

Original Research Article

Symbolism of the Red Color in Iranian-Islamic Culture and Art

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Abstract

Introduction: Colors in Iranian-Islamic culture and art have long carried deep concepts and meanings. Each color represents a special meaning due to thought, life experiences, religious and mythological beliefs, and visual characteristics. The symbolism of the color red, in particular, manifests a new perspective toward a deeper understanding of this rich culture. Examining this symbol helps us better understand Iranians' beliefs, values, and traditions and facilitates learning codes and symbols used in literary and artistic works. By analyzing the correspondence of scholarly data and samples of Iranian painting, this research investigates the symbols of red and its hidden concepts and seeks to answer the question of what concepts red color symbolizes in Iranian-Islamic culture and art.

Research Method: This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method. The data collection process used written sources, available documents, and electronic sources. In the data analysis, literary, historical, mythological, religious, and mystical data related to red color were collected, and samples of Iranian paintings were selected as evidence and examples of the use of red color symbols.

Findings: In Iranian thought, red is a symbol of warriors, Romans, Gods of Mehr and Vayu, symbols of groups such as Qarinvands (Sukhra Dynasty), Khurramites, and Qizilbash, Bahram planet (Mars) and iron metal, power and kingship, intellect and wisdom, celebration and glory, love and bloodlust. In Islamic culture, it symbolizes martyrdom, red death, the blaming soul, and Malamatiyya. In its positive dimension, the red color is the symbol of Imams, and in its negative dimension, it is used as the symbol of Ashqia and Satan.

Conclusion: The study of red color symbolism in Iranian-Islamic culture and art shows that this color is a multifaceted and complex symbol rooted in nature and human experiences. Throughout history and with different beliefs, the color red has taken on different meanings, including love, power, war, martyrdom, and even the devil. Iranian-Islamic culture and art have used it in various ways, conveying a different meaning each time. Examining the symbolism of colors helps us understand the depth of the beliefs, values, and worldviews of the people of this culture.

Keywords

Color, Red Color, Symbolism, Iranian-Islamic Culture

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Introduction and Problem Definition

Colors have long played a fundamental role in Iranian-Islamic culture and art, each carrying deep meanings and concepts. Among these, red holds a special status and, as a symbol of various concepts, is woven into the fabric of Iranian-Islamic culture and art. With its unique ardency, the red color is deeply rooted in Iranian-Islamic culture and art, carrying profound and sometimes contradictory meanings: from love, passion, and ecstasy to war and bloodshed, from power and royalty to spirituality and mysticism. Additionally, a look at the history and myths of Iran reveals the special place of the color red in the beliefs and convictions of the Iranian people. The roots and origins of the symbolism of the color red can be found in nature and human experiences. Red is the color of blood, fire, and the sunrise. Since ancient times, humans have associated this color with power, dynamism, passion, love, war, and spirituality. The symbolism of the color red in Iranian-Islamic culture and art manifests a new perspective toward a deeper understanding of this rich culture and art. This helps in better understanding Iranians' beliefs, values, and customs and facilitates the comprehension of the codes and symbols used in literary and artistic works. By comparing literary data with visual examples of Iranian paintings, the present research has addressed the reflection of red color symbols in Iranian miniature paintings. The aim is to examine the red symbols in Iranian-Islamic culture and art and analyze the underlying concepts. It seeks to answer the question: «What concepts does the red color symbolize in Iranian-Islamic culture and art?»

Research Method

This research is qualitative and has been conducted using a descriptive-analytical method. The research data have been collected from written sources, existing documents, and electronic resources. Criteria such as historical period and symbolic content were considered when selecting samples of Iranian paintings. First, literary, historical, mythological, religious, and mystical data related to the red color were collected in the data analysis process. Then, samples of Iranian paintings were selected as evidence and instances of using red color symbols to determine the role and symbolic meanings of the red color in these works. In this research, semiotic analysis has been used to analyze the data. To ensure the validity and reliability of the results, the data were selected and reviewed from credible and trustworthy sources. A total of 22 miniature paintings were chosen from a large number of available paintings that had the most relevance to the topic of discussion as the sample and statistical population.

Research Background

So far, numerous studies have been conducted on the red color in Iranian-Islamic culture and art; however, research explicitly focusing on the symbolism of the red color and the comparison of literary works with painting is limited. The most relevant research in this area is the study by «Danesh and Khazaei» (2020) entitled «Symbolism of the Green Color in Iranian Culture and Art», which explored the symbolic expression of the green color in Iranian culture and art and analyzed the symbols and concepts of this color in Islamic Iranian culture and art. Another related article by «Moonesi Sorkheh, Talebpour, and Goudarzi» (2010), entitled «Type of Clothing and Color Symbols in Islamic Mysticism», introduced the characteristics of Sufis, their clothing, and the symbolic meanings of these colors. They have also explained the reasons for using such clothing and colors. «Nikubakht and Ghasemzadeh» (2008), in their article entitled «Symbolism of Light and Color in Iranian-Islamic Mysticism», addressed the symbolic role of colors in expressing the spiritual

