

Symbolic and Semantic Manifestations of Colours in Oral Folklore (Based on Nakhchivan Folklore Texts)

Aytan Jafarova 

Abstract. Colour symbolism is a highly relevant topic of research today. The issue of colour symbolism is an interdisciplinary subject of interest to psychologists, theologians, philosophers, and literary scholars. In general, concepts carrying symbolic meaning were perceived much more clearly in ancient cultures. Today, many oral texts associated with symbolically significant concepts and objects are gradually disappearing, which is a natural process. Just as the time-space continuum influences every aspect of human life, it also has a profound impact on symbolism as one of the essential elements of culture. Concepts and objects with symbolic meanings, such as colours, may lose their original significance over time, while others undergo semantic transformation. In other words, an object or phenomenon that conveys a particular meaning within a specific temporal or spatial context may acquire an entirely different meaning as temporal and spatial conditions change. In recent years, interdisciplinary approaches that promote the integration of knowledge from different fields of the humanities have gained increasing importance. The study of colour symbolism is one of these interdisciplinary fields. The scientific interest in understanding the psychological and aesthetic properties of colour has a long tradition. Researchers have examined colour not only from the perspective of physics but also in terms of its influence on the human mind and behaviour. The effects of colours, which surround people from birth, on the human body, nervous system, and psyche continue to be an important subject of modern psychological research. The issue of colour perception within national consciousness has also been extensively explored in contemporary scholarship. The evaluation of colour perception is studied as a socio-cultural phenomenon with distinctive characteristics across different peoples and historical periods. The semantic significance of colours is most effectively examined within the context of folklore texts, where their symbolic meanings are preserved and reflected.

Keywords: colour symbolism, green, blue, yellow, grey, folklore texts, symbol

Institute of Art, Language and Literature, PhD in Philology, Baku, Azerbaijan
Nakhchivan Branch of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS), Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan
E-mail: ceferli_ayten@mail.ru

Received: 20 April 2026; Accepted: 4 August 2026; Published online: 22 October 2026

© The Author(s) 2026. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

Şifahi xalq yaradıcılığında rənglərin simvolik və semantik təzahürləri (Naxçıvan folklor mətnləri əsasında)

Aytən Cəfərova 

Xülasə. Rəng simvolikası müasir dövrdə tədqiqi olduqca aktual olan mövzulardan biridir. Rəng simvolikası məsələsi psixoloqların, ilahiyyatçıların, filosofların və ədəbiyyatşünasların maraq dairəsində olan fənlərarası tədqiqat sahəsidir. Ümumiyyətlə, simvolik məna daşıyan anlayışlar qədim

mədəniyyətlərdə daha aydın şəkildə dərk edilirdi. Bu gün simvolik əhəmiyyət daşıyan anlayış və əşyalarla bağlı bir çox şifahi mətn tədricən yoxa çıxır ki, bu da təbii prosesdir. Zaman-məkan kontinuumu insan həyatının bütün sahələrinə təsir göstərdiyi kimi, mədəniyyətin mühüm elementlərindən biri olan simvolikaya da ciddi təsir göstərir. Rənglər kimi simvolik mənə daşıyan anlayış və əşyalar zaman keçdikcə ilkin mənasını itirə, digərləri isə semantik dəyişikliyə məruz qala bilər. Başqa sözlə, müəyyən zaman və məkan kontekstində konkret mənə ifadə edən əşya və ya hadisə zaman və məkan şərtləri dəyişdikcə tamamilə fərqli mənə qazana bilər. Son illərdə humanitar elmlərin müxtəlif sahələrinə aid biliklərin integrasiyasını təşviq edən fənlərarası yanaşmalar getdikcə daha çox əhəmiyyət qazanır. Rəng simvolikasının öyrənilməsi də bu fənlərarası tədqiqat sahələrindən biridir. Rəngin psixoloji və estetik xüsusiyyətlərinin dərk edilməsinə yönələn elmi marağın uzun tarixi vardır. Tədqiqatçılar rəngi yalnız fizika baxımından deyil, həm də onun insan şüuruna və davranışına təsiri baxımından araşdırmışlar. İnsanları doğulduqları andan etibarən əhatə edən rənglərin insan orqanizminə, sinir sistemində və psixikasına təsiri müasir psixoloji tədqiqatların mühüm mövzularından biri olaraq qalır. Milli şüurda rəng qavrayışı məsələsi də müasir elmi araşdırmalarda geniş şəkildə tədqiq edilmişdir. Rəng qavrayışının qiymətləndirilməsi müxtəlif xalqlara və tarixi dövrlərə xas xüsusiyyətləri olan sosial-mədəni hadisə kimi öyrənilir. Rənglərin semantik əhəmiyyəti onların simvolik mənalarının qorunub saxlandığı və əks olunduğu folklor mətnləri kontekstində daha səmərəli şəkildə araşdırılır.

