



Colours of the Trinity

Fair, golden or dark colours are enriched through association with deities.

LALITA RAMAKRISHNA

Colours acquire significance when associated with the celestials. Fair, dark or golden--these are the colours of different deities. All three tints are extolled in liltng verses.

The colours of the Trinity subsume the major races in humanity; we have fair people, dark-skinned races and yellow complexioned communities.

Divine Siblings

White is the complexion of Siva and Sarasvati.

Gold is the colour of Brahma and Lakshmi;

Dark is the pigmentation of Vishnu and Parvati.

Brilliant White

Siva and his sister Sarasvati are revered as brilliant white. Siva is described as *karpura-sphatika indu-sundara tanu* (whose body is as radiant as camphor, crystal and the moon) in *Mrtyunjaya-manasika-Puja*. Siva is *Divya-ambara*. He wears 'pristine radiant white garments' as he is the lord of the elements.

Siva is also called *Dig-ambara*, which means his garments are the various directions of Space; he is clothed by sheer Space. This has the profound suggestion that Siva is enveloped with *Prakrti* (Nature), and is merged into all of Nature.

Sarasvati, the power of the mind, is the feminine power. She is fair, clothed in white garments, wears crystal (*sphatika*) and pearls as ornaments and rides on a white swan. Since she is the power of the intellect, she is shown holding the *Vedas*.

A popular *sloka* on Sarasvati has this evocative description:

"She who is glowing with garlands that are luminous like the white lily, the brilliant moon, and white snow, she who is clothed in pure white garments ... She who is seated on a white lotus; may that Goddess Sarasvati protect me



and destroy completely my dense ignorance.”

The ‘white’ hue of Siva and Sarasvati conveys an idea of a pure dispassionate mind which is the ideal for all rational thinking human beings. We should receive stimulus from the outside world on a clear ‘white’ canvas without



any preconceived colouring or bias in our minds. This is a supreme challenge because our minds are coloured with impressions received from the time we are born. We have to make a deliberate effort to keep our minds like a blank sheet of white by constantly wiping out all prejudices.

Golden Seed

Gold is the color of Brahma and Lakshmi-- revered as brother and sister.

Hema Bija is *Brahma* or *Hiranya garbha*, born from the golden seed that was cast into the “Primal Golden Womb” of the cosmos. The sun is called *Svarna*

retas--filled with gold dust; and the name of fire is *Svarna Rupa*, which means ‘golden form.’ *Svarna Paksha* is the ‘gold-winged’ Garuda.

Lakshmi is extolled in the well-known verse in *Sree Suktam* thus: *Hiranyavarnaam Harinim*, as “golden in colour,” and as the “gold-coloured deer.” Harini is also the name of pale yellow fragrant jasmine. *Suvarna*, literally meaning “pleasing complexion,” is used to indicate *svarna* (golden) complexion.

Lakshmi is *suvarna-rajatasrajaa* (one who wears a silvery-gold garland) and is the flame that by its single glow illumines the entire world (*lokaika deepaankura*).

Black Is Beautiful

Vishnu and Parvati, considered siblings in ancient lore, are both dark (*shyama varna*). The most



charming divinities--Krishna and Devi (*Shyamala*)--are both dark-complexioned.

In the *Vishnu Sahasranama*, Vishnu is extolled as *Meghavarnam Subhangam* (having auspicious limbs with the colour of a cloud). Krishna is *Shyama-sundara* (dark and lovely). He is compared to a dark rain-cloud when he is called *Ghana Shyam*.

Devi Parvati is adored by Kalidasa in *Syamala Dandakam*--
*Mahendra-nila-dyuti komalangim
 Matanga kanyam manasa smarami/*
 "Devi, with delicate limbs, who

is radiant like a dark rain-bearing cloud--I concentrate with my whole mind on the daughter of Matanga rishi." (Mahendra refers to heavy dark clouds because Indra is the power of rain.)

Subramania Bharati, the renowned Tamil poet, visualised the Supreme Power as 'feminine' and has written a lyric on Devi as his beloved *Kannamma* (the dark beauty). "Her eyes are glowing stars in the pitch-dark night sky. Her eyes are diamonds placed on rich dark silk of the night."



Dark is associated with the peace and beauty of night time.

It is mysterious and makes even the sharpest intellect flounder because nothing is stated, and one has to use the subtler faculty of intuition. Our mind and reasoning faculty operate only in the clear 'light' of perception and logic. In a dark ambience, our senses can only guess at the material world around us. Poets know that the 'real world,' which is the intricate creation of the Supreme, cannot be subsumed by logic. So they use words that cancel one another, such as 'gentle-power', 'dark-luminosity,' when they describe

their experiences with people and Nature.

Dark does not have negative associations in Sanskrit literature. Dark is the medium for rejuvenation. It is necessary for seeds to remain in the depths of the soil, before they can sprout into plants. All life depends on plants to survive. So dark is vital for birth.

Dark as a Symbol

'Dark and dusky' is life-giving because it is the colour of rain-bearing clouds that sprinkle water on plants and crops to sustain all forms of life. The darkness

of night induces sleep and rest. This is necessary for life forms to rejuvenate themselves. Dark colours in a painting give depth to a landscape. Dark patches give the effect of solid three-dimensional appearance to a flat picture.

Darkness is also a symbol of human inability to comprehend the Cosmos. We are in the 'dark' about vast areas of the universe. Our understanding of the cosmos is pitifully limited in spite of scientific progress.

***Lalita Ramakrishna can be reached
at ggramakrishna@yahoo.com***