qualities and personal experiences of mystics. In their article entitled «Color in the Tales of Haft Peykar of Nizami», «Taj Varedi and Mokhtarnameh» (2007) examined the seven colors mentioned in Haft Peykar, each belonging to one of the seven domes and analyzed the connection of these colors with the tales presented in each dome. «Najafi» (2020) conducted a study entitled «The Role of Color in Reducing Tensions in Urban Spaces (Case Study: Mohatasham Neighborhood, Gorgan)», aiming to examine the role of color on the physical and external structure of buildings as the most influential visual factor in creating a sense of social security, happiness, and peace for the residents of the studied neighborhood. In an article entitled «The Mystical Symbolism of Color in Islamic Art and Architecture», «Nasiri, Afrasiabpour, and Ahmadi» (2018) stated that the azure blue and turquoise colors are among the primary colors of the backgrounds of walls, tiles, mihrabs, domes, courtyards, and prayer halls of mosques, and these colors, along with gold, display a unique brilliance and charm in Islamic Iranian paintings. In his article entitled «Analysis of the Expression of the Color Red in Haft Paykar of Nizami Based on Islamic Mysticism», «Rafiei Rad» (2020), using a descriptive, analytical, and comparative method, showed that the expression of the red color in Haft Paykar can be interpreted and analyzed not based on astronomy, the Mithraic mysteries, or Zoroastrianism, but rather on the foundations of Islamic mysticism, in the form of specific keywords that emphasize the acquisition of wisdom and the necessity of rationality in this story. In the article entitled «Frequency Analysis of Iranian Colors in Graphic Posters with the Theme of Iran», «Kolahkaj» (2022) addressed the nature of the most frequent Iranian colors in Iranian graphic posters and showed that the most frequent colors associated with Iran had been ranges of «lacquer red, light yellow, brick, and turquoise blue». In their article entitled «The Role of Color and Design in Evaluating Handwoven Textiles», «Arbabi, Iqarloo, and Allameh» (2021) demonstrated that qualitative indicators and criteria such as color, design, and pattern are prioritized in the evaluation of handwoven textiles. The present study also examines some symbolic aspects of the red color in Iranian painting through comparing literary, historical, mythological, and mystical sources.

Properties and Effects of the Red Color

Red, called "Suxr" in Pahlavi, is one of the three primary colors: Blue, yellow, and red, and from the group of warm colors, its complementary color is green. In terms of shape, the heaviness and stillness of a square also correspond with the volume and weight of the color red. In accordance with the diagonal line of the homogenous line, it has a wavelength between 800-650 microns, which means it has the longest energy wavelength (Itten, 2001, 17). From a psychological perspective, red is a dynamic and vibrant color. «It is a motivation for intense activities, sports, struggle, competition, and sexual desire». Red has a bloodthirsty temperament and a masculine nature; its sensory perception manifests as tension and appetite, and its emotional content is desire and longing. Its physical organs include stiff muscles, the sympathetic nervous system, and reproductive organs. «Red is present in material conditions» (Lüscher, 1994, 87). «The red color is a warm and extroverted color. It causes an increase in blood pressure, a rise in body temperature and stimulates the nervous system. It eliminates states such as depression and sadness» (Sun, 1999, 61).

Examining the Symbols of the Red Color in Iranian Culture and Art of Painting

1. Red, the symbol of warriors and soldiers: In pre-Islamic Iran, different social classes used garments with distinct colors that symbolized their character and social status. In the Avestan and Pahlavi texts, the social structure of society was divided into four classes: the king and priests, warriors, farmers and artisans, and scribes. The color of the warriors' or soldiers' garments was red and purple, and their celestial symbol was «Vayu» (Bahar, 2005, 74). Xenophon also describes the clothing of Cyrus and his soldiers in his writings as purple garments (Ziapour, 1967, 19). In his book entitled «Al-Tafhim», «Biruni» associates the red color with groups, considering it suitable for soldiers: «And among the groups, the commanders, horsemen, soldiers...» (Biruni, 1937, 367-391). «Bahman Namvar Motlagh» refers to the correspondence between the colors of the Iranian flag and the professions and motto of Cyrus. In this correlation, the green color is designated for artisans and its connection with plants, the red for warriors, and the white for kings. These colors might unconsciously be related to Cyrus's motto: «I am afraid of three things for my people: lies, enemies, and drought». Lies are the greatest threat to the rulers, enemies to the warriors, and drought to the craftsmen (Danesh & Khazaei, 2020, 20). Zal, also known as Dastan in the Shahnameh, plays a central and multifaceted role in Iran's national epic. In his youth, Zal was a mighty hero and proved his bravery and warrior skills in battles. He acts as a guide and advisor to other kings and heroes throughout the story due to his wisdom and experiences. He is also recognized as a symbol of wisdom, knowledge, and experience. «Manouchehr» and «Kay Khosrow» are among those who benefit from Zal's guidance. In Fig. 1, Zal is depicted as a warrior in the battle against Golbad. Due to the color and shape of its bud and flower resembling a hearth, the pomegranate is associated with the red color; the invulnerability of Esfandiar is also linked to the pomegranate. In the «The Book of Zarathustra», the prophet Zarathustra bestows four divine gifts upon four individuals: to Vishtaspa, wine (the opener of the eye to the spiritual world), to Jamasp, the odor of flowers (the giver of knowledge and enlightenment), to Peshotanu, the cup of milk (the secret of eternal life), and Esfandiar, the pomegranate (invulnerability). (Wine represents the profession of royalty, odor represents the profession of farming, milk represents the profession of animal husbandry, and pomegranate represents the profession of warfare) (Zabeti Jahromi, 2010, 296). In Fig 2, Esfandiar is depicted as the representative of the warrior profession in a battle with lions, which signifies his prowess in warfare and face-to-face battle.



Fig 1. «The Death of Golbad by Qasem Ali». Source: https://wikiwand.com/en/Battle_of_al-Qadisiyyah



Fig 2. «The Battle of Esfandiar with the Lions». By Mirza Ali. Source: <https://millikimlik.az/2021/4239>.

2. Red, the Symbol of Rome and the West: The red color of Roman legionnaires' uniforms is mentioned in numerous historical sources. Additionally, the sunset in the west is a dark red color, which may have intensified the fear of the continuous threat from Rome in ancient Iran. «According to the Pahlavi text «Zand-i Wahman Yasn», Iran will be the target of an enemy invasion before the sons of Zoroaster (the future prophets) appear in the world. ... The Romans will invade Iran from the West with red clothing and flags» (Chunakova, 1997). The fact that «Abu Rayhan Biruni» refers to Rome, Slavs, and Levant and, in general, to the West, in the context of colors representing regions, originates from this idea.

