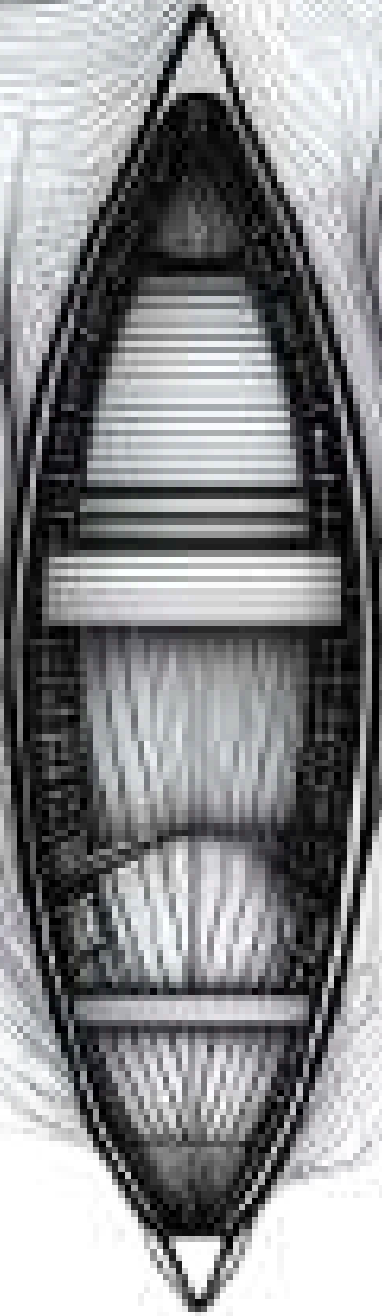




GENDER
MELA
2025
#PRIDE





PRIDE MONTH



BE YOURSELF

Organized by

**MOITRISANJOG SOCIETY
OF COOCHBEHAR**



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LGBTQ #PRIDE JUNE 2025

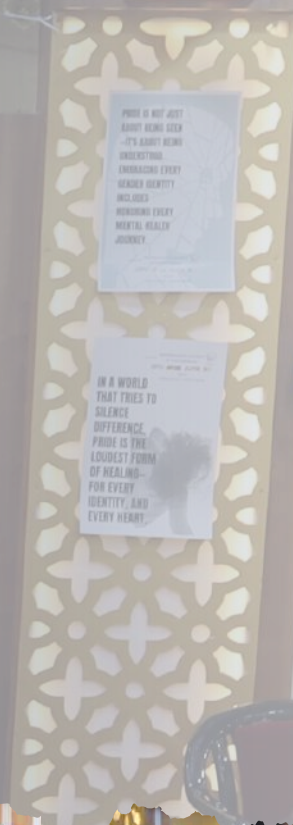
VENUE

HOTEL JONAKI, COOCH BEHAR



GENDER MELA





Namaskar and heartfelt greetings to everyone gathered here,
It is an honour and a profound joy to welcome you all to
Gender Mela 2025, on behalf of Moitrisanjog Society. Today,
we open not just a festival—but a space of belonging,
reflection, and collective courage.

Gender Mela 2025 is not simply an event—it is a declaration.
A bold, compassionate stand that says: our lives, our identities,
our histories, and our aspirations deserve recognition,
celebration, and justice. In marking this Pride Month, we do
more than raise flags—we uplift each other's truths, pay
homage to those who walked before us, and reaffirm our
shared vision of a future rooted in safety, dignity, and joy for
all queer and trans people—regardless of geography, gender,
or class.

This Mela is a living expression of healing, creativity,
resistance, and community care. It has been lovingly shaped to
reflect the vibrant realities of queer and trans lives across
North Bengal. Through storytelling, performance, art, and
dialogue, we are not only expressing who we are—we are
healing wounds, reclaiming narratives, and building solidarity.
At its heart, Gender Mela 2025 embodies pride with purpose.
It brings together the urgent conversations around mental
health, the economic and cultural contributions of queer
artists, the power of grassroots activism, and the need for
accessible, affirming spaces that honour every person's right
to rest, to be heard, and to be safe.