Açar sözlər: *rəng simvolikası, yaşıl, mavi, sarı, boz, folklor mətnləri, simvol*

İncəsənət, Dil və Ədəbiyyat İnstitutu, filologiya üzrə fəlsəfə doktoru, Bakı, Azərbaycan
Azərbaycan Milli Elmlər Akademiyası (AMEA) Naxçıvan Bölməsi, Naxçıvan, Azərbaycan
E-poçt: ceferli_ayten@mail.ru

Daxil oldu: 20 Aprel 2026; Qəbul edildi: 4 Avqust 2026; Onlayn dərc edildi: 22 Oktyabr 2026

© Müəllif(lər) 2026. Bu açıq girişli məqalə Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 Beynəlxalq Lisenziyasının (CC BY-NC 4.0) şərtlərinə uyğun olaraq yayımlanmışdır.

Introduction

The colour-symbolic system of Azerbaijani culture has evolved through the historical development of the nation, integrating both natural associations and socially significant meanings that emerged from people's lives and activities. Researchers identify three principal functions of colour in culture: communicative, symbolic, and aesthetic (Kosherenkova, 2015, pp. 163–169). The aesthetic function of colour is realized through its ability to express and evoke particular emotions within the process of human aesthetic activity.

Aesthetic activity plays a decisive role in the cultural life of society. Through participation in aesthetic processes involving the purposeful sign-symbolic (artificial) modelling of social emotions, individuals contribute to the formation, development, and transmission of socially significant emotions within society (Voyevodin, 2010, p. 129).

The study of the aesthetic impact of colours is possible only when the historical context is taken into account, encompassing the principal interpretations of the cultural meanings associated with a particular colour within the cultural and historical region under investigation.

Every nation possesses its own distinctive system of colour symbolism, reflected in its folklore, religion, language, and literature. The most vivid manifestations of colour symbolism are found in the images and events preserved in folklore texts.

Folklore characters, people, animals, birds, trees, natural phenomena, and other symbolic elements all contribute to the integrity of the folk worldview. This worldview can be understood through a

system of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations (Gasimova, 2024). Researcher O. B. Serostanova notes about this: “*A symbol establishes the cause-and-effect relationship between objects. It reflects the unity of the ideal and the material, the whole and the part, space and time, in other words, everything that constitutes the meaning of mythical substance*” (Serostanova, 2020, pp. 23–27).

Colours function as symbols that express the underlying essence of thought through meanings rooted in the deepest and most natural layers of human perception. Regarding the nature of the symbol, it has been argued that “even when it exists only temporarily, a symbol is a reflection and manifestation of what is eternal and true. From this derives the symbol’s capacity to acquire multiple meanings, and its power lies in its polysemy and in the dynamic transition from one meaning to another” (Kuznetsova, 2010).

Materials and Methods

At different periods, the symbolic meanings of colours in the Turkic world and in the cultural consciousness of Turkic peoples have attracted the attention of both Turkic and Western scholars. Researchers have sought to explain aspects of Turkic colour symbolism that differ markedly from the symbolic colour systems of other cultures. Among the most significant contributions to this field are the studies of the Hungarian scholar Prof. A. Alföldü and the German Turkologists Annemarie von Gabain and I. Laude-Cirtautas (Laude-Cirtautas, 1961; Annemarie, 1962; Alföldü, 1943).

Folklore texts provide one of the most appropriate sources for revealing the symbolic dimensions of colours. Accordingly, this study examines the semantic manifestations of colours within folklore texts in order to identify and interpret their underlying symbolic meanings. The semantic nuances of the colors green, blue, yellow, and gray are explained primarily through references to folklore texts.

Green has long been regarded as one of the most symbolic and evocative colours in human history, drawing its significance from countless myths, symbols, and cultural traditions. The history of green reflects humanity’s perception of nature, its relationship with the natural world, and the enduring pursuit of harmony. In ancient times, green symbolized fertility and the regenerative power of nature. During the Middle Ages in Europe, however, these positive associations gradually shifted, and the colour became linked with evil forces and malevolent spirits. The Renaissance brought about a renewed appreciation of green, associating it with nobility, refinement, and elegance, making it a favoured colour among artists and rulers.

In Ancient Egypt, green possessed profound symbolic significance, representing prosperity and agricultural abundance. Its hieroglyph depicted a papyrus shoot, symbolizing life, vegetation, and rebirth. In wall paintings, the face of Osiris, the god of the underworld, was portrayed in green, emphasizing his association with health, regeneration, and eternal life. In Ancient Greece, the distinction between green and blue was not clearly defined, and the same lexical item could be used to describe both the colour of the sea and that of trees. In Ancient Rome, green was regarded as the colour of Venus, the goddess associated with vineyards, vegetation, and fertility.

During the Middle Ages, green symbolized youth, spring, and love, while at the same time conveying ideas of instability, uncertainty, and danger. In Christian symbolism, green occupied a secondary position and was often associated with the devil, evil forces, and witchcraft.

In 1676, the perception of green changed following the discovery of the colour spectrum. The English scientist Isaac Newton demonstrated that white light could be separated into multiple coloured rays, establishing a new spectral arrangement in which green was positioned between yellow and blue.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, green has increasingly been associated with nature, peace, and renewal. With the advancement of science, particularly ecology, green has become an

international symbol of environmental awareness, representing nature conservation, ecological responsibility, and efforts to combat environmental pollution (Kukhaleishvili, 2024).

