

Report of the small grant from INFOSEM

Yaariyan (Friendships)

**The Young LGBT raising awareness on Sexual minorities and
gearing towards Queer Azaadi Mumbai 2013**

Submitted by

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Project Report

Yaariyan : The Young LGBT raising awareness on sexual minorities and gearing towards Queer Azaadi Mumbai 2013

About Yaariyan

Yaariyan is a Humsafar Trust Youth Initiative that was initiated to understand current trends and behavior of LGBT youth. The Yaariyan Core Team currently comprises a group of ten LGBT-identified youth between the ages of 18 and 28 years. The group was set up following meetings with the youth members and sharing of ideologies; the first meeting of all members took place in December 2010. The group chose the name Yaariyan as the name symbolized community bonding and friendship. Furthermore, the name commemorated the first gay pride walk—also named Yaariyan—that took place in Kolkotta in 1999.

Yaariyan has been initiated by The Humsafar Trust to HEAR VOICES of the LGBT youth and to facilitate the LGBT youths' access to services such as a safe space for discussions, healthcare, mental health, and legal rights. Yaariyan also aims to serve as a platform to understand current trends and behavior of LGBT youth.

The Yaariyan Core Team communicates and plans activities mainly over a Facebook Group created exclusively for the core team. Furthermore, the group meets from time to time. Youth members of Yaariyan are technology savvy and believe in using technology to the best of its ability to run the group efficiently. All ten members are full-time employees in their respective vocations, and their contribution to Yaariyan is entirely voluntary. The Yaariyan Core team members actively recruits members into the team based on need or resignation of a core team member.

Queer Azaadi Mumbai

'Queer' stands for all LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) as well as for Hijra, Kothi, Panthi individuals. This is a sexual minority group not accepted by Indian society that recognizes only two genders and considers only heterosexual relationships valid. Queer Azaadi March is an expression, a voice, a celebration and a platform to ask for equal rights of these individuals conducted in form of an annual parade in Mumbai

Queer Azaadi Mumbai is a community initiative in Mumbai and the entire fund raising is done through community initiatives. 'Yaariyan' did a series of activities and these activities were used to raise awareness about LGBT issues in India that formed a prelude to the main walk and most importantly funds were raised that would be used to support QAM Pride Walk 2013.

Project Goal: Innovative and a creative model that will enhance the accessibility, appropriateness, effectiveness of LGBT rights.

Objectives of the project were defined as given below

Undertake advocacy with mainstream society on discrimination against sexual Minorities.

- Raise awareness on LGBT issues among mainstream populations, media and other stakeholders
- Raise funds for Queer Azaadi Mumbai March 2013 and act as a prelude to the pride walk.

Target populations will include

- Media
- Community
- Mainstream populations

Yaariyan undertook following activities to achieve the desired objectives

Yaariyan's Pink Mumbai Darshan: Fundraiser for QAM

Yaariyan's Pink Mumbai Darshan a.k.a Gulaabi Yatra (journey in pink), was a fundraiser for QAM i.e. Queer Azaadi March, the body governing the pride activities of the city. It was also an effort to highlight the landmark queer spaces which have been important parts of either the queer movement in the city or important social spaces, including cruising areas.

A lot of these spaces are either lost to the general queer community or most are unaware of its existence or history. This event was an attempt to inform the youth involved with the queer movement today of these spaces and the history behind their existence.

The event began at The Humsafar Trust DIC at Vakola where the participants gathered. The Yaariyan team invited the guests with mocktails and finger food as they settled in and waited for the speakers to arrive. The speakers included; Ashok Row Kavi, one of the founders of The Humsafar Trust also dubbed as the pioneer of the gay rights movement in India, Sridhar Rangayan, celebrated director of queer films and documentaries and festival director of KASHISH- Mumbai's International Queer Film Festival and Pallav Patankar, Director of HIV programs at The Humsafar Trust.

The speakers gave a small brief about the history of the queer community in Mumbai before the advent of social media and networking online and recounted personal anecdotes from their lives that involved such queer spaces. They also gave the participants brief introductions of the places that they would be visiting in the course of the next few hours.