This space also holds sacred the memory of those we have lost
—to violence, rejection, neglect, and silence. Let us carry their
memories with care, and let our presence here speak for them:
we remember, we resist, and we rise.

To each artist, organiser, volunteer, speaker, and participant—
thank you. Your presence is not only valuable—it is vital. In
showing up, you are helping to weave a larger, more
compassionate fabric of community and change.

As we begin these two days of connection, creativity, and
collective movement, let us commit ourselves to what this
Mela represents. May we take its spirit of inclusivity,
resilience, and radical love back with us—into our homes,
collectives, streets, and daily lives.

May Gender Mela 2025 be more than a gathering—may it be
the seed of lasting transformation, rooted in justice, care, and
queer liberation.

In solidarity, gratitude, and hope,

Sumi Das

For Moitrisanjog Society

Coochbehar, June 2025





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PRIDE
MONTH



“Living on the Edge: Gender, Mental Health & Inclusivity in Contemporary India”

Event: Gender Mela 2025

Date & Venue: June 2025, Coochbehar

Overview:

As part of the vibrant and socially conscious programming at Gender Mela 2025, the panel “Living on the Edge: Gender, Mental Health & Inclusivity in Contemporary India” brought together three powerful voices—Rima Bose, Anupam Mitra, and Sajida Parveen—each illuminating critical and often neglected intersections of gender, queerness, and systemic marginalization in India. Moderated by Sumi Das, the session was both reflective and forward-looking, urging structural reform and empathetic engagement at every level of society.



Moderator’s Opening Remarks – Sumi Das:

Chairing the session, Sumi Das opened with a thoughtful reminder that while legal and cultural landscapes around gender and mental health are shifting in India, true change remains incomplete without centering the lived experiences of those at the margins. “Living on the edge,” she said, “is not a metaphor—it is a daily reality for many gender-diverse individuals in India. Our role is to listen, amplify, and push for a world where the edge no longer feels like exile.”

She emphasized the importance of intersectionality in any conversation around inclusivity—reminding the audience that gender, mental health, and class are not separate silos but overlapping terrains where identity and struggle intertwine.

Speaker 1: Rima Bose – Gender Inclusivity in the Indian Context

Rima Bose laid the foundation by tracing the historical presence of gender-nonconforming communities in India, arguing that any meaningful discourse on inclusivity must begin by reclaiming and respecting these indigenous narratives. She critiqued the dominance of western frameworks in Indian gender discourse, noting how they often overlook or erase the resilience and traditions of communities like the hijra and kinnar.

“Inclusivity,” she asserted, “cannot be borrowed—it must be grown from within our own soil.”

Rima called out the institutional barriers that continue to marginalize queer and trans people, stressing the need for reforms in education, healthcare, and employment that move beyond tokenism and actually redistribute access and power. Her presentation was a call to dismantle structural exclusion and to amplify grassroots resistance already underway.





Speaker 2: Anupam Mitra – Mental Health and the Queer Experience

Anupam Mitra's session brought attention to the mental health crisis facing LGBTQ+ individuals, especially in rural and semi-urban settings. He described how "social mental health crises" are created not by individual weakness but by collective abandonment, family rejection, and systemic neglect.

"Being unseen, unloved, and unsafe in your own society," he said, "is a kind of violence that leaves deep psychological scars."

He argued that while therapy is vital, it is insufficient unless matched with affirming communities and systemic transformation. Anupam advocated for training mental health professionals in queer-affirmative practices and making services geographically and economically accessible. He concluded with the powerful reminder: "There's no wellness without justice, and no care without inclusion."



Speaker 3: Sajida Parveen – Labour Movements and Daily-Wage Rights

Drawing from her years of grassroots activism, Sajida Parveen focused on the invisibilization of queer individuals in the labour economy. She pointed out that while women and queer people often make up significant portions of the daily-wage workforce, they remain ignored in both policy discussions and union spaces.

"Development cannot speak only in economic terms," she said. "It must speak the language of dignity, of representation, of rights for all."

