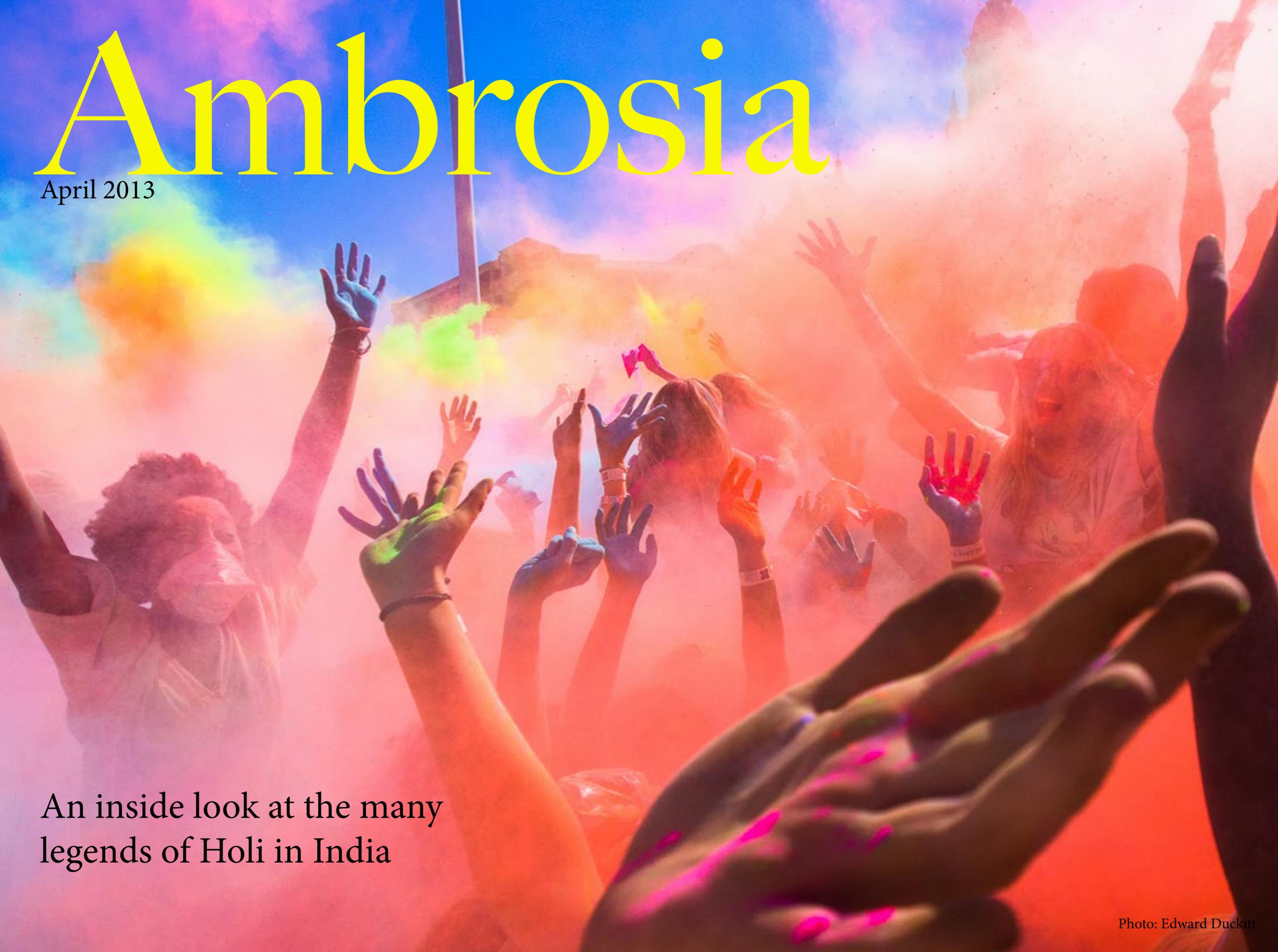


Ambrosia



April 2013

An inside look at the many legends of Holi in India

Neon Euphoria

Story By Aarti Banayat



Photos on this and next page by:
Paras Chaudhary

Spring is in the air and you are walking with the sun on your back, a song in your heart and . splat! What was that? Sure sign that Holi is here again: that dreaded festival when lolas start raining down on unsuspecting lasses.

It's this year's coincidence that the Holy Week coincides with our own Holi week. Both probably originated in pre-Christian or proto-Vedic equinox festivals but at least our Holi has degenerated into a free-for-all excuse for society's misogynists to batter women.

*“The moral:
Good triumphs
over evil”*

As legend goes, Hiranyakasyap was an atheist king who believed himself to be superior to God. His son Prahlad, however, was an ardent devotee of Bishnu. Unable to tolerate his son worshipping someone else, Hiranyakasyap planned to assassinate him. After several failed attempts, he turned to his sister Holika for help. Holika, was blessed with immunity to fire. She sat on a burning pyre with her nephew on her lap and found out that her boon could only be used for good deeds. Her nephew escaped unscathed from the ashes of his aunt. The moral: Good triumphs over evil.



