

CHROMATIC EXPRESSION IN CHOLISTANI NOMADIC CULTURAL: AN ANALYSIS THROUGH WESTERN ARTIST COLOR REFERENCES

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Abstract

This research explores the chromatic expression embedded in Cholistani nomadic culture and examines how these traditional color practices can be analyzed, understood, and reinterpreted through references to Western artists. The study investigates the symbolic, environmental, and cultural meanings of colors used by Cholistani nomads in their textiles, attire, crafts, and daily life. By comparing these indigenous color choices with the chromatic strategies observed in selected Western artworks, the research highlights both parallels and contrasts in color theory, emotional impact, and visual communication. Through qualitative analysis, field observations, and visual comparison, the study aims to identify how Western chromatic principles can inform a refined color selection process while maintaining the authenticity of Cholistan's cultural identity. The findings contribute to cross-cultural design knowledge, offering new insights for artists, designers, and researchers seeking to integrate traditional Pakistani color heritage with global artistic methodologies.

INTRODUCTION

Primer

The Cholistan Desert, located in the southern expanse of Punjab, Pakistan, is a landscape where culture and environment are inseparably woven together. Amid its vast dunes, scorching sunlight, and nomadic rhythms of life, color emerges as one of the most powerful forms of expression. For Cholistani nomads, chromatic choices are not merely aesthetic preferences; they are deeply rooted in cultural symbolism, spiritual beliefs, environmental observation, and generational knowledge. The reds, ochres, indigos, and earthy browns that dominate their textiles, garments, and handcrafted objects reflect stories of ancestry, identity, and the intimate relationship between humans and the desert.

Within this cultural tapestry, color serves as a visual language communicating social roles, tribal

associations, marital status, festive occasions, and even connections to nature. Over centuries, nomadic communities have developed instinctive and intentional methods of selecting, combining, and interpreting colors. These chromatic traditions are shaped by natural dyes, climate realities, and the visual cues of the desert ecosystem, yet they also express poetic meanings that transcend geography.

In contrast, Western art history presents an entirely different but equally rich chromatic philosophy. Many Western artists from the Impressionists to modern abstract painters have used color to convey emotion, movement, light, and conceptual depth. Their structured approaches to hue, value, saturation, and harmony have significantly influenced global design and visual culture. Although these frameworks have been widely analyzed in scholarly discourse, there

remains limited research exploring how Western chromatic strategies might interact with or illuminate indigenous color practices such as those found in Cholistan (Shoukata, Jafara & Wattoob 2021).

This research aims to bridge that gap by examining the chromatic expression of Cholistani nomadic culture through the lens of selected Western artist references. By comparing these two distinct visual traditions, the study seeks to uncover intersections, contrasts, and new insights that can enhance color understanding in cultural, artistic, and design contexts. Through qualitative analysis, field observation, and visual mapping, this study highlights how traditional Cholistani chromatic knowledge can be appreciated more deeply while also exploring how Western artistic principles may offer additional clarity for color selection and interpretation.

Ultimately, this introduction situates the research within a broader conversation about cross-cultural aesthetics, heritage preservation, and creative innovation. It positions Cholistani nomadic color expression not as a static folkloric element, but as a dynamic cultural language that deserves scholarly attention and global recognition. The study invites the reader to view color not simply as a visual choice, but as a meaningful bridge between tradition and contemporary artistic thought.

The History and Significance of Color

Color is one of the features of art that is created when light reflects off of an item. However, historical examples show us that color has been interpreted differently over time. Cave paintings and rock engravings began to be reproduced on walls and animal leather canvases. The innumerable masterpieces of art were hidden among sand dunes in the Indus valley, where there were no rocks or stones. These artifacts from the past were hidden beneath the ruins of old cities, and some of them have since been lost to the ravages of time. In the case of large-scale works of art, these tragedies took place in the Indus valley, where there were no mountains, rocks, or stony terrain, and what art there was usually constructed on muddy walls and clay constructions. Then it would have been admirable to continue looking for the great gems of artistry from the past if there were any reminders of ancient times and old customs.

