

# THE SYMBOL OF RED COLOUR IN MALAYSIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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## Abstract:

Malaysia is a land of natural grace and cultural activity. It is a multicultural and multilingual society. It consists of three groups are the Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Each ethnic group lives and practice their own tradition, religion and culture. The article investigates the symbol of red color according to these different ethnic groups in Malaysia. The colour red has a significant role in the Indian and Chinese cultures, it is associated with their cultures. This article shows the importance of red for these ethnic groups in Malaysia since Malaysia is a multi-cultural country where people of Indian and Chinese origin live in, and also will clarify whether these groups have succeeded in bringing their cultures to Malaysia ,specifically the importance of red colour through the Malaysian novels in English ."The Rice Mother", "Evening Is The Whole Day", "The Garden Of Evening Mist".

*Keywords —Malaysia ,Red, angpow, Indian, Chinese , Kumkum.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Colour has an important role in human life. One of the conditions of communication between people is to know the customs and traditions of each person. Colours are an important aspect of human life. So life cannot be imagined without colours because the use of words alone may not help express the message unless using the colour with it (Fraser and Banks, 2004). Many researchers deal with the notion of colour like Elliot & Maier (2007) mention that Colours carry specific meanings and communicate information. Guimei (2009) mentions that Colours may transmit different information to people of different cultures. Due to the respective cultural tradition and background ,some Phrases that contain colored words have exceeded their original meanings and formed different connotations in cultures. The difference of colour's connotation may determine according to different customs, traditions and national and historical background.

The meanings of colours reflect the boundaries of culture and language to represent memories shared by our distant ancestors. Crowley (1993) notes that colour helps us to create feelings and to activate and stimulate our memory, thought and experiences. The colours are magical threads that are woven into each culture. (Jansson, Marlow, & Bristow, 2004) indicate that colour is the most effective visual component

Colour may be interpreted differently between individuals or within the same culture. It may have several meanings (3, 2012). For example, 'red' colour indicate violence and anger in some European societies but in Asian societies, specially Indian culture, it expresses purity and happiness ,for that the following paper is going to analyse the symbol of red colour according to Chinese and Indian cultures in Malaysian literature in English.

## **2. The symbol of red in Chinese culture in Malaysian literature in English**

Through the analysis of Chinese culture in Malaysian literature in English "The Rice Mother", "Evening Is The Whole Day", "The Garden Of Evening Mist". It was found that red colour is the strongest one of all kinds of colours for the person's eyes and brains. Red is the favourite colour for the Chinese people, it is associated with sun and heat for example: "sky reddens". "Red in sun", "red heat" (2,p4,60) 'painted with red and glistened in sun'(1,p24). The sun is the source of life, for this, Chinese people consider the 'red' as a colour of life and warmth. Beside Chinese consider 'red' as a colour of sun. It also stands for fire. For example: 'red fire'(1,P33). Chinese consider the fire as a source of warmth and heat for this they connected it with 'red' as a colour of life.

Red' colour comprises in Chinese marriage culture. It is a symbol of happiness. They use the colour word 'angpow' means 'red envelope' which classifies into two parts, firstly: It is used in Chinese marriage. The word 'angpow' uses among Chinese people in Malaysia, while in China, it addresses as 'Hong Bao' in Mandarin language. An example of 'red envelope' uses in 'The Garden Of Evening Mist' when Yun Ling, a Chinese woman tells Artimo to put money inside a 'red envelope'(P.183) with the mention of the word 'fu' which mean 'good luck' to their friend's wedding(P183). For them, 'red' colour can bring happiness and make the life of the bride and groom better and better.

Secondly: The colour word 'angpow' is also used as a gift for the new born in Chinese culture as in the case of Mui Tsai in 'Rice Mother' who 'accepts the customary red angpow packet with the crisp, folded, fifty ringgit note inside in exchange' to her new baby'(1,P52). The following sentence shows that Chinese put an amount of money inside an 'angpow' (p52) to the child as a sign of good luck.

