

The Psychological and Communicative Effects of Colors on Pilgrims Visiting Janam
Astana Baba Guru Nanak, Nankana Sahib

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ABSTRACT

Colors are a fundamental aspect of human perception, influencing emotions, attention, and behavior. In the context of religious sites, colors also carry cultural and spiritual significance. This study investigates the effects of colors on pilgrims visiting Janam Astana Baba Guru Nanak in Nankana Sahib. Using a mixed-method approach, surveys were conducted with 75 pilgrims, supplemented by semi-structured interviews and observational analysis of the site's color usage in walls, signage, and decorations. Findings indicate that certain colors, such as saffron, white, and blue, evoke feelings of calmness, spirituality, and focus, while bright or contrasting colors can distract visitors from contemplative experiences. The study highlights the importance of culturally and psychologically informed color choices in enhancing visitor engagement and communication within sacred spaces.

Keywords: Pilgrims, Baba Guru Nanak, Colors, psychology

INTRODUCTION

Color is a powerful tool in communication, capable of influencing perception, guiding attention, and shaping emotional responses. In public spaces, particularly in religious or heritage sites, color is more than an aesthetic choice—it conveys messages, sets mood, and enhances the overall visitor experience. For the Sikh community, colors hold symbolic meaning, reflecting values such as purity, courage, and spirituality. Janam Astana Baba Guru Nanak, the birthplace of Guru Nanak in Nankana Sahib, is a site of deep spiritual significance, attracting thousands of pilgrims each year. Despite the importance of colors in shaping visitor perception, little research exists on how colors within sacred spaces affect pilgrims' engagement, emotions, and understanding of the site. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the psychological and communicative impact of colors at Janam Astana.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Color-Psychology

Research in color psychology suggests that colors can evoke specific emotional responses. For example, warm colors like red and saffron often increase alertness and energy, while cool colors such as blue and white are associated with calmness and serenity (Elliot & Maier, 2014). The use of color in public environments can therefore influence mood, attention, and behavior.

Environmental Communication

Environmental communication theory highlights how physical surroundings convey meaning to visitors. Colors in architecture, signage, and interior design act as non-verbal messages, guiding behavior, directing attention, and enhancing comprehension. Well-designed color schemes can facilitate navigation, reduce confusion, and create a welcoming environment (Porteous, 1996).

Religious Semiotics of Color

In Sikhism, colors hold symbolic meaning. Saffron represents courage and sacrifice, white symbolizes purity and peace, and blue is associated with spirituality and devotion. Colors in religious spaces serve as semiotic tools, conveying values and enhancing the spiritual experience of visitors (Singh, 2010). The integration of these symbolic colors into site design can strengthen cultural identity and improve pilgrims' emotional engagement.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The study involved 75 pilgrims visiting Janam Astana over a period of four weeks. Participants included men and women of various ages, backgrounds, and familiarity with the site.

Instruments and Data Collection

- **Survey:** Pilgrims were asked to rate the colors used in the site on emotional impact, clarity, and spiritual relevance using a 5-point Likert scale.
- **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews with 12 participants explored personal experiences, cultural interpretations, and emotional responses to colors.
- **Observation:** Systematic observation recorded color usage in walls, domes, signage, flooring, and decorations, noting frequency, brightness, and context.

Analysis

Quantitative data from surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine which colors elicited the strongest emotional and spiritual responses. Qualitative data from interviews were coded thematically to identify recurring perceptions and cultural interpretations.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

- **Saffron:** 68% of respondents reported feeling a sense of courage, energy, and connection to Sikh heritage.
- **White:** 82% associated white spaces with calmness, purity, and spiritual focus.
- **Blue:** 60% indicated that blue areas enhanced contemplation and inner reflection.
- **Bright Colors (Red/Green/Yellow in decor):** 35% reported distraction or reduced focus during prayer or reflection.

Qualitative Insights

Interviews revealed that pilgrims strongly associate colors with cultural and spiritual meaning. Many noted that white corridors and domes created a calming effect, enhancing meditation and reflection. Saffron flags and banners were perceived as visually energizing and symbolically powerful, reinforcing Sikh identity. Some pilgrims highlighted that inconsistent or overly bright colors in signage occasionally caused confusion or visual discomfort.

Observation

The site primarily uses white, saffron, and blue in structural elements, with occasional bright decorative colors. Signage is often brightly colored but lacks uniformity, which may reduce effectiveness in guiding visitors.

DISCUSSION

The findings align with color psychology and environmental communication theories, showing that colors significantly influence emotional and spiritual responses. White and blue, associated with calm and reflection, enhance pilgrims' contemplative experience, while saffron reinforces cultural identity and symbolic meaning. Conversely, excessive use of bright or contrasting colors can disrupt focus, suggesting a need for carefully planned color schemes in religious sites.

The study also demonstrates that color serves as a communication tool within the Janam Astana, conveying spiritual messages without words. Colors help direct attention, create mood, and enhance the overall visitor experience. Integrating culturally meaningful colors into site design is therefore essential for both communication and engagement.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Colors play a vital role in shaping pilgrim experience at Janam Astana Baba Guru Nanak. White and blue contribute to calmness and reflection, saffron strengthens cultural identity, and inconsistent bright colors may reduce focus. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Standardize signage using culturally and psychologically appropriate colors (e.g., white background with saffron or blue accents).
2. Limit the use of overly bright decorative colors in spaces meant for meditation and prayer.
3. Use color strategically to guide visitor movement and highlight important areas of spiritual significance.
4. Conduct periodic visitor feedback surveys to ensure that color usage continues to align with pilgrims' emotional and cultural expectations.

By applying these strategies, Janam Astana can enhance visitor engagement, support spiritual experiences, and communicate cultural values more effectively through the careful use of color.

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