Sajida called for an inclusive model of labour rights that recognizes the complex identities of workers. She pushed for unions and worker collectives to evolve in their understanding of gender and sexuality, ensuring that queer and trans voices are heard, protected, and empowered in all sectors.

Moderator's Closing Reflections – Sumi Das:

In her closing comments, Sumi Das highlighted the thematic convergence of the three speakers—each revealing how systemic erasure operates across different spheres, whether historical, psychological, or economic. She praised the panel for "not just pointing out the gaps, but showing us where bridges already exist, and where we must build more."

She concluded with a call to action:

"If we want an India that is truly inclusive, then we must reimagine every structure—our schools, clinics, workplaces, and movements—through the lens of equity, empathy, and lived experience. Listening is not enough. It's time to act."





Tejaswini Samman 2025 Honours Mithu Das: A Journey from Marginalisation to Motherhood
Born in Tapsikhata village of Alipurduar district, Mithu Das has lived a life shaped by resilience, compassion, and quiet revolution. Assigned male at birth and identifying as feminine, she faced rejection from her own family for embracing her true identity. Cast aside and left to fend for herself, Mithu found refuge among folk music groups in Alipurduar and later survived by begging on trains—an unfortunate reality for many in the transgender community, pushed to the fringes of society.

It was during these difficult times that Mithu encountered a heartrending situation: a family preparing to sell their two young daughters, aged just six months and one and a half years, simply because they were girls. Moved by the injustice, Mithu stepped in and adopted both children, refusing to let them be discarded by a world that failed to value them.

That act of profound love and defiance marked a turning point—not just in their lives, but in Mithu's own. She left behind the precarious life of begging, purchased a small plot of land, began farming, and eventually opened a modest grocery shop. Today, her daughters live in a safe, loving home, and are attending school—thriving under the care of a mother who rebuilt her world from the ground up.

In recognition of her fearless determination, her commitment to dignity, and her unwavering compassion, the Moitrisanjog Society is proud to confer the তেজস্বিনী সম্মান ২০২৫ (Tejaswini Samman 2025) to Mithu Das.

The award was formally presented by Dr. Pompi Bhattacharya, President of Citizens for Justice in Cooch Behar, in the presence of Sumi Das.

Mithu's story is a powerful reminder that strength comes in many forms, and that true courage lies in choosing compassion when the world offers none.



Moitrisanjog Society
www.moitrisanjog.org



তেজস্বিনী সম্মান ২০২৫

TEJASWINI SAMMAN 2025

An initiative launched this year by Moitrisanjog Society on the occasion of Pride Month to honour exceptional individuals.



Presented to

Mithu Das



Born in Tapsikhata village of Alipurduar district, Mithu Das faced deep personal hardship early in life. Assigned male at birth and identifying as feminine, she was rejected by her own family for embracing her true identity. Despite such adversity, Mithu found solace in folk music groups in Alipurduar and later, as part of the transgender community, sustained herself by begging on trains—a reality for many like her, pushed to the fringes of society.

During this time, Mithu came across a heartbreaking situation: a family intending to sell their two young daughters, aged six months and one and a half years, simply because they were girls. Refusing to let their lives be discarded, Mithu adopted both children. That act of love marked a turning point—not just in their lives, but in her own.

She stepped away from begging, bought a piece of land, took up farming, and eventually started a small grocery shop. Today, the two girls live with her in a safe, loving home and are attending school. Mithu's journey from marginalisation to motherhood, and from struggle to self-sufficiency, is a story of extraordinary courage and quiet revolution.

Moitrisanjog Society, which believes deeply in the power of alternative livelihoods and inclusive development, is honoured to confer the তেজস্বিনী সম্মান ২০২৫ (Tejaswini Samman 2025) to Mithu Das—for her fearless determination, for building a life of dignity against all odds, and for shaping a future filled with hope for two young girls.

Her story reminds us that strength comes in many forms, and that true courage lies in choosing compassion when the world offers none.



