

The Weird Widows of Aravan

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1. Sahodaran worker as Delilah in drag, catching the last rays of the setting sun before going out for the evening.



2. Hijaras on their way to the annual Aravan temple festival south of Chennai (Madras) which attracts hijras (trans-sexuals) from all over India.



3. The hands of a hijra (trannie) displaying sequined nail-polish.



4. A hijras in a hotel room during the Aravan festival. The hotel was completely booked with hijras turning it into a Grand Hotel of Drag.



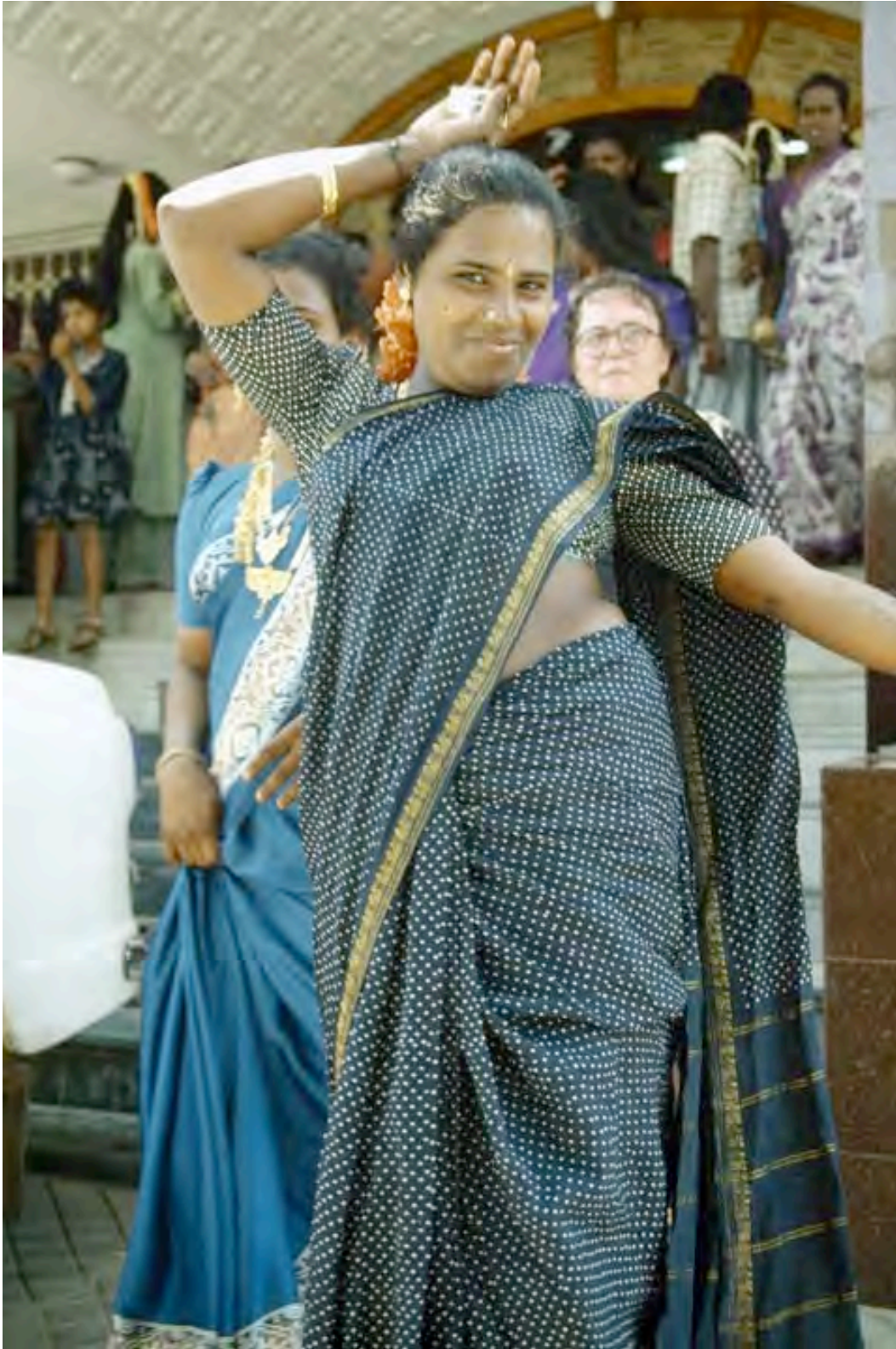
5. Gay men's health workers from Madras striking an artistic pose.



6. The Prakriti Sahodaran social workers on their way to the annual Aravan temple festival south of Chennai (Madras) which attracts hijras (trans-sexuals) from all over India. The Sahodaran workers in drag pass out condoms and give counselling to the trans-sexuals.



7. The Prakriti Sahodaran social workers on their way to the annual Aravan temple festival south of Chennai (Madras) which attracts hijras (trans-sexuals) from all over India. The Sahodaran workers in drag pass out condoms and give counselling to the trans-sexuals.



8. A Hijra poses before going out for the evening, Aravan Festival. Rosie (hijara in black sari) said, “God listens to our prayers. With a word, we can make or break a man’s fortune.”



9. A Hijra poses before going out for the evening, Aravan Festival.



10. The menopause that refreshes. Hijras (trannies) relax drinking a cuppa chai (sweetened milk tea).



11. Old age Hijara (trannie).



12. Aruna, one of the more attractive trannies poses with an admiring taxi-driver whom she picked up on her way from the Aravan festival back to the hotel, Villupuram.



13. A hijra plucks the whiskers from her boyfriend's face in the hotel room. Later the couple will get "married" in the temple of Aravan.