Cognitive Effects of Color

Different human emotions could be represented by different colors. A color is actually a variety of light wavelength combinations. In order for our brain to detect any hue, nerve cells and our sense of sight work together to understand the numerous combinations of light wavelengths. Colors are not studied or understood in isolation, but rather in connection to other colors or in succession. Through the use of color, we may express our unique personality and style in art and design. Color has been used for years to improve our environments by interior decorators, graphic designers, advertisers, and artists. The use of color can elicit an emotional response from the observer, convey a message, or elicit a strong reaction (Elliot & Maier, 2014).

According to research, the same color can symbolize a variety of meanings, some of which may not have an obvious physical origin. Beth Tauke summarizes and writes on color in a comprehensive manner, including practically all of its aspects. Color is an ephemeral medium. Although it can move in, on, above, below, beside, toward, beneath, and within, its ability to move, especially between, is one of its key qualities. Between dimensions, matter, states, space, time, human perception, internal and external, and the outside light, world, and shadow, between the senses, and between the imagined, illusory, and the supposedly real, the eye and the brain, are just a few of the transitions it makes. It defines the concepts of transparency, translucency, and opacity as well as proximity and distance (Kudrya-Marais & Olalere, 2022).

Color psychology is the learning of colors as a figure in affecting human behavior. Color can affect subtle perceptions like the flavour of food. There are properties of colors that might evoke particular feelings in people (Roohi & Forouzandeh, 2019). Age, gender, and culture all have an impact on how people are affected by color. Despite the fact that cultural environment can affect color associations, color preference should be rather consistent across gender and ethnicity. Additionally, colors can improve the efficacy and samples. Red or orange tablets, for instance, are typically employed as stimulants.

The use of color psychology in advertising and branding is widespread. Because of the emotional and psychological effects it can have on buyers, marketers

place a premium on color (Huaixiang, 2012). Logos are important for businesses because they increase brand recognition and recognition among consumers. Consumers feel this way about Victoria's Secret, for example, since they associate the brand with the feminine color pink (Humphrey, 2019). Colors are a crucial part of any window display's ability to convey its message. Although blue is the favoured hue, studies show that colors like red are more likely to entice impulse purchases (Whitfield & Whiltshire, 1990). Aside from its most profitable use in marketing, color psychology has numerous other applications such as in medicine, sports, healthcare, and even game design. Carl Jung is widely regarded as an early pioneer in the study of the psychological and philosophical implications of color. Jung once said, "Colors are the mother tongue of the subconscious" (Nieminen, 2017).

The Emotional Power of Color

There is a close relationship between the way we feel and the colors we see. Color temperature can also affect how we respond to a given hue, with warmer tones eliciting a wider range of emotions than cooler ones. Color theory's application is crucial to the success of any endeavor. Feelings as varied as joy, sadness, calm, and hunger can all be triggered by a change in color palette. Reactions like this are influenced by a combination of psychological variables, biological conditioning, and cultural imprinting. Understanding color theory is important, but so knows what different colors mean and how they may affect the average person emotionally or mentally.

Fiery and Serene Tones

On the color wheel, the warm colors red, orange, and yellow are located close together. Many people report feeling more upbeat, optimistic, and energetic after being exposed to warm colors. However, the colors yellow, red, and orange can also get your attention and alert you to potential danger or prompt you to take some sort of action (think stop signs, hazard warnings and barrier tape). Seeing red may also stimulate appetite (Cahng & Xu, 2019).

Green, blue, and purple are examples of cool hues. While typically tranquil and pleasant, cool colors can also convey grief. Purple, which combines the calming

colors of blue and red, is frequently used to assist inspire creativity (intense). Include these hues if a business wishes to convey security, beauty, or wellness (Chang & Xu, 2019).

Emotionally Stimulating and Calming Colors

Bright, warm hues like yellow, orange, pink, and red are considered happy colors. Peach, pale pink and lilac are examples of pastel colors that can brighten your mood. More cheerful and upbeat feelings are evoked by colors that are brighter and lighter. Adding several main and secondary colors together for a vibrant, young impression is another way that colors can inspire feelings of happiness (Chang & Xu, 2019).

