APPLIED INSIGHTS

"DANDIA, LIGHTS, MUSIC... OR MANAGEMENT?"

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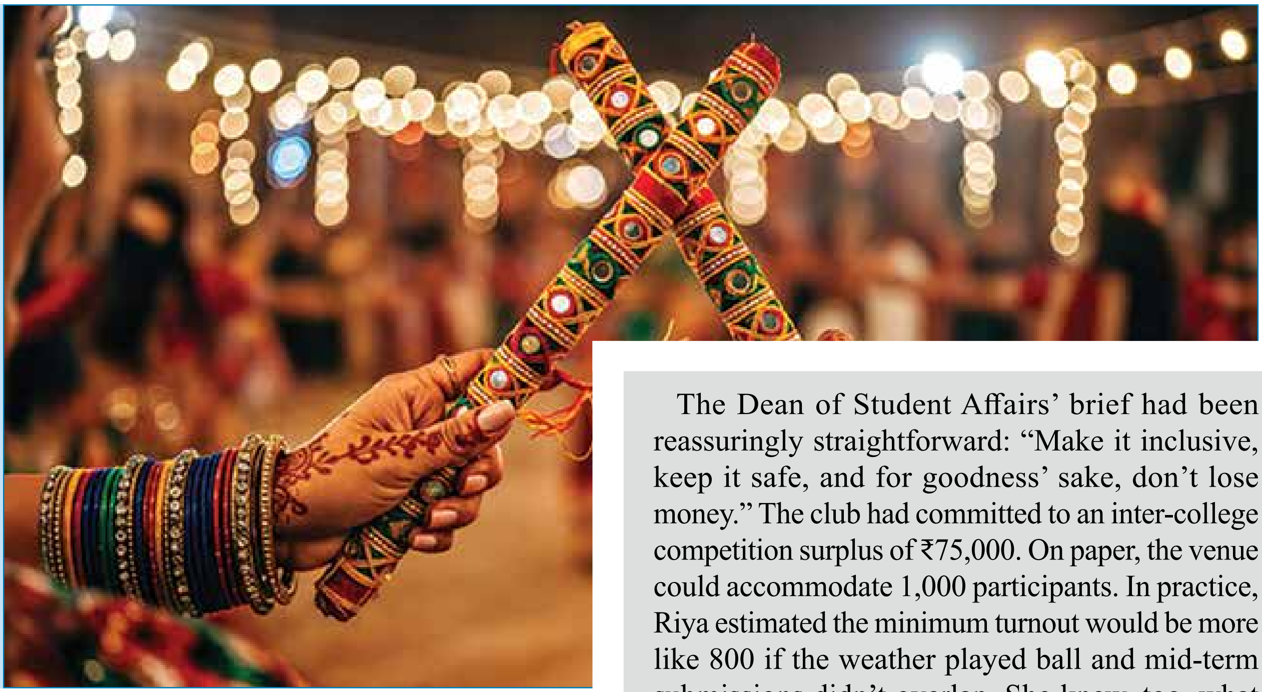

The University music room still had a lingering scent of rangoli colors and new marigolds when Riya Sharma unlocked it at 7:05 a.m. She was the president of the Rhythm & Roots Club—one week from the largest student-organized celebration of the year: Dandiya Night. Her phone vibrated with messages: a DJ requesting a last-minute confirmation, an alumnus inquiring if couple passes could be transferred, and a volunteer bewildered as to how "VIP" would differ from "On-spot" tickets at the gate. Riya stood by the window, gazing at the sports complex where the stage would emerge in a few days' time. She had been warned, more than once, that cultural events don't require spreadsheets. She wasn't certain she was on board.

The Dean of Student Affairs' brief had been reassuringly straightforward: "Make it inclusive, keep it safe, and for goodness' sake, don't lose money." The club had committed to an inter-college competition surplus of ₹75,000. On paper, the venue could accommodate 1,000 participants. In practice, Riya estimated the minimum turnout would be more like 800 if the weather played ball and mid-term submissions didn't overlap. She knew, too, what the evening was like when it functioned: the first cut, lights coordinated to the dhol rhythm, circles serving to form of themselves, and that moment when you cease to count heads because the energy includes itself.

Sponsors had materialized this year. Weeks of pitch decks and courteous follow-ups later, she had ₹1,50,000 of sponsorship secured—five sponsors at ₹30,000 each, in food, wellness, and a local clothing brand which was a big fan of garba reels. The club was also organizing a small ancillary event—a photo-booth—at ₹50 per head, hoping memories paid for music.