Among the folklore materials collected in Nakhchivan, the symbolic significance of the colour green is less prominent than that of several other colours. In the Great Chilla (*Böyük Çillə*), one of the traditional seasonal rituals, the green rind of the watermelon - its principal ritual attribute - symbolizes ancient people's aspiration for the return of green, renewed nature. In folk belief, the mythological figure Khydyr Nabi (Xıdır Nəbi) is also described wearing green garments.

At the heart of the Khydyr Nabi ritual lies the aspiration for the return of green nature and the renewal of life. In folk belief, the arrival of Khidir marks the beginning of nature's greening, and the fusion of the Khydyr figure with the color green defines the symbolic significance of green in the collective consciousness of the people. More broadly, green begins to assume its symbolic role as early as the Chilla (Midwinter) ceremony, which marks the onset of winter. The green rind of the watermelon, the ritual's most important symbolic offering, reveals the deep-rooted symbolism of this color. From the very beginning of humanity's struggle with the forces of nature, represented by the day of Chilla, green has symbolized the hope for the revival of nature and the enduring struggle to bring life and renewal back to the world.

In addition to symbolizing abundance, the color green is widely associated with youth and renewal. Referring to the etymology of the Azerbaijani word *yaşıl* ("green"), M. Seyidov notes that it consists of the components *yaş* and *-ıl*, explaining: *Here, the word "yaş" is the root, the core, the fundamental element, whereas "ıl" was probably once a productive derivational suffix that later became fossilized, or perhaps the remnant of an unknown word that merged with the root* (Seyidov, 1982, p. 47). Based on Seyidov's interpretation, it becomes necessary to examine the semantic range of the root *yaş*. Such an investigation reveals that in Mahmud al-Kashgari's *Divani-Lughat-it Türk*, the word *yaş* carries the meanings "fresh", "moist", "green vegetation", "greenery", "plant", "to sprout" and "verdure" (Kashgari, Vol. IV, 2006, p. 657).

The symbolism of striving for the return of green nature is also reflected in the sprouting of *samani* (germinated wheat) during the preparations for the Novruz festival. Thus, in all three rituals, the color green carries a sacred meaning as a symbol of new life and the renewal of nature. Green also serves as a defining symbol of renewal in *bayatis*—the short lyrical folk poems that constitute one of the region's principal lyric folklore genres. Consider the following example of a *bayati*:

*Mən aşiqəm, göy bağlar,
Göy bağçalar, göy dağlar.
Kimin əzizi ölər,
Yaşıl açar, göy bağlar* (İsmayil, 2010, p. 85).

(Meaning: This bayati presents green as a symbol of renewal and the continuity of life, emphasizing nature's enduring cycle despite human loss.)

The third and fourth lines of the *bayati* clearly reflect local customs surrounding weddings and mourning rituals. A green head covering symbolized joy and happiness among women; however, a woman who had lost a loved one was not expected to wear it. Because the color green represented emotions that contrasted with grief and mourning, it was traditionally avoided during funeral ceremonies.

The color green is also closely associated with Islamic values. In Islam, it is regarded as one of the sacred colors and plays a significant role in various religious beliefs and ritual practices.

Green garments and head coverings, by contrast, were traditionally worn during joyful celebrations and festive gatherings. The sacred status of green in Islam is also reflected in the Qur'an in verse 21

of Surah 76 (*Al-Insan*) states: “*They (inhabitants of paradise) will wear garments of fine green silk and heavy brocade, and they will be adorned with silver bracelets. Their Lord will give them a pure drink*” (Bunyadov & Mammadaliyev, 2018, p. 578).

Folklore scholar Bahlul Abdulla argues that green occupies a relatively marginal place in the broader Azerbaijani folkloric tradition: “*....The color green is encountered only rarely in our ancient way of life and in our folklore. Since green became one of the symbolic attributes of Islam, it could not establish a prominent place in the earlier stages of our culture. This association is further evidenced by the traditional depiction of God’s angels as wearing green garments*” (Abdulla, 2004).

In the village of Garalar in Kazan, Ankara, it is customary for the Groom participating in the dance performed around the fire to wear a red ribbon on his arm, while the Groom’s attendant wears a green ribbon (Kalafat, 2018). It is generally accepted that green occupies a more prominent position than other colours within the Islamic value system. From this perspective, green is regarded as the colour of Islam. Although examples of green in folklore are relatively limited, those that do exist indicate that this colour also held a prominent place in ancient Turkic thought. However, as time passed and the significance of green within Islam deepened, it gradually came to be recognized as the colour associated with the principal symbols and attributes of Islam.

In contemporary folk consciousness, green is perceived as the colour of hope, aspiration, and the fulfilment of wishes. The poet R. Zaka expresses this symbolic dimension of green in one of his poems as follows:

*Yaşıl-yaşıl yamaclar,
Könlümün ahəngidir.
Mən yaşıla vurğunam,
Yaşıl murad rəngidir* (Khandan, 2004, p. 24).

