

Breaking taboo, Hindu widows celebrate festival of colors

By Biswajeet Banerjee
The Associated Press

VRINDAVAN, India — Aruna Samaddar threw fistfuls of colored powder into the air. Blue and red and green, the cheerful colors settled on her white sari and all over other women nearby.

In most of India, widows like Samaddar have no place in this joyful celebration of Holi, the Hindu festival of colors. The country's millions of observant Hindu widows are expected to live out their days in quiet worship, dressed only in white. They are typically barred from all religious festivities because their very presence is considered inauspicious.

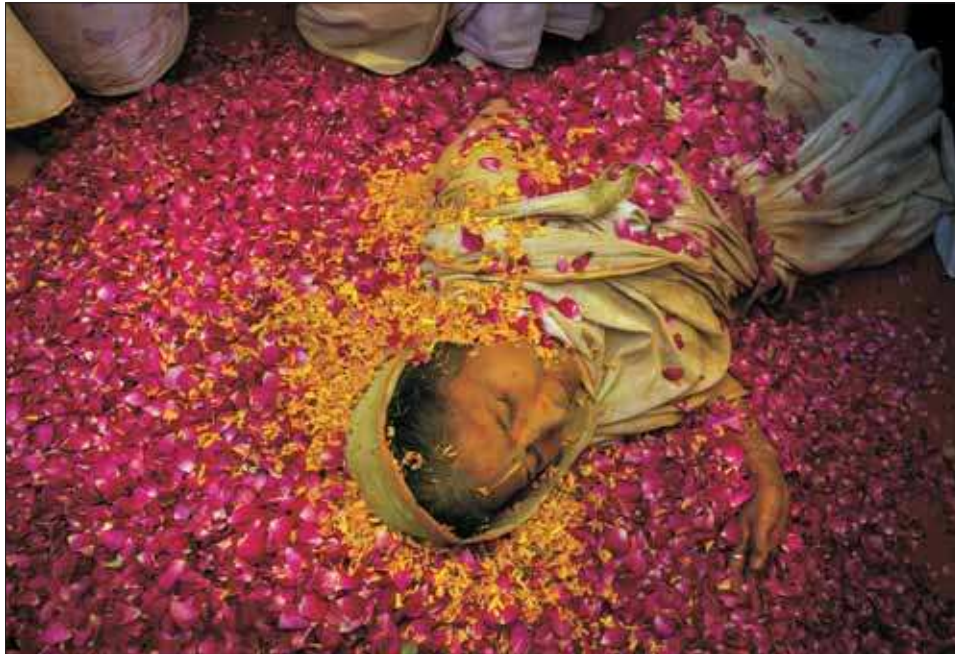
So for Samaddar, the celebration was a joy long denied.

"I am so happy. I am playing Holi after 12 years. I am happy, very happy," said Samaddar, who appeared to be in her early 30s. The powder made her white sari and those of the widows around her shimmer in myriad colors.

So deep is the ostracization of widows that they're often shunned by their families and forced to seek shelter in temples.

The holy city of Vrindavan, in India's Uttar Pradesh state, is known as the City of Widows because it has given so many women shelter. And in recent years, widows have found a bit of color and joy as well.

Aid group Sulabh International has been organizing regular Holi celebrations in Vrindavan since 2013. Samaddar and more than 1,000 other widows gathered in the courtyard of one of the city's oldest temples — devoted to Krishna, the most playful of the Hindu gods.



FESTIVAL OF COLORS. An Indian Hindu widow lies on a bed of flower petals during Holi celebrations at the Gopinath temple, 112 miles southeast of New Delhi, India. A few years ago, the joyful celebration was forbidden for Hindu widows. Like hundreds of thousands of observant Hindu women, they would have been expected to live out their days in quiet worship, dressed only in white, their very presence considered inauspicious for all religious festivities. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)

Hindu priests chanted religious verses as hundreds of widows splashed colored powders and played with water pistols filled with colored water. Showers of flower petals filled the air.

As loud music blasted, the younger women jostled each other as they played with the colors.

For dozens of older women, years of social conditioning proved hard to break. They applied only tiny dots of color to each other's foreheads.

"Their participation in Holi symbolizes a break from tradition, which forbids a widow from wearing a colored sari, among many other things," said Bindeshwar Pathak, the head of Sulabh International.

Sulabh was asked to oversee the lives of widows of the city by India's Supreme Court following news reports of the widows being forced to beg for food and resorting to prostitution. While there are tens of

thousands of widows in Vrindavan, the group has been appointed caretaker for about 1,500.

The organization looks after their basic needs and gives them a stipend of 2,000

High-speed Mercedes crash ignites uproar

By Jocelyn Gecker
The Associated Press

BANGKOK — The dashcam video is jaw-dropping: On a virtually empty stretch of highway, a midsize car is seen travelling in the slow lane. Suddenly, a black Mercedes-Benz zooms into the frame and rear-ends the car at tremendous speed. Within a split second, a cloud of smoke and debris fill the video screen.

What happened next is now well known in Thailand and the focal point of growing outrage. The midsize car burst into flames and the couple inside, both graduate

students in their 30s, died at the scene of the accident. The Mercedes driver, the son of a wealthy Thai businessman, survived with minor injuries and refused both alcohol and drug tests — and his wishes were respected. Police say he was driving at an estimated 150 miles per hour.

Since the video was widely shared on social media, the fatal March 13 crash has reignited a debate about the impunity of the rich and well-connected in Thailand. A similar debate raged in the U.S. with the case of a Texas teenager who used an "influenza" defense in a deadly drunk-driving

While some women were not comfortable joining in the celebration of colors, Samaddar was determined to have at least one day of cheer.

"We have got just one day to celebrate life," she said as she tossed the colors joyfully. "Let's do it to the hilt."

rupees (\$30) to buy essentials. They are taught to make incense sticks and garlands to ensure they can earn a small amount of money on their own. But for the most part, the women spend the day singing hymns to Krishna, for which they earn 10 rupees (15 cents).

The women range in age from 22 to 100. Some were abandoned by their families decades ago.

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RIDE MAX?

Track work will disrupt MAX service May 8–21

We're making much-needed improvements to the MAX tracks along 1st Avenue in Portland City Center to help trains run on time. Sunday, May 8, through Saturday, May 21, the Blue and Red lines will run on different routes downtown. The Green Line will run between Clackamas Town Center and Rose Quarter only. All MAX lines will run less frequently, and trains will be crowded.

To see how your trip will be affected, visit trimet.org/firstavenue.



Before 1905, Portland's Chinatown was located on SW Second Avenue.



Old Chinatown, Portland, Oregon, ca. 1900
Oregon Historical Society Research Library, bb002460

Chinese American:

Exclusion / Inclusion

Closes June 1, 2016

Beyond the Gate:

A Tale of Portland's Historic Chinatowns

Closes June 21, 2016

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