Alternative
Livelihood
#P.L.E

Arundan Das (Sumi)



KUSHAN DANCE (KUSHAN NRITYA)

Kushan Dance (Kushan Nritya / Kushan Gaan)

Kushan Dance, also known as Kushan Nritya or Kushan Gaan, is a vibrant traditional folk drama of the Rajbongshi community. Deeply rooted in oral storytelling, this performance art seamlessly blends narrative, music, song, dance, and dialogue to depict episodes from the Krittivasi Ramayana. The tales are often conveyed through the voice of Kush, the son of Lord Rama, making the performance both devotional and dramatic in essence.

A significant cultural tradition in the Cooch Behar region of West Bengal, Kushan Nritya continues to thrive through community participation. One prominent occasion where this art form is celebrated is the Gendar Mela, organized by the Moitrisanjog Society, where local performers keep the legacy alive with their captivating enactments.





“Living on the Edge: Gender, Mental Health & Inclusivity in Contemporary India” (Session II)

Event: Gender Mela 2025

Date & Venue: June 2025, Coochbehar

Session II Overview:

This second session under the broader theme “Living on the Edge” at Gender Mela 2025 explored crucial yet under-discussed intersections of queerness, regional literature, education, and legal justice. Moderated by Sumi Das, the panel featured thought-provoking presentations from Riki Chakraborty, Madhabi Das, and Sourav Das, each bringing sharp insights into the lived realities and structural challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in contemporary India, especially in North Bengal and adjacent rural spaces.



Moderator’s Opening Remarks – Sumi Das:

Opening the session, Sumi Das noted that conversations around inclusion must extend beyond urban centers and mainstream institutions. “Too often, queerness is imagined only in cities, only in English, and only in elite spaces,” she said. “But what about queer lives in Siliguri, in Alipurduar, in Coochbehar? This session asks us to widen our lens—and our responsibility.” She reminded the audience that literature, education, and law are not abstract concepts, but living systems that either empower or exclude. “When these systems fail queer individuals, they don’t just lose opportunity—they lose safety, dignity, and at times, even the right to live.”

Speaker 1: Riki Chakraborty – Queer Presence in North Bengal Literature

Riki Chakraborty, a literary scholar, focused her talk on the subtle yet persistent presence of queer themes in the literature of North Bengal. She pointed to the coded language often used in regional narratives, where queer existence has been expressed through metaphor, subtext, or silence.

“Literature has always known us,” she said, “but it didn’t always name us.”

She examined several regional texts—both mainstream and lesser-known—that hinted at queer relationships, gender nonconformity, and emotional intimacy that defied heteronormative expectations. Riki argued that as queer individuals begin to write, publish, and critique, the region’s literary landscape is slowly shifting.

“Representation is not just visibility,” she explained. “It is a rewriting of who gets to be the protagonist, who gets desire, who gets justice.”

She urged readers, writers, and critics to engage with literature as a site of political imagination and cultural resistance, particularly in regional languages and grassroots platforms.





Speaker 2: Madhabi Das – Inclusive Education for School-Left Community Members

Madhabi Das, a long-time educator and grassroots worker, brought focus to the painful reality of LGBTQ+ youth who are excluded from formal schooling. Framing education as both a right and a lifeline, she described how queer and gender-diverse students are often bullied, misgendered, pathologized, or outright forced to drop out.

“Most school systems in our country are still designed around conformity—not care,” she stated.

She shared field data and firsthand accounts of students who were denied uniforms, restroom access, or simply the respect of being addressed by their chosen names and pronouns. Many of these students, Madhabi revealed, become invisible—trapped between family rejection and institutional neglect.

Her solution was multi-pronged: community-based education centers, emotional and trauma-informed teaching, curriculum reform, and robust teacher sensitization programs.

“Education must be an act of affirmation,” she concluded. “Only then can it be a vehicle of social mobility, healing, and empowerment for queer lives.”