Chinese use 'red' in formal wedding dress. It is the colour of wedding. "The Rice Mother" by Manicka

illuminates the subject of Chinese traditional wedding dress by Mui Tsai who was happy with the marriage of her both sons, looking at them proudly wearing red Chinese traditional custom 'they were dressed in identical flam red Chinese custom'(176), and waiting for the brides to come with a red Chinese 'Qi pao' wedding dress (Guimei, p160) 'Qi pao' is also known as 'Cheongsam' is a traditional Chinese dress. It includes one piece along the body with special Chinese characteristic of Manchu origin. Chinese culture show that 'red' uses with 'Cheongsam' in wedding as a sign of happiness and prosperity 'a red silk Cheongsam'(2,p207), also 'red' is not limited with 'wedding dress' but, it also associate with the decoration of the whole house' The whole house had been decorated with red banners painted with special writing for even more prosperity'(1,p175) and 'red trim on gate'(1,p8)

Thus Chinese use 'red' in ceremonies to decorate their house. "The Garden Of Evening Mist" by Eng illuminates the Chinese decoration of 'red' in the eve of Chinese new year "where children travel from all over the world for a family reunion in Chinese new year "Majuba House was decked out in red: red banners, red paper lanterns and red squares of paper with the Chinese character Fook in black calligraphy to entice more wealth into the home"(p127). A family gathering is so important in this day to the extent "To ignore it is to be deemed unfilial"(p127). So 'red' plays an important role in Chinese new year as a sign of happiness.

Chinese associate 'red' colour with their God 'red faced figure of Kwan Kung'(3,p192). The image of god Kwan with 'red', it shows that 'red' is a colour of 'worship' thus Chinese are very adhering to their religion and beliefs. As in the case of Yun Ling, the protagonist of 'The Garden Of Evening Mist' who used to go with her mother to the temple of the god 'Kwan' for the purpose of winning the lottery as mentioned in the sentence "my amah had taken me along to a temple in a Georgetown alley, when she would beg the gods for her weekly lottery numbers"(193). He is also named as "God of commerce" although she never won the lottery but

it appears that Chinese has a strong believe in their God.

Chinese culture is one of the oldest and important culture in the world and has effect on the neighbouring countries .Eng clarifies how Chinese are attached to their culture from one side and the important of spread this culture in Malaysia peacefully in another side . Including Chinese writing on the wall of most Malaysian places as in the case of 'kapitiam 'in " The Garden Of Evening Mist" where" kapitiam "is a traditional Malay coffee shop "kopi" is a Maly term for coffee and "tiam" is a term for shop (Zainol,Et Al,2014) .""The kopitiam was of the type found in every town and village"(78). It is a place for old men spend their morning chatting and drinking coffee from saucers .This place is decorated with red Chinese script as a kind of Chinese culture diffusion to Malay " Felicitations in red Chinese calligraphystreaked down a large and unframed mirror on one wall "(78) .Decorating the place with red Chinese script is a sign for happiness ,prosperity and good luck in Chinese as well in Malay.

### **3.The symbol of red in Indian culture in Malaysian literature in English**

For Indian the word 'red' and 'blood' share the same meaning ,thus 'blood' consider as the 'kiss of life' in the body ,for examples: 'red blood', 'blood flew out like a red rain' ,'blood red sky'(3,p61,90,192) . The word 'red blood' according to Indian culture doesn't refer to violence but it refers to life. For Indians, the glow of the cheeks and the body in red indicates that this person is in good health. For example ; 'slap its white flesh till it turned bright red'(p30)Manicka shows in the sentence from her novel 'Rice Mother' that the person beat himself in order to be red and look healthy.' red' can describe purity in Indian culture .For example; 'baby little red ears'(2,P83),'red lips' bright red behind her Shute yield '(2,p55). They also use the word 'red' in their language when the mother call her son 'meralal' means literally 'my red' but it refers to 'my son' (Gulati, 2017).

