



Jairaj

- [Edit Profile](#)
- [My Times](#)
- [Redeem](#)
- LOGOUT

Ready for tomorrow

Fast, insight-rich analysis of news that matters to you | long-reads that outlive the news cycle

[subscribe now](#)

Now Reading:

How schools constantly end up failing queer kids



- Small
- Medium
- Large

How schools constantly end up failing queer kids

Anish Gawande

Mar 5, 2022, 19:06 IST



- Small
- Medium
- Large

Despite significant advancements in LGBTQ+ rights over the past few years, we have lost yet another young life to queerphobia. A toxic culture of bullying and harassment continues to thrive unchecked in our educational institutions

Trigger Warning: Childhood trauma, queerphobia

"This is not a suicide, this is an institutional murder," Sayantan Datta, a queer-trans science writer and journalist based in Hyderabad, tells me, in a conversation about the recent death by suicide of a 16-year-old DPS student in Faridabad. Their words do not come as a surprise. After all, an emotional letter written by the boy to his mother, shortly before he died, was straightforward in assigning blame. "This school has killed me," he says, before adding, "I tried my best to live, but it seems like life wanted something else." The anguish in Sayantan's voice deeply resonates with me. As we discussed our experiences of growing up queer in India, however, there was a looming sense of exhaustion and frustration. Despite significant advancements in LGBTQ+ rights over the past few years, we have lost yet another young life to queerphobia. A toxic culture of bullying and harassment continues to thrive unchecked in our educational institutions. That frustration reappears constantly: In messages with friends from the LGBTQ+ community, on my Twitter timeline and in WhatsApp forwards, all demanding justice.

[How bullying, toxic masculinity and sexual assault drove a Class 10 boy to suicide](#)

'Could have been me'

What is entirely absent, however, is any element of surprise. There is an overwhelming feeling that 'it could have been me' running through every conversation I have while putting together this piece. Taunts, jibes, insults — like "baila", "gandu", "faggot" — come rushing back as stories blend into one another. Years of suppressed pain and humiliation, as we navigate through the world with pride, resurface in one anecdote after another. "[Seeing the news of the DPS student's suicide] took me back to a disturbing time in my life," shares Aditya Tiwari, a young queer poet who grew up in Jabalpur. "In school, I was on the verge of suicide. I had written a letter and sent it to my counselor, but she did nothing." Aditya was teased for being effeminate, or "flamboyant and fabulous", as he now describes himself, and had classmates find his address and show up at the doorstep when nobody was home to hurl abuses outside his window.

A toxic culture of bullying and harassment continues to thrive unchecked in our educational institutions

Aditya's experience, unfortunately, is not unique. For most queer children, bullying is the norm rather than the exception and takes varying forms. Dalit trans activist Grace Banu, for instance, has spoken out about how discrimination on the grounds of both gender and caste saw school authorities forbidding her from attending school during normal hours and threatening to punish students for interacting with her. Yet, bullying rarely ends at school. Since bullying is our first introduction to our own queerness, the imprint of shame and stigma continues to influence the ways in which we negotiate our identity in subtle yet profound ways. "For a long time, the vocabulary I used for myself was derived from bullying," says Sayantan, who identified as gay and then queer before finding the label of 'queer-trans' that felt like a better fit to describe their identity. "That is such a violent act, such a huge space of discomfort for me."

Who you turn to

Where does bullying leave young queer people struggling to find acceptance today? What alternatives do we have to counter the trauma of discrimination and prejudice?

Aditya found safe spaces in the queer parks of Jabalpur, in friends like cross dresser and sexual health activist Lara didi. Sayantan sought refuge in cisgender girls in the classroom, and later on within friendships with those from different marginalised backgrounds. I found comfort in literature and cinema, poring over James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and watching *Queer as Folk* on repeat to reassure myself that I was not alone.

As I go through news articles and television debates around the passing away of the DPS Faridabad student, I can only hope that this will serve as an urgent wake up call for reforms that are long overdue.

[Why kids must know the difference between sex and sexuality](#)

"Bullying in school is one thing, but we also need to address bullying by the state," says Rohin Bhatt, a queer lawyer and co-founder of the Indian Bioethics Project. "If the government is not supportive of queer people, schools themselves cannot be expected to take positive action."

He points to objections raised against the progressive NCERT training manual on "Inclusion of Transgender Children in School Education" by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights and how government institutions actively oppose sensitisation around equal rights.

Change then needs to begin at the institutional level. While many, like Meghna Mehra, a writer and founder of the All India Queer Association, believe that teacher training modules at the BEd level needs to include material on the LGBTQ+ community, others are firm in demanding that there need to be frameworks through which teachers can be held accountable for failing to protect queer children. And there is a growing understanding that structural support systems — like helplines in regional languages for children facing bullying and harassment — are the need of the hour.

**We are constantly failing queer kids.
We need to tell them that everyone is normal,
that everyone deserves to exist in peace**

Silver linings

Amidst notes of despair, there are silver linings on the horizon. Rohin feels that several classmates who used to bully him have gone on to apologise over the past few years, with some of them becoming his close friends. Aditya has published a book of his poetry, and Sayantan has created a vibrant community of transgender and non-binary people working in STEM. Across the country, community organisations like Nazariya QFRG and activists like Kalki Subramaniam, have started working with educators to transform classrooms into safer and more inclusive spaces.

