

RAINBOW RESILIENCE

Growing up with anxiety and what I now think was depression, I had always struggled with my mood swings and anger issues. It was not until I left my family home in 2022 that I finally began to acknowledge the root of my emotional turmoil.

Throughout my childhood, I have been through a bunch of rough stuff; however, the most recent incident, dealing with the 2020 Delhi Riots and their aftermath, was particularly harrowing. In February 2020, my family and I found ourselves trapped in a riot-affected area; our house was attacked, burned, and later looted. We had to flee barefoot, in a police van, leaving behind all our belongings. Eventually, we sold our home and relocated to a new neighbourhood. Witnessing such violence was deeply personal and only served to exacerbate my anxiety. As a Muslim from a marginalized community, the violence I witnessed during the riots deeply affected me. When Muslims are targeted in attacks, it is like a betrayal from the very place they call home. Their faith teaches loyalty to their country, yet they face danger within its borders. Riots amplify this insecurity, making it feel like there is nowhere safe to turn.

I had not even begun to heal from the trauma of the riots when the COVID-19 pandemic placed us all in a lockdown. Those were the days when being gay in a heterosexual family felt like an additional burden.

Eventually, all this felt unbearable, and I left home in 2022. I experienced panic attacks, which I had always experienced but could not express openly because of the small house setting, the strict environment at home, certain stereotypes like "boys don't cry," and persistent anxiety that made every day feel like a battle. It was then that I realized I needed help, so despite financial concerns, I sought out a psychiatrist. I found a hospital where sessions were more affordable, just ₹50 for OPD, and I

hoped that the psychiatrist there would understand my struggles. I was rudely surprised. She seemed completely unaware of the reality of the Delhi Riots when I told her the major reason for my anxiety and nightmares those days. This lack of empathy was disheartening, but it was her response to my sexuality that truly shocked me. When I told her I was gay, she questioned the validity of my identity, asking if I had ever been with a woman to confirm it. I was furious and wanted to leave the room right away. But I stayed and challenged her, asking if she had ever questioned her sexuality in such a manner. She smirked. Despite feeling defeated by the encounter, I continued with the prescribed medication, hoping it would offer some relief from my intrusive thoughts.

I guess she was amazing at her job as a doctor. But when it came to seeing me as a person, someone who needed empathy and understanding, she missed the mark. Instead of trying to understand what I was going through, she just gave me a prescription for Paxidep CR 12.5mg, mentioning my gut issues along with a few other medications. It was like she saw my symptoms, but not me.

The psychiatrist eventually moved away, and I only had that one session with her. Reflecting on the experience, I felt that it was far from the compassionate and inclusive mental healthcare I had needed.