

**Name of the element:** Deepavali

**Community/ies:** As an all-inclusive and all-embracing element today, Diwali is celebrated by a wide range of individuals and groups, subsequently expanding its bearers and practitioners. Within households, elders impart and guide rituals and practices that are often transmitted intergenerationally. Creative communities comprising cultural practitioners, artists and artisans; agrarian communities, business communities, organizers of Diwali events alongwith the priests and devotees who engage in the worship rituals in their homes, offices and temples; and the diverse partakers irrespective of age, gender, caste and creed- all enrich the continuity of Diwali through practice, participation and transmission.

Knowledge and skills associated with Deepavali and its socio-cultural manifestation are transmitted through intergenerational learning within families and communities. Elders impart knowledge systems in the form of traditions, rituals, and craftsmanship to younger generations, through hands-on participation, storytelling, and active engagement in the preparations and celebrations. Educational institutions, cultural organisations, government machinery and digital platforms aid in disseminating information and fostering awareness about Deepavali's significance and its diverse cultural meanings. Deepavali finds representations everywhere, from street theatres to depictions in films and popular culture. Through these multiple channels, the continuation and relevance of the element in contemporary society are ensured.

Deepavali serves as a corner stone of social cohesion and cultural identity for individuals and communities today. Socially, it acts as a unifying force, transcending all boundaries. It is the time when people come together, sometimes travelling from afar to celebrate the festivities with family in their native homes, where all generations and members participate. Culturally, it leads to community engagement, heralds fresh starts, reinforces the universal values of righteousness, inclusivity, gratitude and generosity and encapsulates the Indian way of life. It fuels economic vibrancy of several communities and catalyses innovation of cultural traditions and artistic expressions.

**Brief Description:** Deepavali also called Diwali is annually celebrated as one of the most popular festivals by diverse individuals and communities across India and the diaspora, featuring myriad traditional, ritualistic, agrarian, and religious manifestations.

It falls on the New/No Moon night in October/November as per the lunar Hindu calendar month of Kartik. Deepavali is preceded and followed by a series of rituals and festivities, spanning several days. Deepavali, meaning 'row of lights' is celebrated as the 'festival of lights.' It symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness and virtue over vice. According to the Indian epic *Ramayana*, it commemorates Lord Rama's return to his kingdom after exile. It also celebrates 'abundance' with devotees offering prayers to seek blessings, especially from the Goddess of wealth and good fortune, Lakshmi. Homes, offices, markets and streets are thoroughly cleaned, decorated and specially illuminated with Diyas/earthen lamps and electric string lights to welcome prosperity. Diwali represents a time of renewal and rejoicing, signifying the onset of a new year, season, harvest cycle, and financial year. It is the time when family, friends and colleagues meet, exchange gifts and sweets, host get-togethers and partake in festivities, reinforcing social bonds.