3. Red, the Symbol of the Qarinvands (Sukhra Dynasty), Khurramites, and Qizilbash: Since the dawn of human history, colors have played a powerful and symbolic role in various societies. Social and political groups use colors as their flags and emblems to distinguish themselves from others and to showcase their identity, values, and ideals. Due to its deep and powerful connotations, the red color holds a special place among group and political symbols. This color is often associated with concepts such as revolution and armed battle for political and social change, and it is also a symbol of social justice and egalitarianism. Among the most important groups and movements in Iran that have used this color as their symbol and emblem, the following can be mentioned: In ancient histories, a group of ruling families in the mountainous regions of Royan, Tabaristan, Daylaman, Muhan in Azerbaijan, Rey, and Hamadan, both before and after Islam, were known as Sukhra or Surkhab. Khosrow Parviz fought with Bahram Chubin (the Daylamite commander), deceived and killed him, and hired a group of Daylamite warriors and cavalry as mercenaries for his own war. «Baladhuri» (died in 279 A.H.) mentions in his book entitled «Futuh al-Buldan» that this group surrendered after the defeat of the Iranians in the Battle of Qadisiyyah, converted to Islam, settled in Kufa, and accompanied Mukhtar al-Thaqafi in his uprising (Baladhuri, 1899, 268-274) (Fig 3). Another significant social and religious movement that emerged in Iran before and after Islam was Khurramites. Baghdadi says about them: «The Khorramiyeh are of two kinds, one of which existed before the Islamic state, like the Mazdakites, and the second kind are the Khurramites who appeared during the Islamic state, and they are of two sects: the Babakieh and the Mazyarieh, both of whom are known in Muhammira». «Sam'ani» says: «Mahmari is related to a tribe of the Babakian Khorramdin, who are called Muhammira because they wore red garments during the time of Babak» (Sedighi, 1996, 262-263). Another group that used the color red as a symbol of their movement was the «Qizilbash», who formed the Iranian army at that time. They were followers of the Safavid order, and Shah Ismail founded the Safavid dynasty with their help. Qizilbash is composed of two Turkish words: «qizil», meaning red, and «bash», meaning head. The reason for this naming was the red hat of the followers of this order, which was invented by Sheikh Heydar, the father of Shah Ismail I, for the Sufi disciples. According to «Shamlou», the Sultan transformed the Turkmen Taqiyeh, common at that time, into the crown of the twelve Heydari Turkmen. His followers also imitated him, and all the members of this family were distinguished from other people by this esteemed headgear. On this occasion, this esteemed class became known as Qizilbash (Shamlou, 1992, 19). The Qizilbash crown changed during the reign of Shah Tahmasp I and lost its spiritual aspect. The Persian pickles, jewels, and colorful feathers were added to it. Instead of being a symbol of Sufism, it became a symbol of the Qizilbash's power and superiority over the Tajiks (Falsafi, 1965, 210) (Fig 4).



Fig 3. «Battle of al-Qadisiyyah», anonymous artist. Source: https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Battle_of_al-Qadisiyyah.

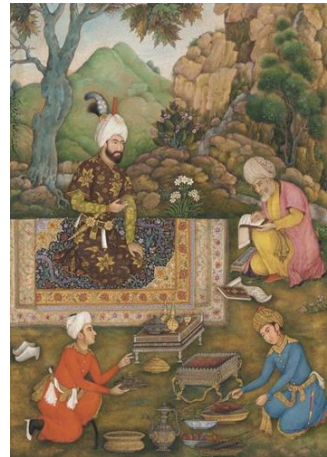


Fig 4. «The painting of Shah Tahmasp I», by Farah Beg. Source: <https://millikimlik.az/2021/4239>.

4. Red, the Symbol of «Mithras» or «Sun» and «Vayu» in Mithraism: In Mithraic rituals, the colors red and purple hold special significance. Red is the symbol of «Mithra» or «Sun» and the «Vayu» in Mithraic beliefs: In Mithraism, the colors red and purple held special significance. The Mithraists considered the redness of the sky before sunrise to be a manifestation and reflection of divinity. In their view, «the sun itself wears a red cloak and hat ...» (Razi, 2002, 57). «Suhrawardi», in the story «The Red Intellect», expresses the redness of the intellect's face through the words of the guiding sage: «But the one who ensnared you in the trap bound you with these various chains, and appointed these guardians over you, has long thrown me into the black pit». «This color of mine that you see as red is from that, and every whiteness that belongs to the light of the arm, when mixed with black, appears red» (Pournamdarian, 1996, 381). In Mithraic tradition, the color of the sun is red. "Rumi" considers red the best color and believes it belongs to the sun and comes from it. In some narrations, this point is worth considering, especially when God is depicted in a red garb. A divine and magnificent robe under which a mystic like Ruzbehan Baqli Shirazi has also witnessed the divine presence. «I beheld the glory of the Almighty on the color of the red rose, but the world was in the realm of the rose as if it were scattered from that red rose» (Baqli Shirazi, 1987, 161). Moreover, in the ceremonial feast of Yalda Night, fruits of red, such as pomegranates and watermelons¹, are used. In addition to the Mithra, the color red is also attributed to the Vayu; Vayu is also a kind of warrior and wears red garments. «Vayu, adorned in a good garment, golden and silver, rosy red, which is the attire of warriors» (Dadgi, 2016, 47). In a painting from «Haft Awrang» by Jami, from the Safavid school of Mashhad, Belqis is depicted wearing a red dress, which indicates that she was previously a sun-worshipper (Mithraic) (Fig 5).



Fig 5. «The Judgment of Solomon attributed to Mirza Ali». Source: Ajand, 2005, 211.