Speaker 3: Sourav Das – Legal Help and Rights Advocacy for the Queer Community

Sourav Das, a legal activist and community advocate, brought the conversation squarely into the realm of law, justice, and protection. Speaking with a grounded and urgent tone, he described the legal vulnerabilities queer and trans individuals face—from police harassment and domestic abuse to housing discrimination and denial of identification documents.

“Even today, queer people are treated as if their rights are optional,” he said. “But the Constitution doesn’t work selectively—it promises dignity, freedom, and protection to all.”

Sourav shared case studies from North Bengal and Northeast India, where queer individuals faced legal violence and systemic apathy. He highlighted the barriers to accessing legal help—language, location, financial constraints, and fear of retaliation. “The law is supposed to protect,” he noted, “but for many queer people, it becomes another site of violence.”

His work focuses on three key areas:

Legal literacy workshops in marginalized communities,

Pro-bono legal support for victims of abuse and discrimination,

Advocacy with local law enforcement and civil bodies to push for accountability and sensitization.

Importantly, he also emphasized the importance of community paralegals—individuals trained from within the LGBTQ+ community to offer first-line legal support and guidance.

“We need queer people in legal rooms—not just as victims, but as experts, educators, and rights claimants,” he concluded powerfully.

Moderator’s Closing Reflections – Sumi Das:

In her concluding remarks, Sumi Das underscored the depth and urgency of the issues raised by the panelists. “We have seen today how queerness is not only about identity—it is about access. Access to words, to learning, to law. And when these systems shut us out, we must remake them.”

She praised the speakers for expanding the framework of inclusivity—from literary archives to street classrooms to courtrooms. “This is what radical care looks like—when we bring literature, education, and justice together in the service of real people.”

Sumi also urged attendees—activists, teachers, writers, and lawyers—to not merely support the queer community from a distance but to walk alongside them, learn from them, and co-create systems that affirm all lives, especially those pushed to the margins.



Sapno Ka Ghar

Sapno Ka Ghar Documentary Screened at Gender Mela to Commemorate Pride Month

As part of the Gender Mela organized by Moitrisanjog Society to commemorate Pride Month, the documentary Sapno Ka Ghar was screened to an engaged and emotional audience.

This powerful documentary narrates the transformative journey of Moitrisanjog in collaboration with community members, focusing on creating a safe and inclusive space for all. Through touching personal stories, the film reflects the organization's commitment to alternative livelihoods, inclusive education, and the empowerment of marginalized gender and sexual identities.

Sapno Ka Ghar—meaning “Home of Dreams”—beautifully portrays the essence of Pride: dignity, visibility, and the right to live freely. The screening served as a reminder of the importance of solidarity, acceptance, and community-led change.

The Gender Mela, with vibrant performances, discussions, and creative expressions, became a true celebration of identity, resilience, and unity.

SENSITIZATION MEETING

at

Kumtir Ghat Gram Panchayat

A sensitization meeting was recently held at Kumtir Ghat Gram Panchayat organized by the Moitrisanjog Society, with active participation from local villagers. The meeting aimed to engage the community in open dialogue about key issues affecting their development and inclusion in society.

One of the central concerns raised was the pervasive sense of social isolation experienced by many community members, especially in this rural area. Although they are physically part of the neighborhood, many expressed feeling emotionally disconnected and unheard. This lack of acceptance was particularly highlighted in discussions around gender identity and the rights of transgender individuals.

Participants shared that while their presence is acknowledged, their voices often remain suppressed, leading to emotional alienation. Moitrisanjog took note of this pressing issue and committed to initiating deeper engagement with various stakeholders—community leaders, local governance, and civil society organizations—to foster inclusive and empathetic dialogue moving forward.

The meeting also touched upon challenges related to accessing government facilities and a lack of awareness about legal rights. Many were unaware that free legal aid is available through the court system. As part of the sensitization process, Moitrisanjog informed the attendees of their legal entitlements and guided them on how to access such services to resolve disputes and protect their rights.

In conclusion, the meeting was a vital step towards building awareness, fostering inclusion, and empowering community members with the knowledge and confidence to claim their rightful place in society. Moitrisanjog Society will continue its efforts to bridge the gap between marginalized voices and mainstream society through ongoing support and advocacy.