Following this discussions, the participants boarded the bus led by Ashok Row Kavi and Sridhar Rangayan. A contribution of Rs. 200/- was collected from each participant and they were informed that this money raised would be donated by Yaariyan to the QAM fund. A total of 51 participants registered for the event and helped Yaariyan raise Rs. 10,200/- to be donated to QAM.

The tour made its first stop at Vakola Bridge, where Sridhar Rangayan recounted a personal story of having found his boyfriend of 18 years while cruising at the very spot. Then tour bus then passed through Bandra station which was earlier known as Bandra Haveli and would turn into a cruising and social space for many gay men every evening. Gay men would meet their friends here to socialize and some of the earlier underground gay gatherings and parties would sell their tickets here to gay men.

The next stop was Maheshwari garden which till date is a social space for queer people in the city and on every Sunday evening gay men from all over the city gather at the park to socialize. The tour group held a 1 minute silence at the garden to pay respect to all those who have lost lives in struggle with HIV and hate crimes during the earlier years.

From here the tour moved on to Girgaum Beach where Ashok Row Kavi spoke of how a lot of gay men would get harassed by the police and other charlatans because of an anti sodomy law that existed in the constitution deeming gay sex as immoral and illegal. He explained this was also an important spot in queer history as this is also where a lot of gay men stood up against the cops and declared their sexualities and refused to be bullied; in effect planting seeds of for the legal battles that ensued in the later years which led to the law finally being read down in the high court 3 years ago.

The tour then moved onto a landmark that can be dubbed as the place where the queer movement began. The Gokul Bar and The Walls were spaces a lot of gay men would convene and socialize. The Walls was a strip adjoining the sea in front of the Taj Mahal Hotel in

Mumbai where a lot of cruising took place and the bar by proximity to this space became a space where they met and socialized.

Incidentally, Gokul was closed off to the queer community in the 90s as the management caught whiff of the queer patrons and refused to serve them. Ashok Row Kavi stood in front of Gokul and spoke of how he was denied entry to the bar after which the community boycotted the bar and its management and he would be reclaiming his right to enter the bar after over a decade. And as he entered, the owner of bar recognized him and welcomed him back to the bar.

The participants and Yaariyan toasted this little victory at Gokul, a metaphoric display of the changing times and people's increasing tolerance to queer issues.

Yaariyan's Q-Fete – Fundraiser for QAM

The Q-Fete (Queer Fete) also dubbed 'GulaabiMela' was an indoor fun fair and party organized by Yaariyan to raise funds for QAM. It was also organized in an effort to showcase businesses that are either queer-friendly or run by queer individuals themselves. It was also a novel idea as most of the social events in the city are either parties or indoor meets in the organiser's home.

Q-Fete broke all these conventions and amalgamated the idea of a fun fair with that of a party all under the same banner. The Q-Fete received 13 stall registrations from a diverse host of businesses that included food, drinks, pride clothing, mobile accessories, tarot and professional counseling services among others. These stalls were charged a fee for the stall which was towards the QAM fund, thus raising an initial amount of Rs. 12,500/- before the actual event.

The venue booked for the event was a lounge space in Juhu, Mumbai. The event was to run for a total of 7 hours which were broken down into several smaller events. The event began at 2 pm as the food stalls were set up. Guests were charged an entry of Rs. 30/- towards the QAM fund and were offered a red-ribbon as a sign of solidarity towards those living with HIV and to raise awareness towards the cause.

At 4.30 pm, an hour long free workshop on street Jazz was organized with guest performers Bhumika Parekh and AmeyaHemmady. Nearly half of the attendees joined the workshop and learnt the basics of the street Jazz dance style.

The next event was a mini musical concert starting at 5.30 where guest performers Kriss Bass, Zia and Resil performed for the audience. Volunteers from the audience also came up for impromptu performances.

During the course of the musical concert the audience was also introduced to the ongoing rehearsals for the Queer flashmob and the protest against Uganda's Kill-The-Gays bill happening in the coming week.

After 6.30 the final event which was an early evening party began. The floor was opened up to the guests to dance as the DJ began playing for the crowd. The party lasted till the event ended at 9 pm, during which the stalls were still open for the guests.