(Meaning: *In this poem, green symbolizes hope, fulfilled wishes, and emotional harmony, while the poet’s devotion to the colour reflects his optimism and deep appreciation of its symbolic significance.*)

Among the folklore examples collected in Nakhchivan, one of the most vivid expressions of ritual tradition is “Gülüm hey” songs. One of these songs contains a stanza, in which the colour green conveys the anonymous poet’s joyful mood and hopes for a happy future. In the lines, “*Arxalığın çim yaşıl, gülüm hey, Geymə, gözüüm qamaşır, gülüm hey*” (*Your jacket is bright green, gülüm hey. Do not wear it, it dazzles my eyes, gülüm hey*) as well as in the folk song “*Qayna, Samavarım, Qayna*” (*Boil, My Samovar, Boil*), the verses “*Samavarın altı yaşıl, Şəninə söz yaraşır*” (*The bottom of the samovar is green. Words of praise suit its honour*) (Farzaliyev & Gasimli, 1994, p. 295) affirm that the colour green symbolizes the aspiration for a fortunate and happy life, as well as the striving inspired by that aspiration.

The ancient symbolism of colours and their interpretation across different cultures are further supported by modern theories that recognize a connection between colour and not only the emotional and volitional state of individuals but also that of an entire community.

The symbolic meaning of the color blue and its lighter shades varies across world cultures. In Western societies, blue is commonly associated with peace, security, stability, harmony, unity, trustworthiness, and self-confidence, while in some cultures it also symbolizes sadness. In Eastern and Asian cultures, blue carries different meanings: in China and Korea, it represents immortality, whereas in India it is regarded as a symbol of heaven and spirituality. In Ancient Egypt, where blue pigments were first developed during the third millennium BCE, the color was associated with the sky and the Nile River, the source of fertility and prosperity. In contrast, among many Latin American cultures, blue is traditionally linked with mourning rituals. Similarly, in Ancient Rome, blue was

viewed unfavorably, being associated with black and, consequently, with mourning, death, and at times even ugliness.

At the beginning of the second millennium, particularly from the early twelfth century onward, blue lost its status as a secondary and rarely used color in Western European culture, as well as in Ancient Rome and the early Middle Ages. Attitudes toward blue changed dramatically: it became fashionable and, according to some scholars, came to be regarded as the most beautiful of all colors. As a result, blue acquired a wide range of symbolic interpretations and came to represent truth, divine power, pure wisdom, and holiness.

In contemporary culture, blue is widely recognized as a symbol of heaven and eternity, as well as of kindness, loyalty, stability, and love.

In Azerbaijani folklore, blue likewise carries a variety of symbolic meanings. In the folklore of Nakhchivan, however, it most commonly expresses sorrow and suffering, while the image of a place being enveloped in blue symbolizes the intensification of pain and hardship.

Among the collected folklore materials, the color blue exhibits profound sacred significance rooted in early folk beliefs. As noted in the previously discussed *bayati* concerning the symbolism of green, blue functions as a marker of mourning, grief, and sorrow. The lines, “*Kimin əzizi ölər, yaşıl açar, göy bağlar*” (*Whoever loses a loved one. Unwear greens and put on blues*) portray blue as a symbolic color that embodies suffering and accompanies the heart consumed by pain. This symbolism is also preserved in the Azerbaijani idiom “*Gününü göy əskiyə düyünləmək (və ya bürümək)*” (wbw translation: *to wrap (or tie) one’s days in a blue cloth*) which means “to make one’s life miserable”. The expression reflects the ancient belief that blue cloth symbolized sorrow, pain, and mourning. As Jafarova (2022, p. 83) explains: “*Gününü göy əskiyə düyünləmək (və ya bürümək)* (*to wrap (or tie) one’s days in a blue cloth*) means *to make one’s life dark*; both blue and black were symbolic colors associated with mourning rituals, particularly among the Turks. Today, black is more commonly recognized as the color of grief, mourning, and bereavement. However, among the ancient Turks, blue likewise carried these symbolic associations.”

It should also be noted that in the symbolic systems of some cultures, blue and green are understood as representing similar concepts, whereas in others they are perceived as contrasting colors. Such contrasting symbolism can likewise be observed in the folklore of Nakhchivan. Consider the following *bayati*:

*Əzizinəm, göy bağlar,
Göy bağçalar, göy bağlar.
Kimin əzizi ölər,
Yaşıl açar, göy bağlar* (İsmayıl, 2010, p. 85).

The references to blue in the opening lines of the *bayati* serve as a prelude to the poem’s central idea expressed in the final two lines: “*Kimin əzizi ölər, yaşıl açar, göy bağlar*” (*Whoever loses a loved one. Unwear greens and put on blues*) The phrases “*blue gardens*” and “*blue woods*” serve as poetic images through which the anonymous folk poet depicts gardens that have fallen into ruin and desolation. In this context, “*blue gardens*” symbolize a life that has been shattered and devastated. Another *bayati* illustrates this symbolism even more clearly:

*Əzizim, nə dən bağlar,
Göy geymiş nədən bağlar?!
Əkmə namərd zəmisin,
Nə bitər, nə dən bağlar* (Farzaliyev & Gasımlı, 1994, p. 282).

Here, too, the image of the “Göy geyinmiş bağ” (*garden wrapped in blue*) functions as a powerful symbol of a life that has been shattered and left in ruin.

A. M. Panchenko likewise notes that among the Slavic peoples, blue was associated with death, observing that “*in religious poetry, blue is perceived as the color of death*” (Panchenko, 1968, pp. 3–15).