Somber colors are those that are dark and muted. Sadness is associated with the color grey, but other cool, dark, and muted colors, such as blue, green, or neutrals like brown or beige, can have the same or similar effect on the viewer, depending on the context. In some East Asian countries, white is a symbol of mourning, although in Western societies, black is more commonly linked with death and loss (Chang & Xu, 2019).

Blue and green, two cool tones, can create tranquility. Baby blue, lilac, and mint are examples of cool-toned pastels that create a tranquil and relaxing affect. White, beige, and other neutral tones might also help people feel at peace. The less colors you use in a design and the more restrained you are, the more serene it will feel (Chang & Xu, 2019).

Colors like neon and other bright, bold tones can evoke powerful feelings. Although red, yellow, and green are stimulating colors, they can also be irritating to the eyes. They'll stand out more against the backdrop if painted in these tones. Colors with a lot of pigment, including royal blue, turquoise, magenta, and emerald green, can jolt your senses and make you feel refreshed and energized (Chang & Xu, 2019).

The Chromatic Vision of Western Artists

Claude Monet

"Color is my day long preoccupation, joy, and anguish" Claude Monet sobbed. As part of his color studies, Claude painted the same subject at different times of day and in different types of weather. "The Rouen Cathedral" is one of his most well-known series. The exterior was captured in photographs taken in a range of lighting settings. Excellent

illustrations of how the quality of light can alter the appearance of objects. He recreated these paintings in his workshop, exploring new color combinations and emotional states. Artists should "attempt to forget what items you have in front of you," he wrote, whether "a tree, a house, a field, or whatever." Just picture a tiny blue square, a long pink rectangle, and a thin yellow line, and paint it exactly as you see it (Efland, 1990).

Van Gogh

Vincent van Gogh regularly expressed his love of color in his artwork. In his opinion, the painter of the future will be a colorist unlike any other. He realized the interconnected nature of colors and thus said,

Henri Matisse

The main purpose of color ought to serve expression, said Henri Matisse. The only light that truly exists is that which exists in an artist's mind, and color serves to convey that light, not the physical phenomenon. Additionally, he stated, "Black was the color I chose to write in the past when I wasn't sure what color to choose. Black is a force, and I rely on it to make the construction easier (Efland, 1990).

J. M. W. Turner

In addition to painting and printmaking, J. M. W. Turner was also noted for his vibrant use of color and his expansive landscapes. When it came to color, he preferred yellow. The "affliction with jaundice" label was thrown at him by detractors who saw something they didn't like in his photographs. To create his experimental water color, the artist employed Indian Yellow, a brilliant paint made from the urine of cows fed mango. A synthetic kind of Chrome Yellow, a lead-based color linked to delirium, was utilized by the artist to emphasize certain areas (Efland, 1990).

Giotto

Gold was worshipped as a symbol of the sun and the Holy Spirit in most ancient nations. The late-medieval Florentine painter and architect Giotto changed that, thinking the color blue stood for the heavens and eternity. His fascination with blue led him to paint the Scrovegni Chapel's ceiling in the hue. When compared to the traditional connotations of luxury and grandeur that had been attached to the use of

gold by earlier painters, this was a huge change. In numerous scenarios inside the cathedral, the blue sky serves as a unifying and broad backdrop, suggesting an infinite number of potential outcomes (Efland, 1990).

Picasso

Picasso's "Blue Period" lasted three years, beginning in 1901 and ending in 1904, and is widely believed to have expressed his grief after the suicide of his friend Carlos Casagemas. The artist, who had previously been gregarious, became depressed and withdrawn after this devastating loss. Psychosis, according to Carl Jung, was Picasso's mental state. His most famous piece from this time period is perhaps "The Old Guitarist," which depicts a homeless old man in tattered clothes playing the guitar on the streets of Barcelona, Spain. Picasso's "Blue Series" series exemplifies how the color blue, when utilized extensively as Picasso did, can cause the observer to feel downcast and depressed (Efland 1990).

Some renowned artists who have painted their cultural thought patterns include:

Courbet

It was Courbet who coined the term "Realism." He comes from a rural family. In 1840, he began his career as a Romanist. However, by the 1848 revolution, he believed that romanticism emphasized feelings and imaginations that were disconnected from the realities of time. He depicted people's appearances, lives, problems, and traditions. Courbet's realism is more naturalistic than realism.