But this isn't the time for complacency. As I watch the video of the mother of the student from DPS Faridabad speaking out about the horrors of losing a child to queerphobia, I am reminded of the constant violence faced by children who have been robbed of their childhood. I think back to the powerful, important plea that Aditya shared with me in our conversation together:

"We are constantly failing queer kids. We need to tell them that everyone is normal, that everyone deserves to exist in peace."

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar at the University of Oxford and the founder of Pink List India

[Dear Ranveer, Ayushmann, non-binary fashion is not a 'costume play'](#)



- Small
- Medium
- Large

start a conversation

Be the first one to review

+



Leave a comment...

0/3000



Refrain from posting comments that are obscene, defamatory or inflammatory, and do not indulge in personal attacks, name calling or inciting hatred against any community. **Help us delete comments** that do not follow these guidelines **by marking them offensive**. Let's work together to keep the conversation civil.

±

All Comments Your Activity

We have sent you a verification email. To verify, just follow the link in the message

more stories

•



[India](#)

[Why Ukraine war hit home harder than Syria, Iraq or Yemen](#)

[People respond to their 'kind' in danger. Trapped students explain Indians' interest](#)

[Dipankar Gupta 7 Mar 2022, 19:49](#)

•



[Business](#)

[The reason high finance needs more women](#)

[Research shows gender diverse teams are better at critical thinking. Good that Sebi has a woman chief](#)

[Richa Roy 7 Mar 2022, 19:44](#)

•



[Business](#)

Women's way of investing is different and often better

[Women contribute something special to the table, and this skill benefits family finances. This variety is recognised through equitable household financial management](#)

[Uma Shashikant](#) 7 Mar 2022, 13:20

•



[Business](#)

Question every country will ask — can US freeze my forex reserves too?

[Bigger incentive for some nations to find alternative to dollar-dominated global exchanges](#)

[Somnath Mukherjee](#) 6 Mar 2022, 20:00

•



[India](#)

Ukraine war is bound to affect India's space programme. Here's how

[How the Ukraine crisis effects space programmes, and means delays plus harsh lessons for India](#)

[Aditya Ramanathan](#) 6 Mar 2022, 19:55

•



[Business](#)

Sanctions could make Russia's \$ 630 billion forex reserves worthless

[Almost overnight, Russia's \\$630b reserves have gone worthless — at least for now. What does it mean for India whose foreign exchange reserves are as much as Russia's?](#)

[Ajit Ranade](#) 6 Mar 2022, 19:51

•



[World](#)

Russia may be winning missile war, Ukraine is winning Twitter war

[The Ukraine-Russia crisis shows that the power of social media plays a big role in getting people and government on board](#)

[Santosh DesaiTNN6 Mar 2022, 19:14](#)

•



[India](#)

Could this be the end of the road for Mayawati?

[What does the invisibility of Mayawati in an election that is being seen as a trailer for 2024 say about a party that was, till not very long ago, the dominant force in the state? Is the game over or is Behenji biding her time?](#)

[Radhika RamaseshanTIMESOFINDIA.COM6 Mar 2022, 18:40](#)

•



[India](#)

In Auroville, idealists fight govt over plans for a model city

[Backed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the new leadership of Auroville, an experimental commune, wants to create a model city. In the way stand trees, tree houses and a take-it-slow tradition](#)

[Emily SchmallNYT News Service6 Mar 2022, 17:50](#)

•



[India](#)

Now I know why I was missing a strong Indian leader all my life

[In new, strong India, the mind is not without fear but doubts and questions have been given a rude burial](#)

[Saurabh BanerjeeTIMESOFINDIA.COM6 Mar 2022, 13:44](#)

•



[India](#)

80% of Indians can't afford MBBS seat in private colleges

[Is doubling or even quadrupling of seats enough to stop students going abroad? Unlikely, TOI analysis shows how out of reach a medical education is for most people](#)

[Rema Nagarajan and Atul ThakurTNN6 Mar 2022, 11:04](#)

•



[India](#)

How women survived and thrived during the pandemic

[Covid-19 affected all, but women, in particular, were hit in ways nobody could have imagined. This Women's Day, let's celebrate our grit and determination for survival](#)

[Shobhaa De5 Mar 2022, 21:15](#)

•



[India](#)

What a close shave in UP tells us about BJP's prospects

[The UP polls may be much closer than we expect and contrary to what opinion polls suggest](#)

[Swaminathan S Anklesaria AiyarTNN5 Mar 2022, 21:14](#)

•



[India](#)

A non-Covid disease we have brought upon ourselves

[Self-medication shot up during pandemic, say docs, many now reporting drug-resistant infections, other illness](#)

[Ipsita PatiTIMESOFINDIA.COM5 Mar 2022, 17:19](#)

•



[World](#)

China's internet is pro-Russia, pro-Putin and pro-war

[In much of the world, Russia is losing the information war over Ukraine. In China, though, it's winning big](#)
[Li Yuan](#)[New York Times](#)5 Mar 2022, 13:46

•



[India](#)

Abstaining from voting against Russia will now get difficult

[Fence-sitting on Ukraine risks many repercussions for India, from Indo-Pacific to EU trade deal](#)
[Aaditya Dave](#)4 Mar 2022, 19:46

•

[FAQ's](#)

Copyright © 2022 Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd. All rights reserved.

Read the full article

[login now](#)

Join us and get access to insightful, multimedia storytelling like you have never seen before.