5. Red, the Symbol of Bahram (Mars), and Iron: Bahram's star is one of the seven celestial bodies², symbolizing war and bloodshed. The position of Bahram is considered in the fifth sky. (Emadi, 1986). Bahrām is called the guardian of the fifth field or the lord of the fifth region, and the third clime³ has been attributed to him (Mosaffa, 1978, 52). «Abdul Karim Jebelli» in the book «Insan al-Kamil» has described the seven skies, seven purgatories, and their colors. The fifth sky, known as the Mars sky, under the command of Azrael, is created from the light of the Day of Judgment and is blood-red in color. The fourth purgatory, the land of desires, is the place of demons and is also blood-red in color (Chevalier & Garabar, 2003, 352-353). «Biruni» also explained the implications related to the days of the week in his book «Al-Tafhim» and considered Tuesday to be associated with the Mars planet (Biruni, 1937, 367-391). «To the smallest, the largest, and the reddest things

... From the places on the fire temples and fire altars, ... From cities and regions to Levant, Rome, and Slavs, and from lava to iron and copper... From traits to wickedness, foul speech, shamelessness, deceit, enmity, war, and animosity, and groups to commanders, horse riders, and soldiers... From the religions, idol worship, drinking wine and wearing red, and from the professions, selling weapons, smithery, and slaughtering». Khwaja Nasir also associates Tuesday with Mars in the correspondence of the days of the week to the planets (Mosaffa, 1978, 29). In the poem «Haft Peykar» by Nizami, Bahram Gur visits the lady of the Red Dome on a Wednesday. At the story's beginning, he mentions that Bahram Gur visits the Lady of the Red Dome on the first day of Dey month. In ancient belief, the color of the month of Dey is red. «The month of Azar is associated with the color purple, and the month of Dey is associated with red» (Behzadi, 1989). Additionally, he refers to the symbols related to the colors of the days of the week. First, Saturday is black, and Friday is white. The day in the middle of the week is red, which, according to mythological belief, results from the combination of white and black (Suhrawardi, 1993, 228). It then refers to the day of Bahram and the Bahrami color, associated with the planet Mars—the goddess of war and bloodshed and the celestial executioner—whose symbolic color is red. Finally, it also refers to the Slavic and red-faced nature of the lady of the Red Dome, which Abu Rayhan Biruni considers in «Al-Tafhim» to be consistent with the color red in the regions associated with the Slavs. On the other hand, in the continuation of the story, Nizami refers to the talismans and the invulnerable fortress made of iron and stone, which again indicates the correspondence of iron with the planet Mars and the color red (Nizami, 1934, 218). In the «Shahnameh», Hoshang is mentioned as the first iron extractor, the first blacksmith, and the first sacrificer (Ferdowsi, 1960, 33). The connection of Mars, «Bahrām», with red is related to the ancient Haranian and Babylonian wisdom. The «Sabians of Harran» had a square, red temple dedicated to Mars. The idol representing this planet, made of iron, the metal associated with Mars, was placed on an elevated throne in the middle of the temple. During the festival of Mars, the Sabians donned red garments and decorations stained with blood and took up naked swords and daggers (Karadu, 1982, 92).

6. Red, the Symbol of Power and Kingdom: A study states that «red is considered a commanding color and also a symbol of masculine power that influences states of masculinity» (Ali Akbarzadeh, 1999, 78-80). In many cultures, the red color is associated with the sun and fire. Fire is a symbol of power, «domination, superiority, and control» (Cirlot, 2010, 98) (Fig 6). In ancient Iran, the worship of fire as a fire god, namely Atar, was common (Hall, 2013, 198). Atar (Azar) was the son of the god of light, Ahura Mazda. The sun in Mithraism represented the powerful god Mithras. By wearing red garments, Iranian kings and rulers also somewhat presented themselves as representatives of the gods and showcased their power and legitimacy (Fig 7). They wore purple garments to participate in royal or religious ceremonies. People also viewed the purple color with a sense of sanctity (Ziapour, 1969, 84) (Fig 8). «Kings, viziers, caliphs, and nobles are described in Persian literature wearing red and purple garments. The royal tents are also red in the miniature paintings, which is the empire's color» (Bloom, Blair, Duri, Grabar, & Ettinghausen, 2010, 224). One of the unpleasant tasks is entering the Caliph's House (Dar al-Khilafa) with red slippers or shoes because red is the color of the caliph's attire (Sabi, 1967, 69). Nizami also considers the red color a symbol of royalty (Nizami, 1934, 234).



Fig 6. The painting of the Sadeh festival by Sultan Muhammad Tabrizi. Source: Ajand, 2005, 124.



Fig 7. The court of Jamshid by Sultan Muhammad Tabrizi. Source: <https://pinterest.com/pin/547187423453449201>.



Fig 8. The conversation of Khosrow with Shirin by Aqa Mirak. Source: Graber, 2011, 101.

Sudabeh, in the «Shahnameh», represents a power-seeker woman who does anything to achieve power. For example, in response to Kay Kavus's proposal to her father, who opposed this marriage, she says, «Why should I be upset and sad about marrying someone who has the kingship of the world?» She always sides with the powerful. When her father, the King of Hamavaran, captures Kay Kavus, Sudabeh supports her. Her desire for power becomes evident in her conversation with Siavash. He knows that after Kay Kavus, Siavash will become the king of Iran; therefore, she offers Siavash her love to maintain her position as the queen of Iran (Zaheri Abdehvand, 2014). In the miniature paintings (Figs 14 & 18) from the «Shahnameh», she is always depicted in a red outfit, which indicates the painter's understanding of her personality traits.