The sensitization meeting at Kuntir Ghat Gram Panchayat was held in observance of Pride Month and marked a significant moment in Moitrisanjog Society's ongoing, year-round efforts toward inclusive community development. This gathering also formed part of the organization's annual commemorative event, aimed at recognizing the voices of marginalized groups and reinforcing the commitment to equality and social inclusion. Through this event, Moitrisanjog renewed its dedication to building a more just and connected society, where every individual is acknowledged, supported, and empowered.





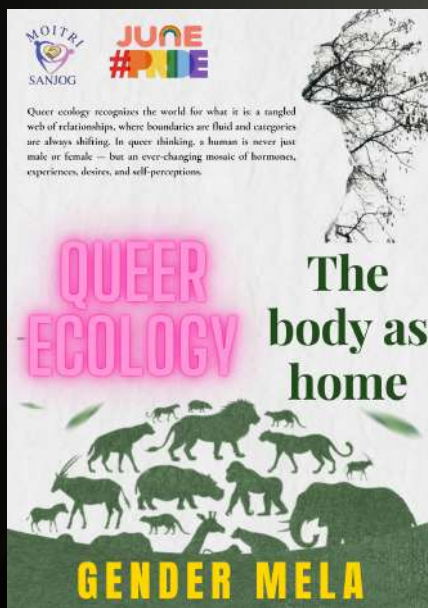
Roots of Pride A Queer Ecology Gathering

As part of our ongoing celebration of Pride Month and in connection with our Gender Mela 2025, Moitrisanjog Society organized a symbolic and meaningful tea plantation ceremony on the morning of 23rd June at Panishala Gram Panchayat, Cooch Behar. This event was not only a celebration of identity and inclusion but also served as the inaugural program of the Gender Mela, extending its spirit beyond traditional venues into the realm of nature and community.

With the active participation of local community members, this gathering reflected our commitment to inclusive development and celebrated the powerful intersection of queer ecology and grassroots community engagement. Queer ecology—an evolving field grounded in queer theory and ecological thinking—challenges heteronormative and anthropocentric views, emphasizing the need to recognize diverse identities in harmony with the natural world.

By integrating the principles of queer ecology into our community development work, we aim to create safe, affirming, and equitable spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals and other marginalized groups. This event not only marked a symbolic step in reclaiming nature as a shared, inclusive space but also reinforced our belief that sustainable development must include voices that are often left unheard.

Moitrisanjog Society remains dedicated to building a society where diversity is celebrated, and nature and community thrive together in mutual respect and solidarity.



Roots of Pride: A Queer Ecology Gathering was a vibrant and symbolic celebration where the act of planting became a powerful expression of identity, unity, and renewal. Organized by Moitrisanjog Society as part of Pride Month and the opening of the Gender Mela, the event brought together community members to connect with the earth and with one another. The simple gesture of placing saplings into soil represented a deeper commitment to nurturing inclusive spaces where all identities can flourish. Inspired by the spirit of queer ecology, the gathering challenged traditional boundaries and celebrated the interconnectedness of nature, culture, and queer existence. It stood as a reminder that every root planted in acceptance helps grow a more just and diverse world.



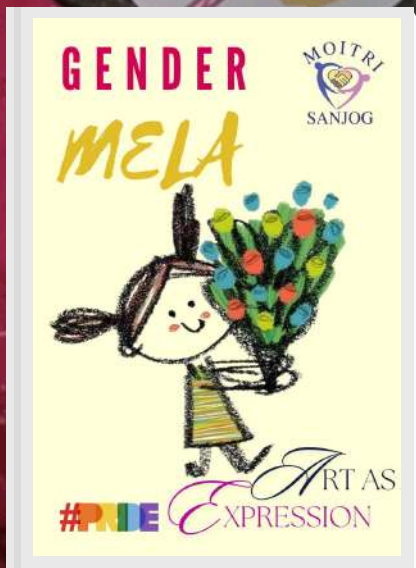
ART AS EXPRESSION



On the evening of the Gender Mela event on 23rd June, as part of the ongoing Pride Month celebrations, Moitrisanjog Society hosted a heartfelt and imaginative session titled "Art as an Expression." This unique event created a safe and joyful space where children from villages and nearby communities came together to express their thoughts, emotions, and dreams through drawing and painting.

