A land as diverse and beautiful as India has an immense treasure trove of festivals that provide an opportunity to bond and rejoice in unity. One such festival is Holi and Rangpanchami, where you find people of all classes mingling together, spreading the colours of joy and harmony.

Signifying the omnipresent factor that governs all festivals, the bonfire that is lit on Holi implies the victory of good over evil. Metaphorically, the fire is meant to signify the destruction of all things evil. As Riddhi Joshi, a Std XII student of Kelkar College elaborates, “Holi is the burning of ‘Holika’ - a mythological character, who was wicked. In today’s world, it implies the need for burning all the evil thoughts and actions that have robbed this world of peace. I would want all of us to burn the evils of terrorism and corruption that is creating a dangerous vacuum in our society.”

Festivals are not just a means of celebration and their mythological significance should be associated to the real world context. The 11/9 World Trade Centre attacks, the 11/7 Mumbai train blasts and the numerous killings that take place in different parts of the country, have made us realize how vulnerable we have become at the hands of terror. Festivals could be used as a medium to not propagate any particular religion’s sentiments but rather to counter the divisive forces of society. As Prakriti Bhat, a Std VII student from Balmohan Vidyamandir says, “No religion preaches terrorism. So we should not have any prejudices against any religion. While we need to uphold our cultural legacy, we should never ever use festivals as a means to promote any form of hatred or intolerance.”

While on the one hand we should burn all the negativity in the bonfire of Holi, we also need to propagate the colours of values, brotherhood and happiness amongst all. Prakriti emphasizes, “Friendliness and tolerance is one colour that I would like to rub on all the people. It is these virtues that will help make our society a better place to live in. Besides, while concern for humanity is a prime requisite I also wish we could pass on the hues of kindness in our attitude towards animals as well.”

In the wake of the numerous unfortunate incidents that have affected our society and in a multi-cultural country like India, festivals would be the best medium to spread a sense of wisdom to all. All religions preach humanity and concern for all of mankind. It is only some self-centred elements who play the game of hatred and provoke harmful sentiments that have far-reaching consequences. Remember that there is an ALI in DIWALI and a RAM in RAMZAN. So if God has not distinguished man by religion, caste and class, how can we mere mortals alter this for our own selfish motives?

It is time to wake up and cleanse our conscience. Believe me, it can only be the will and belief of each one of us that can shatter the ghastly designs of the anti-social elements. What each of us needs to understand is that whoever kindles the flames of intolerance is actually lighting a fire that will burn himself first. So this Holi, let us take a vow to truly live up to the spirit of the festival by setting ablaze the negative thoughts within us and open-heartedly spreading the colours of love, forgiveness, brotherhood and happiness to all. After all,

“Tolerance and celebration of individual differences is the fire that fuels lasting love”

...Tom Hannah