7. Red, the Symbol of Intellect and Wisdom: Ruzbehān Shīrāzī, in his visions, sees Gabriel in a red robe (Ernst, 1998, 142), and also Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī considers the luminous sage (the red intellect) as the eternal intellect, the tenth intellect, Gabriel or the guiding angel, a sign of the active intellect or the divine light in the realm of creation (Goli, 2016). Savants like Avicenna also refer to Gabriel as the angel of revelation and the Holy Spirit, considering him an intermediary between the Aseity and the First Intellect (Ibn Sina, 1986, 89-90). Thus, considering the vision of Ruzbihan Shirazi, who saw Gabriel in red clothing, and the writings of Ibn Sina, Najm al-Din Kobra, and Suhrawardi regarding Gabriel, who consider him a manifestation of the intellect, one can interpret the color of the intellect as red (Fig 9). Nizami, in «Haft Peykar», narrates the story of Bahram Gur with seven maidens from the seven climes. Bahram Gur goes to the Red Dome on Tuesday. The daughter of the Slavic king welcomes him in a red dress and tells him a story from the land of Russia (Fig 10). The main characters of the story «The Red Dome» are the king's daughter, the young prince, and a sage. The girl is described with attributes such as being educated, resourceful, quick-witted, and a painter of the China factory, etc. It is described that all of them refer to the knowledge and intellect of the girl. Another character in the story, the young prince, seeks «wisdom» to achieve union and learns from it. The third character in the story is also a sage. «The main theme in this narrative naturally refers to the fulfillment of an individual who has made the pursuit of knowledge and the increase of intellect and wisdom their profession» (Rafiei Rad, 2020).



Fig 9. Description of Jerusalem by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) by Ahmad Musa. Source: Chevalier & Garabar, 2003, 145.

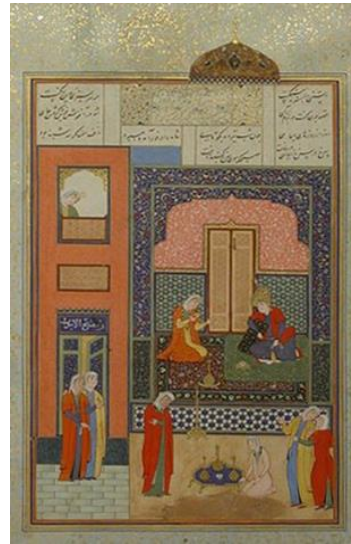


Fig 10. Bahram Gur in the Red Dome, a work attributed to Sheikhzadeh. Source: Ghazizadeh & Khazaei, 2005, 18.

In Shia traditions, red, in its positive aspect, symbolizes the Imams, and, in its negative aspect, it symbolizes the wicked (Ashqia). Shia sources and traditions mention that two garments from paradise were sent to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) for Hasan and Hussein (AS). The clothing of Imam Hasan (AS) was like a green emerald, and the clothing of Imam Hussein (PBUH) was like a red ruby (Majlesi, 2018., 246; Qomi, 2010, 531) (Fig 11). In the book «Hilyat al-Muttaqin», a narration is mentioned in which red and green garments are referred to, which God bestows upon Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Imam Ali (AS) on the Day of Judgment (Majlesi, 1990, 15). In some narrations and hadiths, it is mentioned that the Prophet and the Imams wore red garments on Fridays and during joyful occasions, including weddings (Tabatabaie, 1987, 133). A narration from Imam Sadiq (AS) states that wearing dark red clothing, except for the bridegroom, is considered abominable (Majlesi, 1990, 15). Mostofi, in his book «Sharh Zendegani-ye Man (My Life Story)», describes the clothing of the nobles and dignitaries during the Naseri period, stating that the wicked (Ashqia) wore red cloaks and the virtuous wore white cloaks (Mostofi, 2009, 289). The clothing of the commanders of the wicked (Ashqia) was mainly brown and red, similar to Shimr; they usually wore completely red outfits with rolled-up sleeves and a skirt tied at the waist. The devil's costume was red primarily and mockingly colored (Beyzaei, 1965, 154; Anasori, 1987, 237-238) (Fig 12).



Fig 11. Imam Ali (AS) and Hasanain (AS), lacquer painting, Shiraz. Source: Danesh & Khazaei, 2020, 24.



Fig 12. Shimr's Letter of Safety for Hazrat Abbas (PBUH), by Hassan Ismailzadeh. Source: <https://pinterest.co.uk/pin/590253094905710378>.

9. Red, the Symbol of Death (Mawt Ahmar) and Mastery over the Soul and Desire: In

In Islamic mysticism, the spiritual journey is undertaken in seven stages known as the seven cities of love. The fifth stage of these phases is called the stage of annihilation or red death, which means mastery over lust and the soul and liberation from worldly attachments (Haghighat, 1988, 29). In the common view and belief, dying as a result of murder, which leads to the body becoming wounded, bloody, and red, is called «Mowt Ahmar» (red death) (Goharin, 2004, 378). Al-Tahanawi, in his book «Kashaf Istilahat al-Funun Wa-al-'Ulum», refers to the interpretations of death by mystics and Sufis and points out that Sufis consider death to be a veil from the lights of revelations and manifestations. He categorizes death into four types, each associated with a color: «Mowt Abyad (white death), which is the training of the soul through hunger and thirst; Mowt Aswad (black death), which is the training of the soul through patience in the torment of people; and Mowt Ahmar (red death), which is the opposition to the soul ...» (Al-Tahanawi, 1996, 1669). Similarly, «Abdul Razzaq Kashani» in the book «Terminology of the Sufis» (Abd al-Razzaq Kashani, 1991, 91) and «Abdul Qadir Gilani» in «Al-Ghunya li Talibi Tariq al-Haqq» (Gilani, 2014, 19) consider the struggle against the self as the red death. In the mystical belief of «Alaeddin Semnani», the seven steps of mysticism are attributed to the seven subtle organs of the human being, and on the path to perfection, each of the seven prophets is considered about the color and conditions of that step, ultimately revealing each of these organs with colorful lights. In this path of mystical evolution, the third step pertains to the subtle organ of the heart, which is interpreted as belonging to Prophet Abraham (PBUH), and its color is the red of agate. Upon seeing this brilliant color, «a great delight reaches the heart and steadfastness in the spiritual journey emerges» (Simnani, 2011, 303). «Kubra» also refers to color symbolism in interpreting and explaining dreams. In his view, in these exemplary dreams, the red color symbolizes power and ambition (Kubra, 1993, 131). The third station of the seven stations of the seeker, in the Qadiri order, is the inspired soul, whose place is the spirit, whose state is love, and whose light is red (Al-Qadiri, 2015, 29). In the thought of Najm al-Din Razi, the sixth step of the spiritual path, the red light is also seen as a sign of knowledge and wisdom (inspired soul) (Razi, 2008, 169). «Saad al-Din Hamawi» (1983) also refers to the three luminous colored points in his book «Al-Misbah Fi'l-Tasawwuf» and enumerates characteristics for each: «The point is of three kinds: one is black, one is white, and the other is red ... The red point refers to creation, speech, the spirit of truth, the unified soul, guardianship, and offspring» (Hamawi, 1983, 57-58).