The initiative recognized that art can be a powerful tool for communication—especially for young minds who may not yet have the words to articulate their experiences. Through vibrant colors and creative imagery, the children shared their perspectives on identity, inclusion, nature, and community. Some drawings reflected everyday life, while others explored themes of freedom, friendship, and self-acceptance.

"Art as an Expression" not only encouraged creativity but also fostered empathy and understanding among participants. It was a gentle yet impactful reminder that inclusion begins with listening, and sometimes, the most honest voices come from the youngest hearts. By giving children a platform to express themselves freely, Moitrisanjog continues to plant the seeds of a more inclusive, expressive, and compassionate future.





FILM FEST

On the evening of 23rd June, as part of the Gender Mela and the wider Pride Month celebrations, Moitrisanjog Society organized a thoughtful and engaging film screening aimed at raising awareness and fostering dialogue around queer and LGBTQ+ issues within the local community.

This screening served as a powerful medium to introduce complex themes of identity, gender diversity, acceptance, and social justice in a way that was accessible and relatable to villagers. Carefully chosen, the film portrayed real-life stories and challenges faced by queer individuals, highlighting both the struggles of marginalization and the strength of resilience and love. It opened a window for many attendees into experiences they had never encountered before—or perhaps never understood fully.

Following the screening, an open discussion was held where community members shared their reflections, asked questions, and engaged in conversation with Moitrisanjog facilitators. This exchange helped to break down stereotypes, dispel myths, and build empathy around the lived realities of LGBTQ+ individuals.

The event was more than just a screening—it was an invitation to see, to feel, and to understand. By using cinema as a tool for sensitization and awareness, Moitrisanjog took another meaningful step toward bridging gaps, encouraging acceptance, and creating an environment where diverse identities can be seen, heard, and respected.



The Need for Safety, Dignity, and Rights for All

Speaking at the event, Arpita Mallik, Protection Officer (Domestic Violence), District Social Welfare Section, Office of the District Magistrate, Cooch Behar, underlined the urgent need to uphold the rights and safety of every individual, especially those from marginalised communities.

She pointed out that violence—whether domestic, social, or emotional—not only causes immediate harm but often leads to prolonged mental trauma, physical abuse, and social exclusion.

“Violence in any form—be it inside the home or in society—strips individuals of their dignity and isolates them,” she said. “We must work together to ensure that every member of our community feels safe, valued, and protected.”

Her remarks served as a strong call to action, highlighting that true social justice can only be achieved when all individuals are free from fear and treated with respect and compassion.





Pride Month 2025 – Community Rebuilding in Darjeeling

In Collaboration with Gender Mela

Organized by Moitrisanjog Society, Cooch Behar

As part of our Pride Month 2025 celebrations, and in heartfelt collaboration with Gender Mela, Moitrisanjog Society organized a community engagement program in Darjeeling focused on healing, reconnection, and regeneration within the LGBTQIA+ community. This initiative was more than a single event—it was a moment of return, a reclaiming of space, and an invitation to rebuild together after years of disconnection and silence.

Pride Month is a time of visibility, resistance, and joy, and this year, we chose to carry its spirit to the hills of Darjeeling—where queer histories have long existed but have often gone unheard. In the cool air of the mountains, voices warmed each other through sharing, listening, and imagining what could be possible when we come together in solidarity.

Background and Purpose

Darjeeling has a deep and layered queer history, shaped by the courage and care of local individuals and groups such as Mijju, who once led visible and community-rooted organizing. However, over time, these efforts slowly faded as community members migrated in search of livelihoods, institutional support waned, and social marginalization deepened. The absence of structured, long-term support has left many feeling isolated and disconnected, even as their will to survive and support one another remains intact.