Impact of Color on Nomadic Craft Traditions

Cholistani is a harsh and barren land with little rain and unreliable rain, relying primarily on livestock of sheep, goats and camels. However, on cold winter nights, they gather indoors to work on various arts and crafts such as Chunri, Pottery, Chahbian, Hand Fans, Mukaish, Jewellery, Khussa, Gota Kinari, Chahj, Morhey, Ralli (Gindi), Khais, Khara, Pranda, Block Printing, Embroidery, Parchy, Pillow Covers.

Fabric Craftmanship

Color is a vital component of Cholistani crafts, giving life and identity to every handmade piece.

Chunri

Color play a central role in Chunri craft, a type of tie-and-dye developed in Punjab, competes with Ajrak which is popular in Cholistan. Chunri which is most commonly worn as a stole (Dupatta) is characterized by its bright colors in the region, these are known as bright colors and serves as a symbol of team spirit. It brings life, meaning, and cultural identity to each handmade piece (Shafeeq, 2014).

Gota Kinari

Golden and silver colors are often used to symbolize wealth, status, and prestige among Cholistani nomads. Matallic color often appears in craft used for wedding, festivals and other important culturalceremonies. Metal embroidery known as Gota work (also referred to as Gota Patti Work, Gota-Kinari work, or Lappe ka Kaam) was developed in the Indian state of Rajasthan. Jaipur, Bikaner, Ajmer, Udaipur, and Kota are home to some of the best examples of Gota art in the country. Metals like as gold, silver, copper, etc. are used in an appliqué technique to create intricate designs.

Block Printing

In Cholistani nomadic craft, color is not just a decoration it conveys tradition, emotion, and community heritage. Block Printed fabrics are made using a novel and straightforward printing method called block printing. Fruit and vegetable juices are utilized as printing colors. Ajrak is the pinnacle of block printing. This method makes use of wooden blocks carved with complicated Cholistani designs.

Embroidery

The use of vibrant and symbolic color transforms Cholistani textiles and craft into visual stories of desert life. In Bahawalpur Cholistan, embroidery is in high demand. Cross-stitching Moti Sitary, makes for a special effect. This style of embroidery, used on apparels like the Dupatta, Kurta and Chadar. Skilled local artisans make excellent use of date tree leaves and palm fronds in their work. Mats made from the dried leaves of the local date palm tree are another unique regional art. The leaves are geometric in shape and filled with color using a variety of dyes.

Pillow Covers

In textiles, embroidery, and decorative crafts, color transforms functional items into expressive art. Cholistani artisans also use Woollen thread to create colorful patchwork and embroidery on pillow covers. It has a geometric form, and it's colored in a cholistani style. Quilts, table runners, and pillow covers are transformed into works of art when crafted from the unique fabric known as Ralli or Rilli. Women number in the thousands with the majority living in Pakistan but also some in Cholistan's Bahawalpur District. Ralli refers to a random assortment of bits and parts, or Jurna, Rallana, or Millana in Seraiki. Cholistani Gindiand Halli is among the most visually striking and colorful handicrafts in the world. A common motif among Desert dwellers is the use of overlapping colorful patches of clothing to reflect their way of life. It is pieced together with needlework and scraps of cotton fabric in a rainbow of hues. It can be hung on the wall or used as a bed spread, blanket, carpet, etc. Most of this art is created in Cholistan's rural areas.

Weave Crafts

Each hue reflects cultural symbolism, representing social status, tribal identity, and spiritual beliefs. The combination of warm and cool tones, along with bright and muted shades, creates harmony and emotional resonance (Qureshi & Faiz, 2025).

Khais

Through color, Cholistani artisans convey communal values, personal expression, and a connection with nature. Both Chadars and Gindian made on hand looms, have a wide range. Desi cotton threads are used specifically for weaving. Vibrant hues are employed to depict traditional Cholistani motifs.