After the event ended, a tally of the entire collection from the event was done for security reasons. The money raised from registration and donations was counted to a total of Rs. 20, 270/- bringing the total funds raised from the event to Rs. 32, 277/-

Dancing Queens presented by Yaariyan : Fundraiser for QAM

Dancing Queens, a group of sexual minorities brings you the unique two hours entertainment on bollywood dance numbers. The objective of the Dancing Queen is to generate a platform of community talent that could build the bridge to reduce discrimination towards sexual minorities.

Dancing queens is making an effort to generate funding for social causes and the employment for needy transgender and hijra community members from last seven years. So far Dancing queens have done series of event to raise funding for social cause like Queer Azaadi March, raising funds for the transgender hijra community living and affected with HIV/AIDS. The objective of the Dancing Queens is to entertain people irrespective of their gender and sexual preferences and raise the income generation opportunities for the transgender and hijra community.

Dancing Queens as a brand is been associated with Queer Azaadi March from last three years. Though the magnitude of shows hasn't been large scale in its first venture itself it raised almost 30000 rupees for the Queer Azaadi March in three hours. The shows have generated some serious money for the social initiatives. However, it has also given huge empowerment for the community people to face their issues around sexuality and gender. Every year this show was attended by community people as well as general community. Show has given an inspiration to create a documentary to the media student. Mid Day and Times of India covered a full page article on this initiative. Over the period of time Dancing Queens have been evolved as a professional group.

Dancing Queens conducted a show called "Rhythm of India" in collaboration with Yariyaan , an initiative which is aiming to generate the community mobilization and support for the young LGBTK members. The event was performed by 18 young sexual minority members and was attended by around 100 communities, non community members and the families of sexual minority. The event potentially attempted to reduce the stigma and discrimination towards sexual minorities and address the crucial issue around the acceptance of the sexual minority children from their parents.

To demonstrate the positive role modeling Mrs. Mangala Aher, mother of Abhina Aher danced together with the sexual minorities. Anam Prem, NGO who are engaged in various social empowerment initiatives also showed their support for the event with their presence. The event was covered by mainstream print media "Hindustan Times" on page 3. The event was widely appreciated by the community audience and the people who could not attend the event personally called to show the support for the initiative.

The entire event was funded by UNDP in collaboration with The Humsafar Trust. The event raised Rs. 14,100/- for the Queer Azaadi Maarch initiative in January 2013.

Yaariyan- A Youth Flash Mob

Following the success of the youth flash mob at QAM 2012, Yaariyan planned to organize a flash mob at the end of the year as a harbinger for the pride week events in 2013. The mob comprised of 50 LGBT youth and their supporters who were going to perform outside Dadar Railway Station (Central) on Saturday 29th December 2012.

However owing to the passing away of the Nirbhaya /Damini the young Delhi girl who was gang raped in a DTC bus on 29th January 2012, we as LGBT community called off the flashmob. The incident has been a national shame and we did not wish to hold a flash mob (though the police department was supportive) on such a shameful day.

All payments for the flashmob have been done and we are seeking new date from Mumbai Municipal Corporation and Dadar Police Station and will conduct the same in January 2013 before the pride walk on 2nd February 2013.

Yaariyan Q-lick International Photography Event: This was an online event that aimed to capture the “queer” element from across the globe. Participants were invited to send up to five photographs with highlighting a queer element from their day to day lives.

Yaariyan promoted the event through various channels, online and offline to invite entries for the contest. This phase of the contest was open for close to a month to maximise visibility and reaching a greater audience. Once the entries were sealed, they were sent to a panel of 3 judges from the field of photography, art and media to be judged. All entries were coded to maintain fairness to all entrants.

Once the judges handed in their marksheets a list of top 18 pictures was made and these were additionally uploaded to the Yaariyan FaceBook page subjected to vote to pick another winner of most popular contest entry by online vote. Once this voting period ended all the winners, i.e. the top 3 prizes and most popular entry, were intimated by email. Following which a gift hamper was sent out to all winners by courier.

The winner of the first prize was awarded a certificate, a pride t-shirt and assorted badges, a DVD of queer Indian short films, an anthology of Indian Queer Short stories titled ‘Out’ and a lens cleaning kit, the 2nd and 3rd prizes also received a similar hamper without one item from the previous hamper. The entries will now be showcased at an exhibition during the pride week.

Report compiled by Kamlesh Gade and Vivek Anand