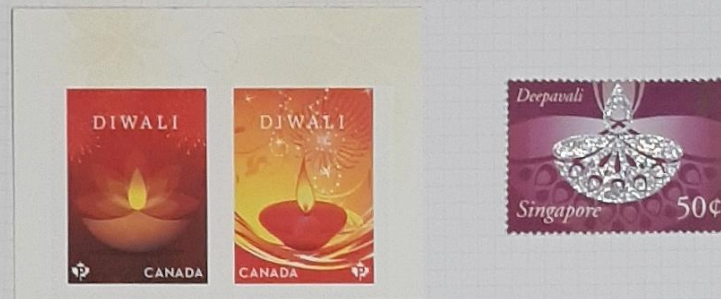
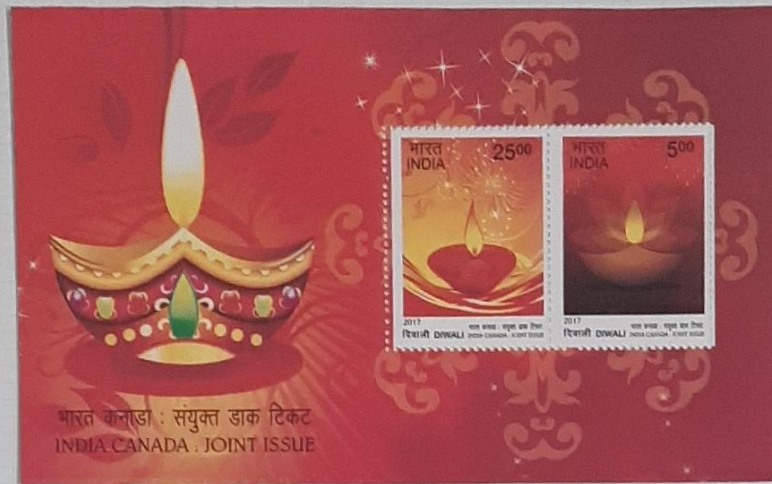


DEEPAVALI - OR - DIWALI — THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Diwali is one of the most important festivals in India. It lasts for five days and is celebrated between mid October and mid November. Diwali symbolises victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance. The festival is widely associated with LAKSHMI-goddess of prosperity and GANESHA-god of wisdom and the remover of obstacles. This day also marks the return of Rama with his wife Sita and his brother Lokshmana to his kingdom AYODHYA after defeating the demon Ravana. During this festival Hindus, Jains and Sikhs illuminate their homes, houses with oil lamps, candles and lanterns. Diwali is also marked with fireworks and decoration of floors with RANGOLI - an art form in which a pattern is made commonly outside houses usually with finely ground rice powder and colours. Sometimes flower petals are also used. Food is also a major focus with families partaking in feasts and sharing sweets. The Jains observe Diwali to mark the final liberation of Mahavira. The Sikhs celebrate Diwali to mark the release of Guru Hargobind from a Mughal prison. Diwali also marks the killing of Narakasura by Lord Krishna according to Hindus. Diwali celebrations in Canada are similar to those in India with many of the members of the diaspora lighting rows of small clay lamps and exchanging gifts and greetings. In Singapore Diwali is one of the major cultural festivals. It marks the triumph of good over evil. People exchange gifts and sweets and pray to Goddess LAKSHMI. In New Zealand Diwali is celebrated by lighting lamps, bursting crackers, decorating the front portion of houses with rangoli and family gatherings. The rangoli and diyas welcome Goddess Lakshmi into their homes to bring good fortune and prosperity.



Hanukkah is a Jewish festival commemorating the recovery of Jerusalem and subsequent re-dedication of the second temple at the beginning of the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire in 2nd century BCE. It is observed for eight nights and days. It may occur at any time from late Nov to late Dec in the Gregorian calendar. The festival is observed by lighting the candles of a candelabrum with nine branches called a Hanukkiyah. Other festivities include singing Hanukkah songs and eating oil based and dairy foods.