

Name of the element: Henna**Community/ies:**

Henna is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of India and is practised by diverse communities, including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis and Christians. Its practice transcends gender and age, with women, men, transgender persons and young adults participating in its application during festivals, weddings, life-cycle rituals and family celebrations.

The element is sustained by a wide range of practitioners, including Henna farmers, artisans, design artists, beauticians, natural dye practitioners and traditional medical practitioners of Ayurveda and Unani. Elders, particularly women, transmit knowledge of preparation, application techniques, designs and symbolic meanings to younger generations through oral traditions, hands-on practice and participation in rituals and celebrations. Apprenticeships, community workshops, vocational training and digital platforms further support the transmission and contemporary evolution of the practice.

Henna also strengthens community bonding, social interaction and cultural exchange across religious, regional and social groups. Its cultivation, processing, artistry and application provide livelihoods to a range of practitioners, contributing to the continuity and vitality of this living heritage.

Brief Description:

Henna is a living cultural tradition widely practised across India for ritualistic, medicinal, artistic, aesthetic and celebratory purposes. It involves the preparation and application of Henna, along with associated knowledge of designs, techniques, symbolism and traditional uses.

Henna forms an important part of festivals and life-cycle rituals. It is associated with celebrations such as Gangaur, Teej, Bihu and Karva Chauth among Hindu communities; Henna Night and wedding traditions among Muslims; renunciation ceremonies, pilgrimage processions and consecration rituals among Jains; and pre-wedding customs among the Knanaya Christian community in South India. Among the transgender community, Henna-covered handprints on walls during weddings are observed as an auspicious practice.

Beyond adornment, Henna is also associated with traditional medicinal knowledge in Ayurveda and Unani and is used in Indian painting, textile dyeing, perfumery and other artistic expressions. Regional styles, including Rajasthani, Arabic and Indo-Persian designs, reflect the diversity and evolving nature of the practice.

As a natural and biodegradable product, Henna also supports traditional livelihoods and environmentally sustainable practices. Through its continued practice, transmission and adaptation, Henna remains a dynamic part of India's diverse intangible cultural heritage.