In folklore texts, blue symbolizes not only pain and suffering but also serves as a portent of misfortune in ancient belief. This function is reinforced by the contexts in which the color appears throughout folklore narratives. Blue typically emerges at moments when success or happiness is anticipated, signaling instead the onset of disappointment or adversity. This symbolism is evident even in folklore texts that initially convey a joyful mood:

*Stol üstə göy daraq,
Yarımı gördüm bayaq.
Yeridim, çatammadım,
Qurusun belə ayaq* (Farzaliyev & Gasımlı, 1994, p. 292).

In this *bayati*, the blue symbol, rooted in ancient mythological belief, functions as an emblem of misfortune, preventing the lyrical hero, who longs to fulfill his desire, from being reunited with his beloved.

The association of blue with pain, grief, and mourning is also evident in the *Book of Dede Korkut*. As Bunyadov (2007, p. 435) observes, “*a person in mourning decorated the household not only in black but also in blue and wore blue garments as a sign of bereavement. When Bamsi Beyrek returns home after escaping captivity, he finds his sister weeping as she carries water from a spring. Asking why she is crying, he also inquires, “If anyone asks about the black-and-blue tent, whose is it?” She sorrowfully replies, “If anyone asks about the black-and-blue tent, it belongs to my brother Beyrek. Since my brother Beyrek departed, I have had no joy.*” Likewise, when Uruz, who has been captured by the enemy, speaks to his father Salur Kazan, who has come to rescue him, he says: “*Let my mother wear blue and wrap herself in black; let her mourn for me among the mighty Oghuz people.*”

In some contexts, however, a blue tent or blue cave is presented as a symbol of good fortune and divine protection. According to traditional folk belief, God dwells in the Blue Tent, a motif reflected in folklore texts. This idea is expressed in a traditional blessing: “*Göy çadırın yəəsi dadaa yetişsin!*” (*May the Lord of the Blue Tent come to your aid!*) (Jafarli et al., 2011, p. 81). Folklore scholar Bahlul Abdulla likewise notes that, in the epic tradition, beings sent from Heaven by God are imagined as blue in color. This supports the view that the sacredness of blue derives from its association with the sky and the heavens. Nevertheless, in the folklore of Nakhchivan, blue is predominantly portrayed as a symbolic color expressing grief, sorrow, and emotional suffering.

The Russian folklorist A. M. Panchenko also discusses the symbolism of blue in Russian folklore, noting that in religious poetry it is associated with death and serves as a symbol of continuity. He further observes that blue is regarded as the color of the realm inhabited by malevolent spirits (Panchenko, 1968, p. 33).

In shamanic tradition, blue likewise conveyed meanings of mourning, grief, and suffering. To express these associations, shamans wore blue garments as part of their ritual attire. “*the shamans’ skirts were made of black and blue paper materials, while their tunics were invariably blue.*” (*Simvolika kultov i ritualov narodov zarubejnoj Azii*, 1980, s.13).

Although the sacred aspects of blue can be observed in the folklore of Nakhchivan, its association with malevolent spiritual forces inherited from ancient tradition is more prominent. Accordingly,

objects characterized as blue in these folklore texts symbolically embody the emotional suffering, grief, and anguish experienced by the protagonists.

The history and symbolism of the color yellow are closely linked to gold, which in the ancient world was regarded as solidified or petrified sunlight. This association is evident in the temples and sacred monuments of Ancient Egypt, where gold ornaments were abundant and walls were often painted yellow. Across ancient civilizations, the worship of the sun occupied a central place in religious belief. Because the sun provided warmth and light, it was revered as a deity, and consequently the color yellow was held in high esteem. The sun was regarded as the ruler of light and abundance and the adversary of darkness and evil. However, in many Islamic societies, yellow did not enjoy the same prestige and, much like in several European cultures, came to be associated with betrayal, falsehood, and deceit. It was also considered the color of illness and old age.

In many Western cultures, yellow is most commonly associated with joy, energy, warmth, and vitality. In China, however, it has traditionally symbolized imperial authority and power, while also representing wealth, wisdom, and honor. In India, yellow is associated with the god Vishnu and is regarded as a symbol of holiness and knowledge.

Overall, yellow is the brightest and most luminous color in the visible spectrum. It is widely recognized as a symbol of the sun, joy, energy, intellect, and optimism.

In Azerbaijani folk symbolism, however, yellow occupies a distinct position. Within traditional folk culture, it is predominantly perceived as a color carrying pessimistic and unfavorable connotations.

Various Turkic peoples have attributed different symbolic meanings to the color yellow. In ancient Turkic thought, yellow was generally regarded as a symbol of compassion, vigorous activity, and humanism. This symbolism is reflected in the names of several Turkic groups, many of which incorporate the word *sarı* ("yellow"). For example, the Uyghurs have historically referred to themselves as the *Yellow Uyghurs*. If yellow indeed signified humanism and dynamic vitality in early Turkic culture, this designation may be understood as expressing those valued qualities. Among the Göktürks, yellow was considered the color of God. In this context, five of the ten Göktürk tribes formed the state of the Yellow Turkesh, while the remaining five established the Black Turkesh. The Yellow Türgesh regarded themselves as the nobler and more ancient lineage. A similar belief existed among the Buryats, who also considered yellow to be the color of the divine. The belief that the world originated from the color yellow gave rise to a set of ideas linking yellow with the earth and fertility. Because the earth was seen as the source of growth and abundance, these qualities were symbolically transferred to women: the mother was associated with yellow, while the male principle was represented by silver. According to the mythological beliefs of these peoples, the remote ancestor of Genghis Khan originated from the yellow rays of the sun. This belief, in turn, gave rise to the conviction that the right to rule belonged exclusively to his lineage (Abdulla, 2004, p. 432).

