

Govandi Arts Festival

Rubayat Ahmed

Deepa Balsavar

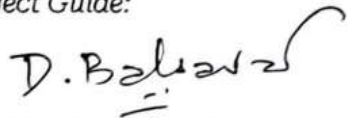
DES 2023



Approval Sheet

This Design Exploration Seminar (DES) Project titled
'Govandi Arts Festival' by Rubayat Ahmed is approved for
partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Masters of Design in Communication Design.

Project Guide:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Balsavar', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Prof. Deepa Balsavar

Introduction

There's nothing that sets my heart ablaze like the art of capturing videos and bringing them to life through meticulous editing. The sheer joy and satisfaction that comes with weaving together individual stories to create an emotionally fulfilling narrative is a feeling beyond compare. It was this passion for storytelling that led me to volunteer for the GAF in the first place.

When I shared my passion with Deepa ma'am and told her about my desire to work on such domain, she immediately agreed that GAF would be the perfect place for me. I was beyond relieved to have found a place where I could finally do what I love, especially since it wasn't something I could do in my usual course.



As I began my work as a visual documenter, my excitement grew with each passing day. However, what I experienced during my time at GAF went beyond my wildest dreams. I was fortunate enough to witness the transformative power of the festival on the people of Govandi, specially children and it changed me in ways I could never have imagined. During the two months that I spent with the indulgent people of Govandi, I felt like I had become part of their family. Despite living in a densely populated urban settlement and struggling to get by in their 200sq ft homes, their dreams and joy for life were truly remarkable.

What began as a simple project brief, turned into a journey filled with heartfelt connections and unforgettable experiences. GAF gave me the opportunity to witness the beauty and resilience of the true human spirit, and for that, I will always be grateful.

Govandi as a neighborhood

One of the most notable urban settlements in Mumbai, Govandi is located in the heart of the city. This densely populated area was once home to a large number of slums, but now many of those slum dwellers have been resettled into high-rise buildings.

Unfortunately, the poorly planned architecture of these buildings has resulted in a lack of sunlight reaching the lower floors, creating a somewhat gloomy environment for those living there. Additionally, the area also suffers from poor drainage systems, which can lead to flooding during the monsoon season.

Despite these challenges, the people who live in this urban settlement manage to maintain a sense of community and harmony. Most of the residents are Muslim, but people from all communities live together peacefully. The busy streets are lined with a variety of shops, and children can often be seen running around and playing in the streets.

Despite the density of the population, everyone seems to know each other, and the sense of community is strong. Despite being in the middle of a big city, this urban settlement often feels like a village, with a tight-knit community and a strong sense of belonging. Despite the challenges faced by those living there, the resilience and strength of this community is truly inspiring.





People of Govandi

Parveen Aapa

My heart swells with pride as I speak of Parveen Apaa, a remarkable woman who has witnessed the dark, twisted underbelly of Bombay during the 90's, struggling each day in the footpaths for a living and now in last decade emerged as a beacon of hope for the thousands of downtrodden souls residing in Natwar Parekh Compound. Her generous spirit and unwavering determination to uplift her community have earned her the nickname of Parveen Apaa. Whenever she speaks, she fills the room with an incredible positive energy that can move even the hardest of hearts.

Despite her tough exterior, I discovered that she's also one of the most caring and loving people I've ever met. Every time we crossed paths, she would ask about my well-being and whether I had eaten. One of my fondest memories was when she invited us over to her home for a meal of delicious biriyani. We all sat together like one big family and enjoyed the mouth-watering biriyani, prepared by her maid. It was an experience I'll never forget.



Parveen Apaa is held in such high esteem that you can see the respect in the eyes of every child and elders in the community. I've witnessed Sana, Tayyaba, and Affan, all of them at the community library, cower in fear if they ever think they've done something wrong in her presence. Parveen Apaa is always present, overseeing the progress of events and providing help wherever necessary. One time, when we were trying to make sticky dough from flour to paste posters, nobody knew how to do it. Parveen Apaa quickly jumped in, instructing and scolding us for how kids these days are too preoccupied with their mobile phones. She even shared how she learned to make it as a child, earning 1 or 2 rupees by pasting posters of political rallies.

