

Diwali lights up Abbotsford

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Abbotsford's Sikh community will bring a glow to the city this week.

The community is celebrating Diwali, a five-day festival of lights comparable to Christmas for the city's South Asian population, said Satwinder Bains, director of the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies at the University of the Fraser Valley. It begins today.

"The whole concept of the festival is the victory of light over darkness because on this day many centuries ago, Rama, a Hindu god returned after 14 years of exile on a moonless night and the people celebrated his arrival and lit his way back with oil lamps and fireworks," said Bains.

Among Sikhs, Diwali has come to symbolize the release and return of a number of spiritual gurus to the holy city of Amritsar where they too were greeted by supporters with lamps and candles.

As such, Sikhs also call Diwali, "Bandi Chhorh Divas," or the day of release of detainees.

The festival involves sharing sweets and gifts, cleaning and decorating

the house with lights, setting off fireworks and visiting with family, said Bains.

"People will take Indian sweets to all their family members to say hello and give thanks they are part of their lives."

"They also exchange gifts, light up their homes and have family get-togethers."

People will also gather at the gurdwara, or Sikh temple, to socialize and pray, she said.

The temple will be aglow with lights, lanterns, candles and diyas, traditional oil clay lamps.

Some decorate the front or walls of their homes with a Rangoli, a colourful geometric pattern made with coloured powder, beads or lentils, as a welcome to guests.

Diwali is a great favorite with children because of the gifts, treats and excitement, but the holiday is significant as a means to rejuvenate the spirit, said Bains.

"My favourite part as a child was eating all the sweets and firework, but as I got older it had deeper meaning and meant being thankful for what you've got."



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On Saturday there was a Diwali celebration at Rick Hansen secondary, held in partnership with the Clearbrook Library and Abbotsford Community Services.