Pretty inspiring stuff. But how did we get from there to aiming lolas filled with filthy Bagmati water at female pedestrians? Or are lola-hitters pretending to be Hiranyakasyap incarnates, waiting to assassinate someone on the sly with water balloons? In Northern India, Holi fires are lit on the eve of the festival. In Nepal, the chir pole was put up in Basantapur Darbar Square a week before Holi to be burnt symbolically. The other legend about Holi concerns the amorous God, Krishna who was famous for the pranks he played on the fair maidens of his village.



Photo: Amir Abdullah

One particular day, he snuck up on the Gopinis who were bathing in the Jamuna and hid their clothes. He refused to return them until the Gopinis stood up and performed the Surya namaskar. This is not as noble as the first legend, but perhaps better explains the female harassment angle that was handed down to posterity.

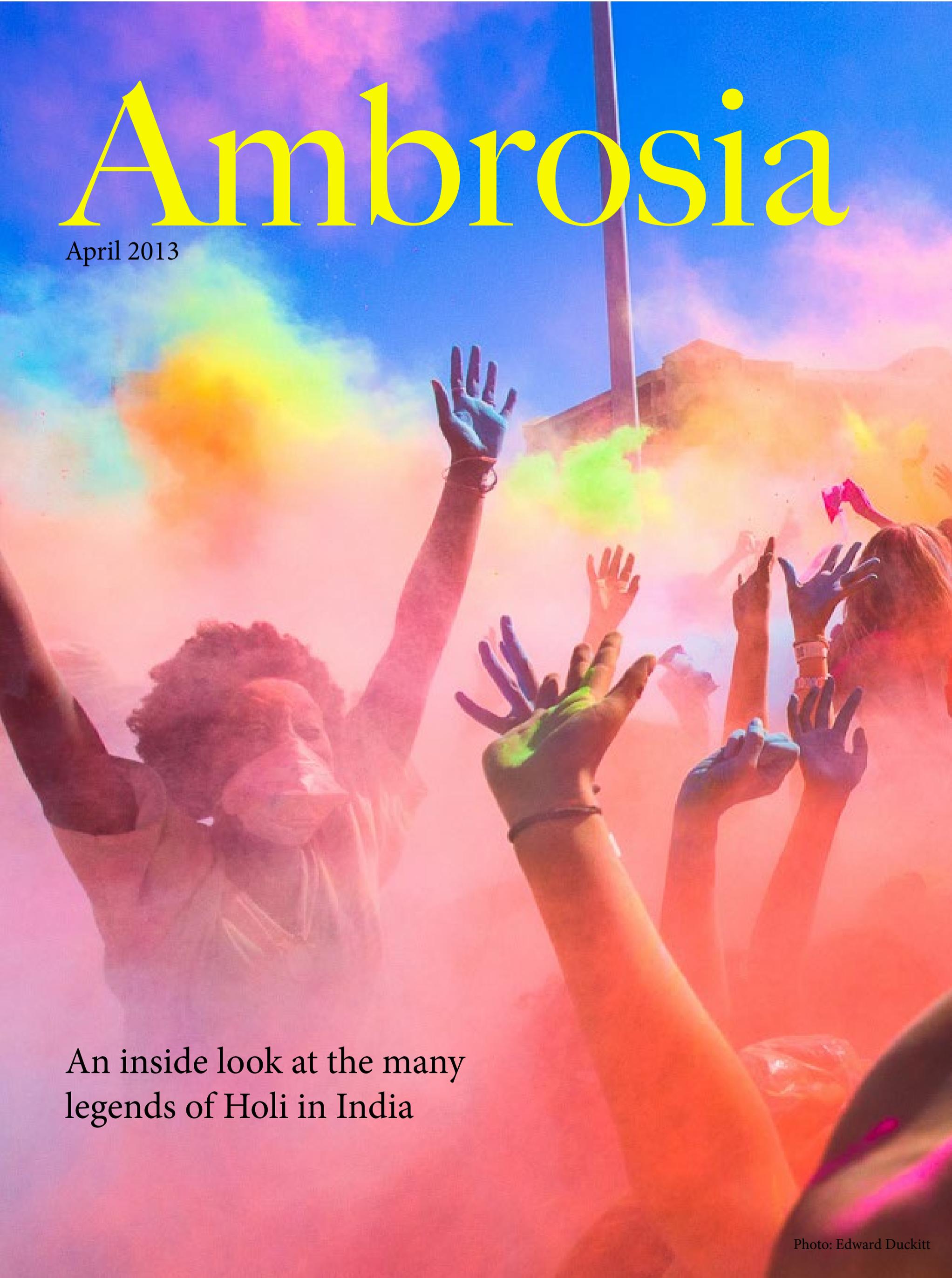
Holi has traditionally been the only time girls and boys were allowed to flirt blatantly, douse each other in water and colours, symbolising passion. Our version of the rites of spring. That is perhaps why extremists have turned the water festival into a war of the sexes. Over the years the harmless fun of Nepali Holi has been invaded by the sinister north Indian variety with its license to flirt stretched to sexual harassment. People hardly play Holi with family and friends anymore, they gang up instead to bombard female passers-by, giggling at their own cowardly audacity.

Best Places to go for Holi in India

(Click locations to see more info)



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Photo;Kevin Frayer

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