Her life has been filled with experiences that have shaped her into the wise and powerful personality that she is today. Through her struggles for survival and fight for rights, she has gained a wealth of knowledge that allows her to confidently stand in front of thousands of people and deliver speeches that leave a lasting impact. As someone who prides themselves on their identity, I sometimes find myself hesitant to express it in fear of judgment from others. But after meeting Parveen Apaa, I was ashamed of my own apprehensions. She proudly embraces her roots in Govandi, and firmly believes that even in places where people lack basic facilities, talent can thrive and bring about change. Everywhere she goes, she speaks with pride in Hindi, stating that if your words carry weight and value, the listener will make the effort to understand, and there's no need to adapt to anyone else's preferences.



Kush Kumar

On my first visit to Kitab Mahal, the community library, I noticed a boy with a phone recording videos of the clay workshop. I was intrigued when I learned that he was a filmmaking mentee working on a documentary about the Kitab Mahal. When I spoke with him, I was surprised that a 13-year-old boy knows most of the fundamentals of cinematography despite growing up in a home without television and taking on such a difficult task of making a documentary at his age. Later on, as we progressed, I formed a strong bond with Kush, which led to one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life when I had to edit his film at the last minute before screening. It was very hectic for the mentors at the time to edit his film as he kept filming until the last possible moment. On the third day of the festival, Bhawna approached me and requested that I edit his film. Kush and I sat down together for a few hours to discuss his vision for the film, and I worked tirelessly throughout the night to complete the editing. I showed Kush the final product before the screening, and his beaming smile and expression of satisfaction were the most rewarding and valuable recognition I had received thus far. After that experience, Kush and I became good friends, and he implored me to help him become the greatest filmmaker in the world.



Moeen Bhai

When I met Moeen, I immediately felt a sense of kinship with him. It turned out that we both shared a passion for shooting videos with our cameras. It didn't take long for me to realize that he was a renowned figure in Govandi, and everyone affectionately called him "Moeen Bhai". It was only later that I discovered that this was the same person who had ignited the spark of change in Govandi with his powerful rap song, 'Haq se Govandi'. Even this song had served as a catalyst for the community design agency to think of such big platform and promote the talents of this vibrant locality.

GAF - the struggle behind

Organizing a community-led art festival such as GAF is no easy feat. It involves tireless efforts and dedication from every member involved, including the children and their parents, mentors, and artists who work together for six months in various fields of arts such as rap, theatre, public art etc. Despite all the hurdles, the result of this collective effort was breathtaking, showcasing the power of art to connect, inspire, and uplift people in the true sense. When the festival finally arrived, and the people from all over the colony came together to celebrate their children's creativity, all the hard work paid off. The vibrant colors of the photographs and paintings, the pulsating beats of the rap songs, and the contagious energy are testaments to the transformative power of art, reminding us that when we work together towards a shared goal, we can achieve anything.



Micro-stories

The living Canvas

The projection mapping of the animated film 'Afsana' on the two buildings of the colony had a magical impact on everyone. The vast canvas was illuminated with stories gathered from the colony's residents and visual elements crafted by children, seamlessly stitched together to form a film that felt uniquely their own. The idea was so beautiful that people from all corners of the colony gazed upward, captivated by its beauty. However, it wasn't until I visited the site of the projection that I truly appreciated its impact. I spoke with the elderly woman who's balcony was being used for the projection, and she told me she had watched the projection every day since it began.



The joy of light

In my opinion, the purpose of the festival achieved a significant milestone through the lamp-lighters parade. I was fortunate enough to witness this magical rally, where children proudly held the lamps they had prepared themselves and marched through their neighborhood singing songs and reciting praises for Govandi. With community volunteers providing security, it was a strong message to all those on the streets that day to recognize Govandi as a place where talent and good things can also happen. The sight of children jumping to the beats of the band and chanting 'Jai Govandi' was so transformative to me. Witnessing how a festival could instill such positive energy in these kids to express themselves so openly in public was truly remarkable.



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