

# ASHOK ROW KAVI

b. June 1, 1947

## INDIAN GAY PIONEER AND JOURNALIST

**Ashok Row Kavi is a journalist and the first gay man in India to speak publicly about his sexuality.**

*“Coming out was a natural defense mechanism.”*

Ashok Row Kavi is an Indian LGBT rights activist and journalist. The first gay man to ever talk publicly about his sexuality in a country where homosexuality is still illegal, he is considered one of the most influential gay men in India. The Pink Pages lists him among the most influential LGBT people in the world.

“When you come out in India, gay identity becomes your primary identity,” Kavi said. “If you come out as an openly homosexual man and refuse to get married to a woman, then your homosexual identity becomes a form of rebellion and attracts a great deal of attention. All the other identities—being a good journalist, for instance—become backups.”

Born in Mumbai, Kavi was educated at India’s most elite schools, eventually graduating with honors in chemistry from the University of Bombay. As a young man, he had trouble coming to terms with his sexuality and trained as a Hindu monk. After a senior monk encouraged him to explore his sexuality, he went on to study at the International School of Journalism in Berlin. He became well known for his work for Malayala Manorama, India’s largest newspaper.

In 1971 Kavi started Debonair, an Indian men’s magazine modeled after Playboy, and in 1990 he founded Bombay Dost, India’s first and only gay magazine.

Kavi’s reporting for leading publications led him to cover the AIDS crisis. He became a representative at the International AIDS Conference in Amsterdam and also served as chairman of the Second International Congress on AIDS. In 1994 he founded Humsafar Trust, an LGBT service organization and drop-in center in Mumbai that specializes in outreach and educates people about HIV/AIDS and political issues. It also provides a rare place for LGBT people to meet and socialize.

In 1998 Kavi designed questionnaires for the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies at the University of California at San Francisco that have been used to help track the disease and to educate young gay men about risk.

After retiring from journalism, Kavi organized the first Indian conference about gay men and the first LGBT conference in Mumbai.

Kavi is an active member of Gay Bombay, the Mumbai District AIDS Control Society and the National AIDS Control Organization. He is also a visiting faculty member of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and the International Institute of Population Studies.



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