"The symbolic interpretation of yellow also differs in geosymbolism, where colors are used to designate the cardinal directions. Although yellow, as one of the four symbolic colors of the world, is regarded by many ethnic groups as representing the center, among others it denotes different directions. For example, among the American Indians yellow symbolizes the west, among the peoples of India it represents the south, and among the Kalmyks it signifies the North." (Abdulla, 2000, p. 432).

The use of the color yellow in the Nakhchivan folklore texts examined in this study suggests that, as in the folklore of many other Turkic peoples, yellow is associated with illness, frailty, and, at times, the approach of death. Consider the following *bayati*:

*Gecə keçdi qaraldan,
Seçməram səni maraldan.
Nə dərdim var, nə qəmim,
Sənsən məni saraldan* (Jafarli & Babayev, 2005, p. 64).

(Meaning: This bayati presents turning yellow (*saralma*) as a metaphor for emotional suffering, expressing how longing and unfulfilled love can weaken a person both physically and spiritually.)

As these examples demonstrate, human sorrow and emotional suffering are conventionally expressed through the verb *saralmaq* (“to turn yellow”). It is therefore no coincidence that Azerbaijani has the idiomatic expression *eşqdən saralıb-solmaq* (to turn yellow and pale because of love), which denotes suffering caused by unfulfilled love. Derived from the adjective *sarı* (yellow), and in many contexts the verb *saralmaq* (“to turn yellow”) departs from its literal meaning and comes to denote a state of suffering, grief, emotional distress, or a visible change in one’s appearance caused by sorrow.

This symbolic usage is also found in the Nakhchivan folktale “Gold, Silver, and Copper”, where *saralmaq* conveys deep sorrow and emotional distress: “My God, because of me, a family has been left helpless and without its protector. Bearing this grief has caused my rosy complexion to fade and turn yellow. I beg You, let me become a source of support to the family that has been left without its protector” (Farzaliyev & Gasimli, 1994, p. 79).

In addition to these meanings, folklore texts also attribute the symbolism of misfortune to the color yellow. In relatively recent folklore examples, the belief that a yellow shawl, a yellow pouch, or a yellow sack brings bad luck has become poetically embedded in the folk song *Gülüm hey*.

*Ay sarı kisə ad oldu, gülüm hey,
Dağıldı bərbad oldu, gülüm hey.
Bu yar bizə yar olmaz, gülüm hey,
Üstümüzə ad oldu, gülüm hey* (Farzaliyev & Gasimli, 1994, p.294).

The motif of misfortune underlying the text is conveyed through the symbolic image of the yellow pouch (*sarı kisə*). In this example, yellow once again functions as a symbol of bad luck. A similar association appears in a folk belief recorded among Western Azerbaijanis: “Nothing yellow, not even a piece of yellow cloth, was brought near a forty-day-old infant. If someone did, people believed the child would develop jaundice” (Suleymanova, 2024, p. 123).

Gray is an intermediate shade between black and white and is generally perceived as a neutral and calming color. In the RGB color model, which consists of the three primary colors - red, green, and blue - gray is produced by mixing these colors in equal proportions.

During the Middle Ages, gray was known as the color of undyed wool. Clothing made from this material was worn primarily by peasants and the poor. Consequently, gray came to symbolize simplicity, poverty, and humility, and it was also the color traditionally worn by monks. During the Renaissance and the Baroque periods, gray assumed an increasingly important role in the visual arts.

Gray carries a wide range of meanings and associations that vary according to cultural and contextual factors. It is often regarded as a neutral color that neither evokes strong emotions nor attracts excessive attention. Positioned between black and white, it symbolizes balance and compromise, representing agreement achieved through mutual concession. Gray is also associated with elegance, refinement, and classical style, which explains its frequent use in business and formal settings. By avoiding excessive brightness and ostentation, it conveys modesty and restraint, while also evoking reliability, stability, and quiet strength.