Moitrisanjog Society, with its decade-long relationships across North Bengal, has remained connected to individuals from Darjeeling over the years. Our decision to return during Pride Month was both symbolic and strategic—recognizing that now is the time to listen again, rebuild together, and support the community in reclaiming its own narrative, space, and strength.

Community Engagement and Insights

The gathering in Darjeeling, held as part of Gender Mela and our broader Pride Month program, brought together a diverse group of LGBTQIA+ individuals from across the hills. It was an emotionally resonant space—one that blended conversation with celebration, reflection with laughter, and storytelling with strategy.

Through open dialogues, sharing circles, and informal group conversations, community members spoke of the pain of invisibility, the impact of long-term neglect, and the urgent need for connection and care. Yet, what emerged most powerfully was a sense of readiness—a quiet but unwavering belief that it is time to rebuild, to reconnect, and to reclaim the vibrant community that once existed and still lives within the memories and hopes of many.

The program also surfaced a strong desire to form local groups, nurture leadership from within the community, and revive a culture of mutual support that is rooted in lived experience and collective resilience. Despite years of silence, the embers of past organizing are still burning—waiting to be reignited.

Looking Forward: A Year of Reconnection and Rebuilding

Building on the energy and insights of this gathering, Moitrisanjog Society is preparing to initiate a year-long engagement in Darjeeling, with the vision of walking hand-in-hand with the community as it rebuilds itself—on its own terms, at its own pace, and in its own voice. This journey will focus on reviving peer networks, fostering local leadership, creating accessible safe spaces, and ensuring that essential information, services, and support reach those who have remained at the margins.

We understand that real change comes not from outside interventions, but from deeply rooted community processes that are inclusive, accountable, and empathetic. Our role will be to accompany, to support, and to help hold space for new and old connections to take root and grow.

A Call to Collective Action

This Pride Month initiative would not have been possible without the solidarity and spirit of collaboration shared with Gender Mela and our extended networks of allies. As we look ahead, we invite all those who care about justice, equity, and community-led transformation to walk with us. Whether you are a community member, an ally, an organization, or someone who simply believes in the power of inclusive development—we welcome your voice, your energy, and your support.

Let us continue to turn Pride into practice. Let us keep building spaces where everyone—regardless of gender identity, sexuality, or background—can live with dignity, safety, and pride.

In solidarity and hope,

Sumi Das

On behalf of Moitrisanjog Society

Cooch Behar, West Bengal



The Gender Mela, organized by Moitrisanjog Society, became a vibrant platform where community members proudly showcased their handmade crafts as part of an alternative livelihood initiative. With sales reaching an encouraging ten thousand rupees, the event not only celebrated creativity and resilience but also sparked hope and motivation among others to join future endeavors and pursue economic independence with confidence.

Acknowledgement

With deep gratitude and immense pride, we thank each and every person who made Gender Mela 2025 a reality.

To Mariwala Health Initiative and Avaagein Foundation—thank you for your steadfast support and belief in our vision. Your commitment to mental health justice, community resilience, and queer and trans liberation has been a pillar of strength in shaping this Mela. Your generosity has helped us create a space where healing, joy, and solidarity can thrive.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to every stakeholder, collaborator, and well-wisher who walked with us on this journey—from concept to celebration. Your time, trust, resources, and voices have been essential in nurturing this powerful space of connection and courage.

To our community members, who brought their stories, art, resistance, and love—this Mela belongs to you. Thank you for showing up with open hearts, for daring to be seen, and for holding each other with care. Your presence is the soul of this gathering.

To our artists, performers, facilitators, volunteers, vendors, local allies, and support teams—thank you for your labour, passion, and generosity of spirit. You have helped create an experience that reflects the brilliance and diversity of queer and trans lives in North Bengal and beyond.

May the spirit of Gender Mela 2025 live on in our relationships, our organising, and our dreams for a future rooted in justice, joy, and collective liberation.

In solidarity and love,
Moitrisanjog Society
Coochbehar, June 2025

News

