

#1 Colored Gemstone Nomenclature

As applied to description of color

The trade has used gemstone color descriptive terms especially “Pigeon’s Blood” and “Royal Blue” for generations in describing the color and quality of fine Rubies and Sapphires. These terms were used to not only describe the color of the gemstone, but also to indicate the superior quality and rarity of the stone. As such it is a very subjective description, without an agreed upon standard, except that it conveyed an exceptionally fine color, quality and rarity.

In more recent years the trade has requested the laboratories to issue reports with such color descriptions, in order to help them market these gemstones. It was easier to sell gemstones to consumers describing the stone with such color descriptions in a report issued by a third-party laboratory. The laboratories complied as it gave them more business by issuing reports for this reason. This appeared to be a very comfortable arrangement both for the trade and the laboratories – the trade could more easily sell gemstones with nice descriptions, and the laboratories sell more reports than before, earning both more income.

But what exactly are these descriptions that are used ? It appears that both the trade and the laboratories are not quite sure ! No one can say for sure. Everyone has made assumptions, basing their individual assumptions on what each think is the correct color and/or quality parameters, but only based on vague and non-scientific historical descriptions. Predictably resulting in a wide range of parameters, all the way from only a color parameter ignoring quality, to very strict color and quality parameters (including the requirement of fluorescence in rubies).

I feel that the problem with this comfortable situation is not from using nice language to describe the gemstone, but that the terms used are not standardized or harmonized in reports. So laboratories use different criteria for the use of “Pigeon’s Blood” and “Royal Blue”. And now with such a wide range of descriptions, “Pigeon’s Blood” Rubies and “Royal Blue” Sapphires are not so rare !

And I believe that the biggest problem is that the consumer receiving the report surely believes that the terms used are an industry standard and harmonized. With a huge number of such reports issued internationally especially in the last three years, it was inevitable that problems have now arisen where the consumer has received a different opinion from different laboratories. And cancellations or returns have followed. And left as it is, these problems will only grow.

Is this an acceptable state or situation for this industry ?

Should we leave it as it presently is, as after all it is a free market, leaving the final consumer to make the decision as to which description is accurate ?

Or should the industry set some guidelines to protect the integrity of the industry and thereby assure the trust of the consumer in our products ?

to be continued...

May 2016

#2 Following my article in May, starting the conversation regarding the color descriptive terms, I wish to elaborate further, with a focus on the reports.

The Association of Gemmological Laboratories (AGL), which consists of most major laboratories in Japan, makes the standards for the Gemmological Report issued by their members. They do not allow the use of the terms “Pigeon’s Blood” and “Royal Blue” as color nomenclature for rubies and sapphires on their reports. As I understand it, the reason being that there is no industry standard or harmonization regarding the parameters for these terms, and that it constitutes a form of grading of color gemstones. The AGL is of the opinion that a Gemmological Report should only publish verifiable facts and standards, developed for the industry. I respect their opinion and agree that the consumer receiving the report assumes that it consists of only such facts and standards. But this has resulted in the dilemma of AGL members not issuing reports with these color descriptions in Japan.

In the meantime the trade, as mentioned previously, wants these descriptive terms to enhance the report as a judgment of quality and make use of it in their marketing efforts. As these gemstones are produced and cut in the mining areas, most overseas laboratories have obliged and add these terms in their gemmological reports, at the request of the trade. Since there were no clear and scientific parameters for these terms, each laboratory created (with good intentions, but...) their own parameters. It appears that the laboratories cannot harmonize the parameters and now we have laboratories issuing reports, which have been handed over to consumers, with different opinions of what “Pigeon’s Blood” and “Royal Blue” is. And we cannot say anyone is wrong, as nobody can scientifically say what is correct !

Some of the parameters that are used, or not used;

- a) color and tone
- b) transparency and clarity
- c) fluorescence
- d) heated or only unheated

- e) origin
- etc...

So you can see that besides the obvious color of the gemstone, there are many other factors that come into consideration, which can contribute to the beauty and rarity of the gemstone. As there was no historical scientific parameters defined when these terms were first used, I guess no one today can claim to be the only correct one. Even the color “Pigeon Blood” has been described many years ago as a color of the mind, which I think means that it can be imagined but not scientifically defined.

With consumer protection and trust of the industry as our foremost priority, how do we solve the problem of differing reports? The consumer believes that these terms are a statement of quality. I am not saying any of these reports are wrong, as no one is sure what is correct.

But we have to think of a solution...

June 2016

#3 To summarize

The consumer receiving the laboratory report with these color nomenclature thinks that:

- a) The color nomenclature “Pigeon’s Blood” or “Royal Blue” is a quality grade
- b) That it is a recognized industry standard

But we know that there is no industry harmonization or consensus for these terms, and each laboratory uses its own standards to decide.

In the meantime the trade requests these reports as it helps their marketing efforts to sell such stones. At times resulting in pricing that does not reflect the value and beauty of the gemstone, in the absence of these reports.

Again we are not sure which criteria are correct, but have to recognize this ambiguity, and make efforts to solve or at least improve on the present situation.

For this the Japan Gem Society (JGS) will be conducting a symposium on this very important subject on 20th July. I will be giving a presentation in which I hope to explain the current situation

regarding this from both a domestic as well as an international perspective. We will also have many samples for your review. And we have reserved much time for an open discussion, as we hope to listen to your views and suggestions, from many participants representing different aspects of the industry.

We look forward to your active participation and listening to your valuable comments and opinion.

Thank you,
Nilam Alawdeen

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