14. A hijra (trans-sexual) putting make-up at Prakriti Sahodaran sponsored beauty pageant, Villupuram.



15. Contestants in the audience watching Prakriti Sahodaran-sponsored, drag beauty pageant, Aravan Temple Festival, Villupuram , South India.



16. Straight gawkiers enjoy and tease as the parade of hijras (trannies) pass on the streets of Villupurum gathered for an annual festival of trans-sexuals at the Temple of Aravan.



17. Contestants performing @ Prakriti Sahodaran-sponsored, drag beauty pageant, Aravan Temple Festival, Villupurum , South India.



18. Contestants performing @ Prakriti Sahodaran-sponsored, drag beauty pageant, Aravan Temple Festival, Villupurum , South India.



19. Hijras, a term used throughout most of the Indian subcontinent, refers to ritually castrated men who dress and live marginalised lives as women, although the term is sometimes broadened to include effeminate men who like to cross-dress. **India.**



20. The legs of a hijra (trannie) displaying painted leg with 'mehendi' and golden anklet.



21. Winner of hijra beauty contest receives her crowning award from real lady in blue sari. This contestant was chosen after successfully performing difficult dance involving balancing plates and juggling fire at the same time.



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23. Enthusiastic contestants after the Prakriti Sahodaran-sponsored, drag beauty pageant, runs dancing on the main street lane catching eyes of tre-passer.



24. Hijaras getting ready (wearing sari and make up) to be married to the South Indian temple god, in an age-old rite performed by the sweating, topless temple priest, a re-enactment of the marriage of Mohini (a female incarnation of Lord Krishna) and Aravan related in the Hindu mythological epic, Mahabharata.



25. Ditto 24



26. Hijara wearing sari.



27. If you are effeminate in India (and not married) your family... forces you to live amongst the hijras, even if you are heterosexually inclined, as many effeminate men are. **India.**



28. Sahodaran worker named Samson, a counsellor for Prakriti Sahodaran, a men's sexual health project poses as he gets ready to go out for work at the annual Aravan festival which attracts trans-sexuals from all over the country.



29. Sahodaran worker gets ready to go out for work at the annual Aravan festival which attracts trans-sexuals from all over the country.



30. Samson, a counsellor for Prakriti Sahodaran, a men's sexual health project powders up as he gets ready to go out for work at the annual Aravan festival which attracts transsexuals from all over the country.



31. Wielding her wide-toothed pink comb like a hatchet, Aruna displays her “privates” which were castrated three years ago. The 23 year-old hijra, a trans-sexual prostitute from Bombay says, “I knew I was a girl trapped in a boys’s body from birth, but since the operation I now feel like a complete woman.” The hairy-chested drag “madam” of her house sits behind her, smiling on the bed.



32. Hijaras tying 'ghungroo' (anklet as seen) on legs to dance in Aravan temple festival, south of Chennai (Madras) which attracts hijras (trans-sexuals) from all over India.



33. Hijaras dancing.
Annual Aravan temple festival, Villupuram, South India.



34. Hijaras dancing.
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36. Auspicious rice-flour mandala (calledn Rangoli in Hindi language) painted on the ground to mark the various halting points of the chariot of Aravan as it is borne through the streets in procession, Aravan temple festival, Villupurum, South India.



37. As the chariot of the god Aravan is pulled in procession, shop-keepers and devotees make propitiatory offerings such as flowers, incense and these piles of husked coconuts, offerings of burnt camphor are made to the god Aravan as the deity passes by in procession. The Koothandavar Temple of Aravan is visible in the background.



38. As the chariot of the god Aravan is pulled in procession, shop-keepers and devotees make propitiatory offerings such as flowers, incense and these piles of husked coconuts, offerings of burnt camphor are made to the god Aravan as the deity passes by in procession. The Koothandavar Temple of Aravan is visible in the background.



39. Bride of Aravan being “married” to the god inside the Koothandavar Temple, the South Indian temple god, in an age-old rite performed by the sweating, topless temple priest, a re-enactment of the marriage of Mohini (a female incarnation of Lord Krishna) and Aravan related in the Hindu mythological epic, Mahabharata. Another hijra (tranny) friend looks on. The marriage lasts for only one festive night then the god is killed in effigy and the brides become wailing widows the next day.



40. The night before the annual Aravan temple festival in Villupuram, South India, hijras or trans-sexuals go out in the streets cruising the straight men, most of whom are macho types with mustaches.



41. Breaking the glass bangles with coconut husk to prevent injury. Broken bangles are the symbol of widowhood. The “brides” of Aravan are “widowed” the next day after the god is killed in effigy.



42. The wailing widows of Aravan. After the god is symbolically killed those hijras (trans-sexuals) who had been ritually married to the god the night before now express their grief at being single and alone once again, ridiculed and ostracized as third gender freaks. Annual Aravan temple festival, Villupuram, South India.



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44. Four hijras (trans-sexuals) dressed in white, the traditional Hindu garb of widowhood, the morning after their newly-wed “husband”, the god Aravan, is symbolically killed in effigy. The Aravan temple festival, Villupurum, South India.



45. After the symbolic death of Aravan, the “brides” of the previous night become widows by taking a ritualistic bath in this bathing tank and donning white. The pool is lined with lecherous men waiting for the gay “widows”.



46. Hijaras dancing.

Called “minstrels of the night”, the hijras are South Asia’s ridiculed and ostracized third gender-eunuchs and trans-sexuals-who are deemed auspicious at wedding parties and birth ceremonies- but otherwise outcast as nature’s freaks.



47. Hijaras counting cash collected by dancing.

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