The semantic symbolism of both white and black in general, and in the folklore of Nakhchivan in particular, has already been discussed above. Nevertheless, this issue merits further consideration. In Nakhchivan folklore, white is associated with victory, happiness, and the aspiration for a prosperous life. Black, by contrast, may symbolize misfortune and ill fate, but it can also embody greatness, wisdom, and primordiality - meanings that derive from ancient Turkic thought. If gray is understood as a mixed color resulting from the fusion of white and black, then the semantic associations of both colors inevitably shape its symbolism. In other words, gray inherits symbolic features from both white and black, although its connotations are predominantly favorable. For example, in the ritual expression *Boz Ay* (Gray Month), the symbolic meaning of gray is positive because it is associated with the arrival of spring. Since *Boz Ay* is regarded as the month that leads to Novruz, it symbolizes an auspicious and hopeful period of transition. At the same time, in certain contexts where white and black are associated with misfortune, this perception has naturally influenced the symbolism of grey as well. This can be observed in the mythological text "*Boz Ay*" (*Grey Month*): "...*The Grey Month borrowed most of its days from the other months, that's why it is so mixed. It took its cold days from the winter months, its warm days from summer, and its rainy days from spring and autumn...*" (Jafarli et al., 2011, p. 27). As is evident from this passage, ancient belief regarded the Grey Month as a *mixed* month. The primary reason for this mixed character lies in the fact that the colour grey is formed by the combination of white and black. In other words, within traditional ethnic thought, winter and spring are symbolically associated with the colours black and white, respectively. From this perspective, the ambiguous rhythm of grey emerges from the interaction of these two opposing colours. In folk vocabulary, talking back to an elder is expressed through the idiom "*üzünə ağ olmaq*" (to defy someone), while experiencing shame before others because of offensive words or disgraceful actions is metaphorically conveyed by the expression "*üzü qara olmaq*" (to be disgraced). When a conversation gets out of hand or becomes heated, and one person begins speaking harshly or raising their voice at another, this is described by the phraseological expression "*üzünü bozartmaq*" (to snap at someone). Thus, the expression "*üzünü bozartmaq*" (to lose one's temper) carries the same semantic meaning as the mixed nature of the *Boz Ay* (Grey Month) discussed above. Just as the Grey Month alternates between cold and warm days, reflecting instability and change, a person in a state of anger likewise experiences emotional fluctuation - at times remaining calm, and at other times losing self-control and speaking harshly to the other person. In this sense, the symbolism of grey conveys emotional inconsistency, tension, and the transition between restraint and outburst.

During the Khydyr Nabi ceremony, celebrated in the first ten days of *Kiçik Çillə* (*Little Chilla*), which constitutes a ritual cycle, the performance of various rituals is considered appropriate. Alongside these ritual practices, elements rooted in ancient belief concerning the figure of Khydyr Nabi himself also attract attention in folk thought. One of these elements reveals the sacramental symbolism of the colour grey. For example, according to folk belief, Khydyr Nabi is dressed in green, while his horse is grey. Similar motifs concerning Khydyr's grey horse also appear in the examples of Anatolian folk beliefs collected by Hayrettin İvgin: "*Khydyr is regarded as a force who comes to the aid of those in distress on his grey horse, bringing prosperity to people and life, vitality, and renewal to nature. We continue to observe the rituals associated with Khydyrellez Day - customs that have survived for centuries in the form of a festival celebrating this enduring force, who is believed to live until the Day of Judgment with his grey horse...*" (İvgin, 2019, p. 196). The information collected from the Nakhchivan region confirms the existence of this belief. According to local tradition, a strong wind blows for three days before Khydyr's arrival and for three days afterwards. People say that this wind is raised by the dust kicked up by the hooves of Khydyr's grey horse. The force of the dust stirred up by the horse's hooves, and the powerful wind it generates, is symbolically associated with the horse's grey colour. Earlier, we noted that in folk tradition the colour grey carries a chaotic symbolism associated with anger and fury, reflected in the verb *bozarmaq* ("to turn grey"). A similar symbolic association can be observed here: the strong wind is believed to originate from the powerful kick of the grey horse, whose hooves raise clouds of dust. Thus, the symbolic meaning of the colour grey

extends beyond emotional states to encompass force, movement, and the dynamic energy embodied by Khydyr's sacred horse.

In the Ordubad district of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, women wear grey headscarves during mourning ceremonies. Thus, in addition to the mourning and bereavement symbolism traditionally associated with black in modern times, this function is also extended to the colour grey. Regarding the characterization of grey as the colour of mourning rituals, the late folklorist B. Abdulla writes: *"Historical sources indicate that, even in ancient times, khans had a Grey Chamber (Boz Otaq). This chamber was primarily reserved for mourning ceremonies."* (Bunyadov, 2007, p. 431).

Results and Discussion

This article has examined the profound sacramental significance of colours and their symbolic functions in folklore. It is well known that colour occupies a distinctive place within the system of features that characterize objects. For modern people, a change in an object's colour does not alter its essential nature. For ancient people, however, an object's natural colour possessed a deep sacramental meaning of its own. Some of these symbolic associations, which express the meanings of various objects and phenomena, preserve traces of ancient culture. Others have acquired new meanings in contemporary life after gradually losing their original symbolism, while some have almost entirely lost their symbolic function. It must be acknowledged that if the colours of the clothes we wear in everyday life still carry meaning today, then the symbolism of colour undoubtedly has very deep historical roots.

Conclusion

In the folklore of Nakhchivan, green symbolizes the ideas of renewal and living nature. This thought is particularly emphasized in ritual practices. Examples include the green watermelon cut during Great Chilla, the belief that Khydyr Nabi wears a green cloak, and samani (sprouted wheat), which represents the revival of nature. Together, these elements demonstrate the association of green with nature and the beginning of new life.