10. Red, the Symbol of the Malamatis: In the second century of the Islamic calendar, Sufis appeared in Samanid Iran who based their teachings on self-blame and constant attention to their thoughts and actions, trust, and asceticism. Their name is derived from the root of «melamat», meaning blame and reproach. The Malamatis believed that to reach the truth; the seekers must constantly reproach their souls and avoid hypocrisy and vanity. They also emphasized the importance of vigilance. The Malamatis were very popular among ordinary people and the lower classes of society. Some of the most famous Malamatis include: «Abu Hafis Haddad Nishaburi», «Hamdoon Qassar, Abu Uthman Hiri»⁴ Regarding the connection between the Malamatis and the Red Death, Ibn Arabi, one of their admirers, believes that the Red Death is primarily for the Malamatis because they endure humiliation and disgrace in order to struggle with the soul and to ensure that the unruly soul does not become arrogant and is considered lowly and insignificant (Ibn Arabi, 2004, 231). The author of the book «Minhaj al-Salikin» considers the red death a request from others (Najm al-Din Kubra, 2009, 54). The Malamatis, due to their spirit of being blameworthy, wore the red cloak—a color with a negative connotation that symbolized their humility and modesty. «Lal Shahbaz

Qalandar, who was said to be from Marand in Azerbaijan, was named Osman because he always wore red garments; he was called ruby» (Zarrinkoub, 1990, 372). The color red is associated with power and action and sometimes with anger. Sufis, embodiments or radiators of power, were called «red-robed» (Schimmel, 1996, 55).

11. Red, the Symbol of Celebration and Joy: Red is an exciting and stimulating color that increases heart rate and blood pressure. This effect is due to stimulating the sympathetic nervous system, responsible for the body's «fight or flight» responses. This characteristic has led to the use of red in celebrations and ceremonies to create a lively and exciting atmosphere. «When the unparalleled King, Shah Ismail, had no male heir yet, upon hearing this joyful and delightful news, he ordered a week of celebration, during which the unique nobles drank red wine and wore red garments in gratitude and as a pretext» (Mirkhvand, 2006, 6377). The king would wear a special purple robe during the Mehr festival (Cumont, 2007, 31; Razi, 2003, 202). «Abdul Rahman Jami» also considers redness a source of joy in his poem «Yusuf and Zuleikha» (Jami, 1999). Brides also wore red dresses at weddings. In Fig 13, Junaid has used a captivating combination of red to depict celebration and joy. Homayoun is also seated at the top seat of the gathering in a red wedding dress, or in the following sample, Sudabeh, as the bride, is wearing a red dress (Figs 14 & 15).



Fig 13. «The Wedding Celebration of Homay and Homayoun», by Junaid. Source: Graber, 2011, 82.

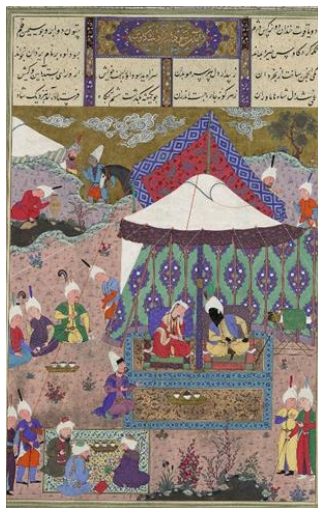


Fig 14. «Marriage of Sudabeh and Kay Kavus» by Mir Musavar. Source: <https://pinterest.ca/pin/217861700712908211>.

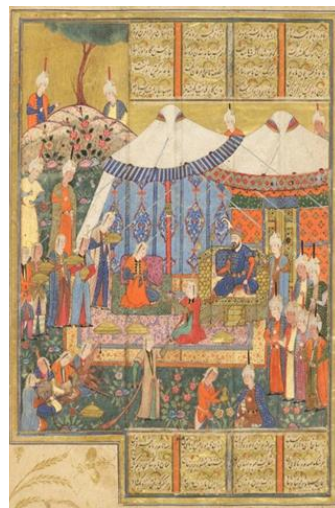


Fig 15. «The Wedding Celebration of Siyavash and Farangis». Anonymous artist. Source: <https://pinterest.de/pin/385620786839373787>.

12. Red, the Symbol of Love: Besides being a symbol of passion and vitality, red is also a symbol of love and life in many cultures (Bayar, 1997, 131). In modern psychology, red represents willpower, strength, courage, and the ability to overcome weakness and disbelief (Lüscher, 1994, 86-87). Red has a stimulating quality. Orange-red signifies passionate love, while purplish-red indicates spiritual love (Ahmadi Maleki, 1999). According to «Simnani», the third step of the seven steps of mysticism pertains to the subtle organ of the heart, which is interpreted as being related to Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him), and its color is red. «Simnani» considers the heart to be the place of love and states that the light of the heart manifests in red, as red is the color of love. Love also manifests in fire with the

color of agate (Simnani, 1983, 265). Observing the red color increases the motivation and courage of the seeker, and he reaches annihilation in the subtlety of the heart, becoming so immersed in the love of the Truth that he forgets sleep and food (Simnani, 1983, 325). «Jalal al-Din Rumi» in «Ghazals of Shams» refers to the two colors red and yellow, and considers them symbols of love. The red gift symbolizes the expression of love. In the story of «Zal and Rudabeh», the gifts are red, and the pack camels are also red-haired; even the shields of the warriors who have come to greet them are red. Farangis's dowry is also placed on the red-haired camel, and her spread is also red.