Chabian

The careful selection and placement of colors showcase the creativity, skill, and aesthetic sensibility of Cholistani nomads. The Chabian craft is another method of using date tree leaves. You can't have a proper dinner without the brightly colored ornamental dish. These Chabian are dyed for decoration and embellished with gold or silver foil. Similar to the large signs, these are crafted from palm leaves dyed a rainbow of colors and decorated with intricate patterns and geometric motifs. Used both as

storage for 'Chapatis' (bread) and as decorative accents on the walls (Shafeeq, 2014).

Hand Fans

Each craft becomes a visual narrative, linking the nomads' heritage with contemporary appreciation of art and design. They use sticks and dried date tree/palm leaves to create rounded or square shapes. These Hand Fans are additionally decorated with vibrant frills (GolaKinari, SitaryMoti, etc.) and dyes.

Chahj

Vibrant reds, deep blues, earthy browns, and sunlit yellows mirror the desert landscape and environment. Craftsmen with golden hands twist and turn various plant materials (Kanay) into the form of a tray for cleaning rice and other uses. Leather threads and plain threads of various colors were also employed (Qureshi, 2013)

Morhey

The seats are made from sticks of (Kanas) and date tree leaves that have been tired in such a way as to make it a comfortable seater, and are then covered in embellishments of embroidered and velvet clothes. The Cholistan design makes use of vivid hues. Morhey, which comes in a variety of vibrant colors, is also used as a decorative accent.

Ralli (Gindi)

Khara

The Khara, a large basket fashioned from twisted sticks of the (Falsa), is a highly prized art in this region.

Pranda

In addition, producing Prandas is a notable art form exclusive to the Bahawalpur area. The hairs are held in place by a knotted black thread. The Pranda that the women of this region wear is beautiful and sophisticated. Pranda come in many different designs and thread colors. This art form also incorporates the use of beautiful pearl jewellery and cut mirror work.

Jewellery

Cholistan people are very fond of converting their savings in the form of silver ornaments and exhibiting the same during wedding ceremonies and local festivals. The nose ornament of married women called

Nath and nose stud called Popa are always crafted in the precious metal gold. Fabulous designs made on Cholistan ornaments are: Popa, Katmala (Necklace), Nath, Bula, Kanghan, Patriyan, Pazaib, Chandanhaar, Chelki, and Anwatyhan, etc gold and silver bangles are also made in two forms one is the solid and the other is hollow.

Khussa

Colors are used to tell stories, preserve cultural memory, and pass traditions through generations. Bahawalpur Cholistan is known for producing a distinctive handicraft known over the world as Khussa. Gold and silver thread, known as Tilla in the region, is utilized to transform the otherwise monochromatic leather into a rainbow of hues. Animal skins, primarily from cows, are used to construct the inner lining and sole of these shoes. These shoes are the visual emblem of social prestige in this country, and they are stunning.

Pottery

High-quality clay not only does pottery have a fantastic aesthetic, but it also has huge practical value. In particular, pitchers (Ghara) that can keep water cold even in the hottest desert months. Kumhar pottery is named after its creators. Those two are masters of their craft. Blue, orange and green are the primary hues used to highlight the floral and geometric patterns on inexpensive pottery (Qureshi, 2013).

Conclusion

This study has explored the vibrant chromatic expressions embedded in Cholistan nomadic culture, highlighting how color serves as a powerful medium of identity, emotion, and cultural storytelling. Through an analysis of textiles, crafts, and daily practices, it is evident that Cholistan nomads employ color not merely for decoration but as a visual language shaped by environment, tradition, and social symbolism.

By examining Western artists' approaches to color alongside Cholistan practices, the research has revealed both parallels and contrasts, demonstrating how cross-cultural insights can enhance understanding and application of color in design, art, and cultural preservation. The interplay between indigenous knowledge and global artistic frameworks

offers a pathway for preserving traditional color heritage while inspiring contemporary creative practices.

Ultimately, this study emphasizes that color in Cholistan nomadic culture is more than aesthetic it is cultural memory, emotional expression, and identity woven into every thread and artifact. Recognizing and understanding this chromatic heritage allows designers, artists, and scholars to create work that is both culturally rooted and globally informed, celebrating the richness of Cholistan's desert palette.

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