Indian associate the colour 'red' with certain emotion. The word 'red face' refers to excited, it means when the person face is 'red' looks excited or shy.'red running down Amma's face, bright red'(57). Indians use 'red' colour for decoration and wedding dress like Chinese. Indian bride wear 'red Sari' at a wedding ceremony.'Sari' is an Indian word for traditional dress and it is traditionally 'red' in wedding ceremonies. "Evening Is The Whole Day "illuminates the Indian cultural wedding successfully ,with the significance of red colour in their wedding , like using 'red powder' and henna . Henna is a paste of herbal. also known as Mehndi is a dye prepared from the plant Lawsonianermis, it is used in Indian wedding as well for Malay wedding and middle east with the same name "henna" (Garg et al,2017 ) thus "henna" word adopts to the English language as referring to henna tattoo .Regarding to Indian wedding culture , 'Red henna' ceremony night or 'mehndi' calls before the wedding day as a way for wishing the bride a good life for her journey on to the marriage (Garg et al,2017) .Although "mehndi" or" henna night" is for female but it is allowed for male relative to join and celebrate the ceremony. The core significance of henna is the use of this natural herbal to cool the body and relive the bride from any stress before the wedding (Deshvidesh, 2012). Henna applies on the foot and hand of the bride "feet and hands red with henna"(1,p33). In this sentence the red colour uses with henna to indicate happiness and luck in Patti's marriage life in "Rice Mother'.

Indian women put 'red dot' on her forehead to show that she is married. 'red dot' refers to 'Bindi' originally from Hindus .It is worn by the married woman on the centre of the forehead, to distinguish her from the one by wearing 'red dot' .To understand this, in "The Rice Mother" when Lakshimi husband was ill and unconsciousness, Lakshimi in a weak moment put a red dot on her forehead and went to the picture of Ganesh ,a popular god in Hinduism, and is one of the most worshipped" 'Look, look,' I cried to the picture of Ganesha. 'I still have a husband'(62) she puts red dot as a way to prove that she is still married and

her husband is still alive. The association of 'red' with 'Ganesha' stand as a person's strong belief of God.

Another example with Indian associate 'red' with God is mentioned in the 'Rice Mother' , 'pieces of jet and rosaries made out of Shiva's tears, brownish-red rudraksh beads'. Indians associate the colour 'red' with the God Shiva to show that 'red' is stand as a religious colour for them .

Along with the 'red dot' Indian married woman uses red " kumkum". It is a powder , made from turmeric(Babu,2016), worn by married woman along the part of the hair it is universally followed by Hindu women as a traditional symbol. This tradition is more followed in south India, especially by married women( Babu,2016) . In "The Rice Mother" Lakshmi knows that her visitor is not married for not putting red "kumkum" on her hair as stated in the sentence "her forehead was not the red kumkum dot for customary married women"(15).

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this work is to analyse the red colour in the Malaysian novels in English such as: "The Rice Mother" ,"Evening Is The Whole Day" , "The Garden Of Evening Mist". Red colour analyses according to Indian and Chinese culture in Malaysia. This work shows that there are differences and similarities in the use of red colour in Indian and Chinese cultures, for differences firstly: Red colour symbolizes warmth and life in Chinese culture because it is related to the sun for example "red in sun". Secondly: 'red' colour is associated with ' blood' in Indian culture in Malaysia. The word 'red blood' doesn't indicate violence as in the case with the west culture but it indicates life and it also symbolizes 'purity' for example: 'baby little red ears'(2,P83) .Also the work shows that Indian associates the colour 'red' with certain emotion .The word 'red face' shows that the person is shy 'red running down Amma's face, bright red'(2,p57). While the common uses of red colour in Malaysian literature in English shows that 'red' colour considers as the colour of wedding and decoration

in Indian and Chinese cultures .Thus in Indian wedding the bride wears 'red sari' as a cultural wedding dress and put 'red henna' ,known as 'henna night' which takes the night before the wedding day. Henna also uses by Malay with the same meaning "feet and hands red with henna"(33). The article investigates also the use of colourword 'angpow' means 'red envelope' uses in Chinese culture. It includes putting money inside a 'red envelope' as a wedding present to wish the bride and groom a happy life. The word 'angpow' is also adopted to Indian and Malay, they consider it as a part of Malaysian culture.

Eng clarifies how Chinese are attached to their culture from one side and the important of spread this culture in Malaysia peacefully in another side. Including Chinese writing on the wall of most Malaysian places as in the case of 'kapitiam' kopi" is a Malay term for coffee and "tiam" is a term for shop (Zainol,Et Al,2014)for example: 'Felicitations in red Chinese calligraphystreaked down a large and unframed mirror on one wall "(3,p78) .Decorating the place with red Chinese script is a sign for happiness and good luck in Chinese as well in Malay. The works shows that Indian and Chinese cultural groups have succeeded in bringing their cultures into Malaysia and consider it as part of Malaysian culture through the analysis of the red colour in Malaysian novels in English.

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