Latin stem. It is no surprise then that in Medieval paintings the devil was often painted in black. The Benedictine monks wore black robes as a sign of humility and penitence. In the 12th century, the Black monks as they came to be called were challenged by the Cistercian monks who wore white. The Benedictine accused the Cistercians of being prideful, as demonstrated by their white robes. The Cistercians prepared comeback: black they responded, was the color of the devil, death, and sin, while their own symbolized purity and innocence. The true masters of Eastern 'ink wash painting' were able to use only black ink to capture the spirit of a scene. The first printed book in the world, the Gutenberg, Bible featured black type on white paper because the contrast between the two colors was the easiest to read. Later, the first computers used green type on a black background but then the researchers found that reading accuracy improved by 26% traditional black on white, they made the Stretch as soon as the technology allowed it typed black.

In Japanese culture black means experience, as opposed to white which symbolizes naiveté. Thus, the black belt is a mark of achievement and seniority in many arts whereas a white belt is worn by beginners.

## VIII. SYMBOLISM AND BLACK

Black is a complex symbol. In Egypt, the blackness of earth and rain clouds stands for the mothering darkness of germination. Black was the color of rebirth and resurrection. In Greek, it is the color of Cronos / Saturn that symbolizes time. The Goddess Kali and Durga appear as black goddesses suggesting the light-dark duality necessary for the continuation of life.

All colors evoke emotions, Red inflames passion yellow shines with joy, green breathe peace, blue when you are sad. But black color has a special full-spectrum status when it comes to the feelings it reflects.

“Power, elegance, sophistication, status  
formality. Evil death, grief, morning,  
the occult. Mystery, blackness, heaviness  
depression, rebellion, fear”

Why so many feelings associated with the color black?

Maybe it's because black goes with everything and brings out the best – or worst in whatever it surrounds [4]. When a black cat darts across our path it is considered to be bad luck. But in England, black cats signify good luck. In the English Midlands, black cats were traditionally given to bring happiness to the bride. In Japan, single women, who own black cats are thought to be more attractive.

A color is hence a form of non-verbal communication. Each color has many aspects to it. It is not static energy; its meaning can change from one day to the next with any individual; it all depends on what energy they are expressing at the point of time. The meaning of colors can vary depending on culture and circumstances.

The physiological and emotional effect of color in each person is influenced by several factors such as past experiences, culture, religion, natural environment, gender race, and nationality.

## IX. PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF COLOR

Researchers propose three main theories of color

- (1) Biology / Evolution
- (2) Gender Schema Theory
- (3) Ecological Valence Theory.

We develop color preferences based on the innate biological mechanism – largely from evolution. The color association may have been formulated early in human history (Grossman & Ursenblit, 1999, pg.2). Males prefer blues and females pink, as back in the day females were gatherer. They needed to find food sources by identifying red and yellow fruit among green foliage (Regan et al 2001).

Gender also dictates color preferences [5]. When our children are young, we reinforce gender stereotypes, we dress boys in blue and girls in pink. Children then integrate these colors into their schema for 'male' and 'female'. These theories explain some differences. But these explanations are limited. Since we all possess the same biological composition – more or less – shouldn't we share the same color preferences. Why do differences emerge? Ecological valence theory can explain. Those differences (Palmer & Schleps, 2010). According to that theory, we develop preferences for colors, based on our emotional experiences with those colors over time. The more enjoyment and positive affect an individual receives from experiences with objects of a given color, the more the person will tend to like that color (Palmer and Schleps, 2010, pp.8878).

Colors do not have one cumulative meaning. People attribute different meanings to some color depending on experience, culture, context.

## X. CONCLUSION

To conclude black does have more negative connotations than positive ones but it is certain like all colors this color has different perceptions. Color perception is subjective but as seen it is also determined by age, gender and culture.

“When you photograph people in color

You photograph their clothes

But when you photograph people in black and white

You photograph their Soul.” - Ted Grant

That is the reason

“I love black color because it does not change color like others” - Kanchi Rawat

## XI. REFERENCES

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