

# THE STUDENT'S PRESS

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### *From Ramayana to Modern India: The Changing Meaning of Diwali*

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The Diwali commonly referred to as the Festival of Lights has traditionally been marked as a symbol of victory – victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance and good over evil. Based on the epic, Ramayana, the festival was initially celebrated on the return of lord Rama back to Ayodhya after his 14 years of exile and victory over Ravana. People lit the lamps in rows to greet their king and to symbolize the renewal of dharma and harmony. But the meaning of Diwali has changed as centuries have changed. Today, it reflects the changing social, economical and cultural atmosphere of India not only in spiritual reflections but also in the present aims and ideals, and lifestyles.



and millions of people adorn their houses, uniting the tradition and modernity.

New hurdles however affect the present Diwali. The increasing environmental issues and air pollution of fireworks and commercialization of religious life has made many people question whether it has ever served its purpose or not. More and more individuals are resorting to environmental friendly festivities – replacing firecrackers with clay lamps, giving to charities, and having a good time together with their family. This is an expression of a slight yet significant change: the outward expression to self-cognition, the extravagance to compassion.



### Conclusion

The procession of Diwali is the procession of the Indian civilization as well; since the time of the moral splendor of the Ramayana to the modern neon-lit streets of India. It has broadened its nature to include mythological worship to national identity, spiritual purity to social awareness. Although the consumerism and new modern lifestyles have changed the manner in which it is celebrated, the Diwali spirit of victory of light, hope, and goodness is not lost in any way.

### From Myth to Morals: The Spiritual Core

The Diwali in its original form was very spiritual – a period to think about what is right and what is not, what is contained in oneself and what is not. The teachings of Ramayana were not limited to the worship of Rama; they pushed the people to overcome their personal monsters – ego, lust and wrath. Diwali was therefore not merely a celebration of an event it was an annual reminder to purify the soul, restore faith, and maintain justice in individual life. The practice of housekeeping and lamp-lighting had metaphorical meaning: the purification of inner impurities and the enlightenment of one ethical way.

### Colonial Influence and Economic Reawakening

When India was going through the colonial rule, Diwali started to acquire new meanings. To traders and the business circles, it became the beginning of a new fiscal year as rituals such as the Chopada Pujan – the worship of account books. This adaptation showed the way in which spiritual traditions were blended with the mercantile spirit of India. During the colonial period, the Diwali celebrations were also a form of cultural opposition, an expression of identity and survival by Indians under the oppression. As the nation was being reconstructed post-independence, Diwali came to symbolize more than mythological victory, but the desire of a prosperous, self-reliant India by all of India.

### The Contemporary Radiance: Business and Awareness

The meaning of Diwali in India today has expanded. The festival itself is full of contradictions and prosperity of modern life. On the one hand, it has turned into an economic giant – a high season of retail Gold, automobile and electronic sales. The glitter of the lights has been combined with the glitter of the ads and Internet offers. However, contrarily Diwali still remains a cultural anchor in a fast globalizing society. Families come together, communities are happy,

“ तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय “

The above mentioned quote is from the Hindu's scripture **Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad**, which means **"From darkness, lead me to light."** this quote isn't as plain as it may appear. Here, darkness represent **Avidyā** , fear, confusion, and doubt whereas against it their lie light which represent knowledge, awareness, truth and clarity. This concept of transiting from darkness to light is the philosophical foundation of **"Diwali"** itself. Diwali, or Deepavali, is a major Hindu festival celebrated across the country as the 'festival of lights' it is celebrated on the Kārtika Māsa, Krishna Paksha, Amāvasyā Tithi or the kartik Amavasya, the darkest night of the month, which symbolizes the victory of good over evil, inner light over outer darkness, knowledge over ignorance. But the actual meaning of Diwali celebration had been not completely lost but shifted while being passed down from **Tretayuga to Kaliyuga**



### Diwali Through the Ages: Tretayuga to the Modern World

**Tretayuga**, the second stage of four yugas , often referred to as the "silver age", is the period in which the epic **"Ramayana"** took place. During this era, Diwali marked the homecoming of lord Rama after 14 years of exile and his victory over demon king Ravana to establish **Dharma**. The celebration was not about luxury, commercialisation, or social gathering but a reflection of morals, principles, values and righteousness. I would say it was more of a dharmic and inward focused type of celebration mixed with lighting of diyas symbolizing the truth and knowledge.

Do you think this celebration of **Tretayuga** still being applied in modern world or in pre-modern era? let us walk through this comparison.

During the pre-modern era the meaning of Diwali shifted slightly towards cultural expansion without losing its core philosophical foundation. In simpler terms, Diwali was now not only bounded inside **"Hinduism"** but also included unique blend of celebration across different religions like **Sikhism** and **Jainism**. Here, Diwali was not just about Lord Rama's homecoming but about creating a shared cultural symbol. Sikh people marked Diwali as Guru Hargobind's release, interpreting Diwali as "Freedom". Jain people marked Diwali as Lord Mahavir's **nirvana** day, interpreting Diwali as "liberation". This shows a clear shift from purely moral and symbolic view to a shared community and religious identity.

In the Modern era ( for example, in the year 2025) the change is more social and behavioral. People now put more emphasis on decoration, a false sense of luxury, shopping and gifting, social gathering, firecrackers and display that often overshadow inner reflection. Although I wouldn't say that it is completely wrong or against the dharma but meaning or the interpretation of Diwali has evolved from dharma, spiritual victory and inner reflection to joy, prosperity, social life and material expression. The modern day Diwali is more outward and expressive yet the core essence remains constant throughout



### Conclusion – The Festival Remains, The Battlefield Changes

The yugas might have changed, the practices and the celebrations might have changed, yet the core essence and philosophical foundation of Diwali has been maintained for generations. Diwali has remained a core symbol of prosperity and restoration of dharma , victory of good over evil has remained constant for ages. Earlier during **Tretayuga** victory of lord Rama over Ravana, in **Dwaparyuga** victory of Pandavas over Kauravas but in **Kaliyuga** victory is not over external enemies like Ravana or Kauravas but the inner self. Here **"The battlefield is internal, and the enemies are within"**