13. Red, the symbol of the Devil: According to Islamic texts and the Quran, the creation and nature of the devil is from fire: «He said, 'I am better than him, that you created me from fire and created him from clay'» (Al-A'raf/7). In mystical belief, the red color, in its negative connotation, symbolizes the devil and the devilish fire within the human soul. In the description of the devil, it is stated that the devil is a fire that is fiercely rebellious, dark, and mingled with the darkness of disbelief in a formidable form (Goharin, 2004, 82). Comparing the devil to a firefighter is based on the belief in his redness. Moreover, in other texts, the redness of the devil is also indirectly referenced (Fig 17). In the *Shahnameh*, Sudabeh is a symbol of impurity and demonic wisdom (negative wisdom) and destruction, which is introduced as the cause of war, bloodshed, death, and devastation. She, who plays the role of the seducer of kings and princes, embodies the demonic female spirit «Jehi» in ancient Iranian mythology (Fig 13 & 18). In a miniature painting by «Kamal al-Din Behzad» from «Boustan-e Sa'di», preserved in the Cairo library, the scene of Zuleikha's seduction and Prophet Joseph's (PBUH) escape from her is beautifully depicted. Here, too, Zuleikha appears in the role of the seductress, similar to Sudabeh, which is one of the duties of the devil, and the artist has depicted her in a red dress (Fig 16). Another negative character in ancient texts and the «*Shahnameh*» is Zahhak. In the «*Avesta*», he is referred to as Aži Dahāka, which means «the evil dragon». He is considered «the embodiment of evil, and in Pahlavi sources, five vices—greed, impurity, sorcery, lying, and debauchery—are attributed to him» (Yahaghi, 2012, 549). Zahhak is always wholly submissive to the devil, and his actions are nothing but the devil's desires (Fig 19). As mentioned, the devil appears in the role of the seducer in the guise of Sudabeh, who, adorned with red makeup, appears to seduce Siyavash.

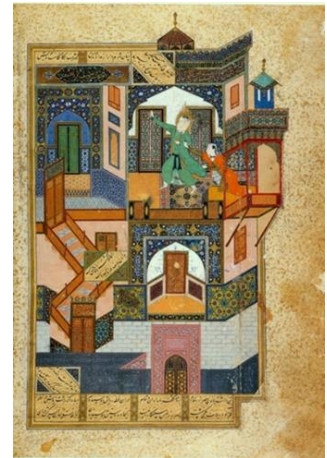


Fig 16. The Seduction of Zuleikha by Kamal al-Din Behzad. Source: Graber, 2011, 92.



Fig 17. «The Prostration of Angels to Adam and Eve», anonymous artist. Source: <https://pinterest.com/pin/490681321892362456>.

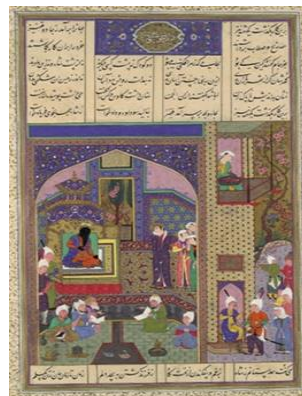


Fig 18. «The Pleading of Sudabeh», by Ghasemali. Source: <https://metmuseum.org/art/collecti on/search/452133>.



Fig 19. The fate of Zahhak is conveyed to him, attributed to Sultan Muhammad. Source: Ajand, 2005, 122.

14. Red, the Symbol of Vengeance: In the long wars of past millennia among different tribes, a red flag atop a roof or tent was a sign of oppression and vengeance (Ahmadi Maleki, 1999). The red flag raised on the holy dome of Imam Hussein (AS) is also a symbol of blood vengeance and retribution. In Arab culture, if someone is unjustly killed and their blood is not avenged appropriately, a red flag is raised over their grave. In a pilgrimage to Imam Sadiq (AS), it is mentioned: «The intensity of the bond and connection of Sayyid al-Shuhada with God is such that his martyrdom is like the shedding of blood from the tribe of God, which will only be avenged and sought by the avengers and blood avengers of God's allies» (Majlisi, 2018, 148 & 168). In the story «Red Dome» from «Haft Paykar» of Nizami, a prince, the suitor of the Russian girl and the avenger of other lovers, is wearing a red garment for vengeance and justice. In «The Alchemy of Happiness», it is stated: «Proclaim that anyone who seeks justice should wear a red garment» (Ghazali Tusi, 1941, 417). «Khajeh Nizam al-Mulk Tusi» also recounts a story in «Siyasatnama» where a king orders that to identify the complainants, «the complainants must wear red garments and no one else should wear red so that I can recognize them» (Nizam al-Mulk Tusi, 1999, 19). Additionally, by the order of the kings, a flag called «Alam-e-Daad» was raised near the royal palace. Anyone with a complaint would wear a garment made of paper and write their grievance on it. Sometimes, the paper garment would be dyed red in the name of blood vengeance. The term «binding a bloody girdle» in literature is also a metaphor for preparing for murder, being ready for revenge and blood vengeance (Moein, 2007, 788). Goudarz, the son of Kashvad Zarrin-Kolah (here, Zarin means red), the grandson of Qaren Kavegan, and the descendant of Kaveh the Blacksmith, is one of the great and renowned Iranian heroes in the «Shahnameh». The Goudarzian, considered one of Iran's most significant heroic families, are his descendants. Goudarz and a few of his sons, such as Giv, Roham, Bahram, and Hojir, participated in the revenge battles of Siavash against the Turanians (Figs 20 & 21). In the story of Rostam and Sohrab, when Sohrab asks Hojir about the insignia of the Iranian champions, his eyes fall upon a red tent and a flag with the figure of a lion on it. Hojir, in response, introduces him as the commander of the forces of Goudarz, the Keshvadans.