In the folklore collected from Nakhchivan, blue most commonly symbolizes misfortune, mourning, and bereavement. Expressions such as "blue comb", "blue tent", and "blue shawl", which frequently occur in folklore, denote objects that prevent the protagonist from achieving his or her desired goal. The symbolism attached to these objects shows that blue primarily represents sorrow, grief, and emotional suffering.

Compared with the other colours discussed above, yellow appears relatively infrequently in Nakhchivan folklore. Within the region's folkloric worldview, as in the broader Turkic cultural tradition, yellow is generally regarded as a symbol of misfortune, spiritual exhaustion, and illness.

Like yellow, grey occurs only rarely in the folklore of Nakhchivan. Nevertheless, it has been possible to identify aspects of its symbolism within ritual beliefs. In addition to representing anger and resentment, grey was formerly associated with mourning rituals.

In general, colours function as symbolic markers in traditional folk culture. Their presence in folklore and ritual practices, where they acquire diverse symbolic meanings, provides valuable insight into the worldview and cultural thought of ancient communities.

References

- Abdulla, B. (2004). The Semantic Symbolism of the Color White in the *Book of Dede Korkut*. *The World of Dede Korkut*. Öndər Publishing.
- Annemarie, G. (1962). The Symbolic Meanings of Colors. *Acta Orientalia Hungarica*, Vol. XV (1–3). Turkish translation by Semih T. (1968). *Journal of Turkology*, Vol. 3. Ankara: Faculty of Languages, History and Geography Publications, 107–113.
- Alföldü, A. (1943). Dual Kingship among the Turks. In *Proceedings of the Second Turkish History Congress* (20–25 September 1937). Kenan Printing House, 507–519.
- Bunyadov, T. (Ed.). (2007). Azerbaijani Ethnography (Vol. III, 3 vols.). Şarg-Garb Publishing.
- Bunyadov, Z., Mammadaliyev, V. (Trans.). (2018). The Holy Qur'an: Azerbaijani Translation (Revised 17th ed.). Nurlar Publishing.
- Jafarova, A. (Ed.). (2022). Nakhchivan Paremiological Units: Idioms, Proverbs, and Sayings. Ajami Publishing.
- Jafarli, M., Safarov, Y., Babayev, R. (Eds.). (2011). Anthology of Nakhchivan Folklore (Vol. 2 of 3 vols.). Ajami Publishing.
- Jafarli, M., Babayev, R. (Eds.). (2005). *The Road Leads to Ordubad: A Collection of Folklore*. Ajami Publishing.
- Aliyev, K. (2011). The Poetics of the Epic: *Dede Korkut* and *Koroghlu*. Elm ve Tahsil Publishing.
- Farzaliyev, T., Gasimli, M. (Eds.). (1994). *Anthology of Azerbaijani Folklore: Nakhchivan Folklore* (Vol. 1). Sabah Publishing.
- Kalafat, Y. (2018). Memorates and the Astral World: The Mythological Dimension. Berikan Publishing.
- Kashghari, M. (2006). *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* (4 vols., Vol. II). Ozan Publishing.
- Kashghari, M. (2006). *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* (4 vols., Vol. III). Ozan Publishing.
- Kaşğari, M. (2006). *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* (4 vols., Vol. IV). Ozan Publishing.
- Kosherenkova, O. (2015). The Symbolism of Color in Culture. *Analytics of Cultural Studies*, No. 2(32), 163–169.
- Kuznetsova, V. (2010). Dictionary of Philosophical Terms. Nauchnaya Redaktsiya; INFRA-M.
- Kukhaleyshvili, N. (2024). *The History and Symbolism of the Color Green*. *Lingua*, No. 99 (September–October). Available at: <http://lingva.ffl.msu.ru/2024/10/история-и-символика-зелёного-цвета/>
- Khandan, R. (2004). *Selected Works*. Sharg-Garb Publishing.
- Ismayil, M. (Ed.). (2010). The People's Word, the Nation's Memory: A Collection of Folklore. Elm Publishing.
- İvgin, H. (2019). *Deep Mythology*. Kultur Ajans Publishing.
- Gasimova, P. (2024). The Ideological Essence of Folklore. *Scientific Work*, Vol. 18, No. 11, 71–74. <https://doi.org/10.36719/2663-4619/108/71-75>
- Laude-Cirtautas, I. (1961). The Use of Color Terms in the Turkic Dialects. *Ural-Altische Bibliothek*. Wiesbaden.
- Panchenko, A. (1968). On Light in the Ancient Literature of the Eastern and Southern Slavs. *Proceedings of the Department of Old Russian Literature (TODRL)*.
- Serostanova, O. (2020). Symbolic Forms of Constructing Reality in Russian Folk Tales. *Science. Art. Culture*, 4(28), 23–27.
- Seyidov, M. (1989). Reflections on the Ethnic Origins of the Azerbaijani People. Yazıçı Publishing.
- The Symbolism of Cults and Rituals of the Peoples of Foreign Asia. (1980). Nauka Publishing.
- Suleymanova, L. (Ed.). (2024). *Folklore of Western Azerbaijan* (Vol. I). Elm ve Tahsil Publishing.
- Voyevodin, A. (2010). *Aesthetic anthropology: A monograph*. RIO LQUVD named after E. A. Didorenko.