

# Dispatch From Kolkata: LGBTQ Activists Face Mob Attack



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02-18-2025~ In another demonstration that the fight for LGBTQ rights in India goes far beyond marriage, a dispute in a Reliance Fresh supermarket in the posh South Kolkata neighbourhood of Jodhpur Park suddenly assumed a sinister character on 11 February. What started as an argument over a place in line became a mob assault outside the store.

Members of [Sappho for Equality](#) who were initially involved or arrived to assist were verbally, physically, and sexually assaulted. Sappho is a Kolkata-based organisation for lesbians, bisexual women, and trans men that runs a nearby cafe.

“This incident is something in our own locality - we know of this place - this was something of a shock to us”, said Shreosi, a member of the organisation who was not present during the assault but is in contact with those who were.

Neither the store’s staff nor nearby police immediately intervened during the incident, during which the Sappho members were grabbed and beaten with helmets. When the police finally did respond, they removed the Sappho members from the scene rather than stopping the mob. The Sappho members were then taken to receive medical attention, and [a case was filed](#).

Ree, one of the five Sappho members who was assaulted, said, “The trauma that has been created, it’s a real burden. The physical pain will ease, but we don’t know how the rest of it will be relieved”.

To be queer or trans in India is a quixotic reality today. There is no doubt that progress has been made over decades - most notably with the 2018 decriminalisation of same-sex relations. It was the “fruits of labour of millions and millions of queer and trans workers,” said Shreosi.

Yet incidents like that in Jodhpur Park on Tuesday demonstrate that what she called “homonegativity and transnegativity” is still pervasive.

Moreover, it’s not just physical attacks. From birth to work to death, queer and trans people in Kolkata and elsewhere have to navigate often difficult lives. This includes the quotidian, such as going without bathroom access for a dozen hours, unemployment and low wages, or facing old age alone without the natal families that have rejected them.

And amidst those day-to-day social realities, they also sometimes have to face violent acts such as the mob attack that Sappho members faced on 11 February and in the past. “We did put our own safety at stake quite a lot of times”, said Shreosi.

She described an incident two years ago in a village in the nearby district of Howrah, where Sappho members were attempting to intervene to stop a young woman from being forced to marry.

“We were encircled by a mob... we experienced how a mob can turn violent within seconds”, she said.

The causes of this hatred of LGBTQ people intersect with other forms of oppression. “Violence is interdependent on other discourses as well”, said Shreosi, citing factors like class and ethnicity.

[Srijan Bhattacharyya](#), the All India Joint Secretary of the Students’ Federation of India, also pointed to overlapping factors.

“The roots of this lawlessness are embedded in the socio-economic uncertainties of our people that have grown during the present dispensation”, said Bhattacharyya. “The people in power are practising majoritarianism of all forms, marginalising the already marginalised”, he said.

Still, all is not doom and gloom. “There are stories of hope as well”, insists Shreosi. “Otherwise, we couldn’t have been alive until now”, she said.

Kolkata's - and wider India's - queer and trans community can only fight to ensure that one day those stories will outweigh the structural and direct violence like that which transpired in Jodhpur Park on 11 February.

*By Saurav Sarkar*

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