Fig 20. «The Battle of Hojir with Sepehrnam». Shahnameh of Tahmasp. Source: <https://pinterest.com/pin/485896247318509375>.



Fig 21. «The Battle of Qaren and Barman». Shahnameh of Tahmasp. Source: <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/epic-iran-victoria-and-albert-museum>.



Fig 22. «Bloody Shroud», by Naser Palangi. Source: <https://honaronline.ir>.

15. Red, the Symbol of Martyrdom: The red color of the tulip flower and the black spot in its center have led to it being called the mourning tulip in literature. In some narratives, it is said that when Adam was expelled from paradise and descended to Earth, he cried so much that from his bloody tears, tulips grew. In Arabic, tulips are called «Nu'man» because Nu'man means blood, and the tulip was named so because of its red color. Iranian poets have had a symbolic interpretation of the tulip, considering it a symbol of suffering, and they compare the battlefields covered with the dead to the tulip fields or tulip gardens. According to Mohammad Jafar Yahaghi, «In the narratives of the Shia sect, where the discussion is about the plain of Karbala and the blood of the martyrs, the story of the purple color of this flower comes to the fore» (Yahaghi, 2012, 717). In Revolutionary art, red is also a symbol of the martyrs, manifested in the red tulips. The painting «Bloody Shroud», in a symbolic and allegorical form, presents a tangible and realistic view of the Ashura event. Naser Palangi's interpretation of Ashura is embodied in a decapitated body. The colors in this painting—white symbolizing the purity and sanctity of the martyr and red representing the blood unjustly shed in history—are significant (Fig 22).

16. Red, the Symbol of the Blaming Soul: Due to its reproachful nature, the blaming soul ((Nafs Al Lawwama) blames the person. This leads to internal conflict in humans (between the self and the devil). For this reason, the red color, which symbolizes war and hostility, is attributed to this soul. The blaming soul, like a lamp or the sun, also dispels darkness. «Najm al-Din Kubra» (1957, 26) refers to it as the red sun, and «Ruzbihan Baqli» has interpreted it as the red ruby: «The red ruby or red rubies is a metaphor for the soul, whose luminosity is intertwined with the darkness and obscurity of attachment to the body» (Baqli Shirazi, 1999, 694). On the other hand, «Najm al-Din Kubra» considers the blaming soul to be the same as intellect (1957, 26). Since the blaming soul and reason have the nature and characteristic of reproach, and the blaming soul possesses qualities similar to those of intellect, the self-blaming soul is the same as intellect. Since the color of intellect is red, the color of the blaming soul is also red.

Conclusion

The color red, throughout human culture and history, has held a unique and symbolic position, embodying deep and sometimes contradictory meanings in mythological and mystical texts. In Iranian-Islamic thought, red carries diverse meanings and symbols, the study of which opens a new window to understanding the deeper layers of this culture. Analysis of the subject reveals that the symbol of red in Iranian-Islamic thought sometimes has a positive dimension and at other times a negative one. Red symbolizes warriors, represents the West and the Romans, signifies certain political and social groups and movements such as the Sokhrais, the Red-robed, and the Qizilbash. It is also the symbol of the planet Mars and the metal iron, of the deities Mithra (the Sun) and Vayu, a symbol of power and kingship, reason and wisdom, celebration and joy, love, vengeance, and, in Islamic culture, martyrdom. It represents the Imams but, in its negative aspect, symbolizes villains, Satan, red death, and the reproaching soul (Nafs-e Lawwama). It is worth noting that some of these meanings are shared between Iranian and Islamic cultures, such as the symbol of vengeance. Moreover, red in mythological and mystical texts holds profound meanings, sometimes synonymous and at other times opposing. For instance, in myths, it symbolizes war and power, while in mysticism, it appears in the struggle between the soul and the self. Similarly, in myths, it represents joy and love, which, in mysticism, are associated with divine love and spiritual fervor. In its negative aspect, red in mythology

symbolizes ominousness and evil, which, in mysticism, relates to the commanding soul (Nafs-e Ammara) and human negative tendencies.

Author Contributions

The first author proposed this research. The second author did the collection of data and materials related to the sections on literature, religion, and mysticism, as well as some illustrations. The first author did the collection and analysis of illustrations and other materials related to the text. The editing and final responsibility of the article lay with the first author.

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Conflict of Interest

The author (s) declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest related to this research, in writing, and publication of this article

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Appendix

1. Watermelon, due to its structure with a green skin, a white layer beneath it, and a red interior, is considered by Mithraists identical to the red of dawn and twilight; because, according to Mithraic beliefs, the sky is green or blue, and when mixed with white light, it turns red.
2. The planets of the charts of the lucky (Sa'd) and unlucky (Nahs) nature of individuals and events, which together included four planets: Major Sa'd (Jupiter) in the sixth sky, Minor Sa'd (Venus) in the third sky, Major Nahs (Saturn) in the seventh sky, Minor Nahs (Mars) in the fifth sky, Sun in the fourth sky, Moon in the first sky, and Mercury (the actuary) in the second sky.
3. The seven climes are as follows: The first clime is attributed to Saturn, the second to Jupiter, the third to Mars, the fourth to the Sun, the fifth to Venus, the sixth to Mercury, and the seventh to the Moon (Mosaffa, 1978, 52).
4. For further study on the Malamatis, refer to the article «Sufism and the Path of Blame» by Seyyed Ali Jafari Sadeghi and Seyyed Ahmad Hosseini Kazerooni, published in the Journal of Islamic Mysticism, Year 9, Summer 2013, Issue 36, pages 13-27.

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