

WHAT'S UP, CAMPUS?

In a first, IISER campus dons rainbow colours for pride march

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The sky was dark and heavy with clouds, but the impending rains did not dampen the students' enthusiasm. Decked up in rainbow hues, they turned out in large numbers for a first-of-its-kind event on campus.

Sunday was a historic day at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), as it saw the institute's first-ever pride march, where activist groups and allies came forward to support the LGBTQIA+ student community of IISER.

'We are a LGBTQIA+ friendly campus, and we don't shy away from saying that loud'

Ahead of their annual college festival – Karavaan- this was an initiative by the students to create a safe space for the students of the LGBTQIA+ community.

"It was a much-needed step," shared Uttiya Roy, a Biology PhD student at IISER, who was a part of the march. She added, "Pride marches have been happening in the city for many years, since even before section 377 was scrapped. These parades have seen participation from people of all age groups. However, a pride parade on a college campus is different. College is when you are in your formative years, which is when you can bond with people easily. Here, you make friends who become a part of your growing up years. And so, with an event like this, the college is providing a safe space for students to come out and discuss LGBTQIA+ issues, or at least educating them, so it becomes easier for students from the community to survive college days."

Another student Suryadepto Nag pointed out the importance of finding a support system in not just peers, but also the faculty of the college. "Our college has always been open to discussions about the community, but this time around, we wanted to do something on a larger scale. The pride took place not only on the campus, but we also went around Aundh and Baner Road. The whole aim was to tell people that the term LGBTQIA+ isn't a foreign one.

In fact, we told our fellow students to dress up in Indian ethnic wear, to show people that it is very much a part of our Indian culture, and that our ancestors too had queer partners or same-sex partners, as is depicted in India's ancient art," said Suryadepto, adding, "People often say that today's youth has been influenced by western culture, and that being gay, lesbian or queer is a byproduct of their culture, so, it was necessary for us college students to make a statement through the parade."

Emphasising that a pride march is not just about celebrating, but also educating people, Pratyush MR, third-year student, and organiser of the march, said, "Many times people around us aren't aware of what's happening, so they end up mocking one's identity. So, if the college, as an institution, speaks up about it, it provides validation, and discussions and marches like these help educate people about the community."



Participants at the pride parade

Participants at the pride parade

students' group, where students can freely discuss the topic, and create a safe space for the community."

"The pride march on campus is just the beginning," said Misaal Bedi, another undergraduate student from the college. She added, "Through it, we wanted to show that we are a queer-friendly campus, and that we don't shy away from saying that loud. It was also held to increase the visibility of the community inside the campus. Following this, we are also going to hold a panel discussion on creating an inclusive campus, and create a



Glimpses from the pride march that took place on Sunday

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WITH AN EVENT LIKE THIS, THE COLLEGE IS PROVIDING A SAFE SPACE FOR STUDENTS TO COME OUT AND DISCUSS LGBTQIA+ ISSUES, OR AT LEAST EDUCATING THEM. THIS WAS A NECESSARY STEP

— Uttiya Roy, a PhD student

OUR COLLEGE HAS ALWAYS BEEN OPEN TO DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, BUT WE WANTED TO DO SOMETHING ON A LARGER SCALE WITH THE PRIDE MARCH. THE AIM WAS TO TELL PEOPLE THAT LGBTQIA+ ISN'T A FOREIGN TERM OR CONCEPT

— Suryadepto Nag, a student

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