Pricing, nonetheless, was not negotiable with the student council until she explained it. The ticket hierarchy had been set to keep the event affordable while establishing some premium anchors: Early Bird at ₹299, Regular Student at ₹349, Alumni/General at ₹449, Couple Pass at ₹699 for two entries, VIP at ₹599 with a snacks add-on, and On-spot at ₹499 for late decision-makers. Group orders introduced a 10% group discount for five or more, but only for Regular and Alumni levels, in line with students' inclusivity and alumni goodwill. Riya's projection estimated that 30% of Regular purchasers and 20% of Alumni purchasers would claim the group discount. The ticketing platform would charge a 2% fee off gross collections—negligible until you multiplied it by categories.

Vendors were consistent on the basics: The figure in Riya's spreadsheet resembled a celebration of figures—some consistent, others shaking with each additional dancer. The sports complex outside alone would cost ₹70,000, and wristbands and print material ₹6,400. Stage and trussing was an additional ₹10,000, and the DJ and the emcee had a price tag of ₹40,000. Professional sound would cost ₹50,000, but arrangements for refreshments and guest drinking water would come to around ₹9,600. Décor and the photo stand totaled ₹20,000, and permissions and licenses would cost ₹15,000. Security arrangements were at ₹25,000, and dandiya sticks for the crowd would cost ₹20,000. Lighting and effects were at ₹25,000, and extra housekeeping for the evening was at ₹6,400. Marketing would cost ₹18,000, and barricading with queue lanes another ₹12,000. Public liability insurance was ₹10,000, photography and videography ₹12,000, and the medical booth with ambulance ₹8,000. The base housekeeping staff would require ₹12,000, and snacks for VIP guests were estimated at ₹3,000. When Riya gazed at the overall total, she could see a combination of commitments—some fixed like the stage truss, others growing with each ticket sold. Her test was to disentangle them prior to determining if the numbers could indeed dance on command.

Her pricing committee had proposed a base mix to inform marketing and track caps: 300 Early Birds, 250 Regular, 50 Alumni, 50 Couple Passes (admitting 100 people), 50 VIP, and 50 On-spot. With good weather, that would be 800 in the door. The question wasn't whether the event would break even; it was whether, after music and lights and memories, the club would have enough to send the dance team to nationals.

Riya went over her initial approximations. Ticket sales from each category, along with sponsorship obligations and adjunct revenue from the photo booth, guaranteed a bountiful flow if attendance equaled projections. On the expense side of the ledger, the combination of infrastructure, experience factors, and participant-sourced provisions built a cost structure that required close scrutiny. The question was whether those numbers would maintain their rhythm once the music began—or if a slip in pricing or attendance could turn the surplus goal into a shortfall.

There was a final decision, and it wasn't a numbers-only one. A professional event management company had approached Riya with the offer to do all the heavy lifting—staging, sound, lights, décor, security, even the barricades—for one bundled fee. It offered polish and fewer late nights, but at a cost that would drive total spending nearly to the top of the revenue limit. The other option was to maintain it all in-house, retain the student-led culture, and keep a comfortable financial buffer—along with the risk that one vendor mistake or a freak rainstorm would transform the night into pandemonium. Riya understood that this decision wasn't just about spreadsheets; it was about control, confidence, and what kind of narrative the campus would report to the world the next morning.

Riya stepped back to consider the safety net. She needed to know how far the event could fall before it fell below its potential. Was there sufficient buffer between what people were predicted to show up and where expenses would devour income? The reply would be based on how much each participant actually added once basics were covered, and the way sponsorships buffered the fixed expense. If her assumptions proved correct, the buffer seemed wide enough to breathe —but she realized that confidence based on estimates could be wiped out by one miscalculation in pricing or attendance.

The cultural contest overshadowed Excel. Student Early Bird tickets made students feel heard; VIPs treated sponsors like they mattered. Group discounts encouraged circles to form even before the first song. The luxury ladder contributed to affording safety. Outsourcing would ensure a perfect evening, but what if the soul of the event were in front of students taping cable runs and setting up water dispensers themselves?

That night, Riya stood on the perimeter of the sports complex with two volunteers, marking the route from the entrance gate to the stage. The wind was soft, and the floodlights cast long shadows across the lawn. She imagined the first ring of dancers and the smiles that would radiate to the back row. She also imagined the ledger the following morning—whether the green would be sufficient to qualify the team for nationals. The message to the Dean sat as a draft on her phone, cursor flashing at the last line: "Approve in-house plan with existing pricing and caps; hold outsourcing as a contingency if weather or vendor reliability worsens this week." She looked at the sentence, then at the field, and wondered if Dandiya Night could bear both—cushion and culture—on the same beat. Before she was able to press send, Riya knew her decision had to be based on more than gut feeling—she needed to balance the figures, calculate in-house and outsourcing options, and determine the degree of maneuvering space available between break-even and desired surplus.

Decision Point: Riya needs to decide, in forty-eight hours, (1) whether to execute in-house or outsource and (2) whether to keep the existing price ladder and caps or modify them to provide greater inclusiveness or headroom. Her decision will determine not just the evening but the year's prospects for University's cultural teams. MA