

VOLUME 7

## TANA BANA

**Newsletter of Population First** 

### From the Editor's Desk

Healthcare services and their access in remote parts of India are not only inadequate but are surrounded by many myths and half-truths. We speak to Dr. Shantanu Abhyankar, a gynecologist with extensive experience in working in remote areas of Maharashtra to get an insight into what are the factors that impact the consumption of such services.

AMCHI has been working in select villages in the Thane district to bring health awareness as well as economic empowerment of women and girls in the region. We 'Spotlight' some case studies of their stellar work.

Book Corner this issue reviews Interrogating Motherhood by Jasodhara Bagchi, a part of the Theorizing Feminism Series edited by Maithreyi Krishnaraj.

Reel Corner features a review of Porgai (Pride), a film that captures the struggle of the Lambadi artisans who at a time when everyone marches towards radical development, are showing courage in walking the opposite way aiming for an organic way of livelihood.

We have just concluded the 12th edition of Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, the Regional edition at Hyderabad. It was after a break of two years that we were back as an on-ground event, and the excitement was palpable! Happenings captures the highlights of the event and of the second workshop on gender-sensitive reporting, this time for media from Odisha.

## What's Inside

From the editor's desk
PAGE 01

Interview of the month
PAGE 02

Spotlight PAGE 05

Book Corner PAGE 07

Reel World

Happening PAGE 09



### Interview of the Month:

## Access to healthcare and women's well-being in remote areas

Dr. Shantanu Abhyankar is a gynecologist, translator, blogger, orator, and avid reader. He works with women populations from remote areas of Maharashtra. In this conversation, we look at various sociocultural factors that impede access to quality healthcare in remote areas. His experiences can be read at https://shantanuabhyankar.blogspot.com/



All views expressed here are those of the interviewee and should not be attributed to Tana Bana

## Q. What role does access to healthcare for women play, especially in remote and rural parts of India?

World Health Organization says that quality accessible healthcare is a basic right of every person. The services should be acceptable, affordable, sustainable, and safe. In Maharashtra, the primary health centers are spread far and wide. And through the network of Asha workers, health services are now reaching the doorstep of most needy patients.

However, a majority of the patients though, continue to visit private practitioners who follow traditional and complementary systems of medicine. Though well-meaning, these practitioners are inadequately trained and do not have enough exposure to women's health.

While Government services are better, they are marred by a lack of concern, care, and compassion, and are riddled with bribery and nepotism. But certain concepts such as Syndromic management, that the government has brought in are very useful.

Syndromic management involves making clinical decisions based on a patient's symptoms and signs. A flow- chart (algorithms or decision trees) is used for the common symptoms and signs of the STD syndrome, such as a genital ulcer or vaginal discharge. Once mapped, decisions about disease management are put in place. This approach is particularly beneficial in situations where no laboratory services are available, which is common in these areas.

Doctors and nurses are taught to pick up certain clues, certain symptoms, which are specific to certain conditions; antibiotics and other drugs are suggested to address the condition.



Photographs in this interview are courtesy indiaspends.com



### **Interview of the Month:**

## Q. What has been your experience regarding timely intervention and access to these services?

A good example would be to think of a pregnant woman who is in some remote part of India. Any prevention strategy has five levels of interventions: health promotion, specific protection, early diagnosis and treatment, disability limitation, and rehabilitation. She needs nutrition and a good diet. There are a lot of government schemes that promote a good diet and provide an allowance for it. This is health promotion.

Specific protection as far as a pregnant woman is concerned is the shot of tetanus that she receives. We have a reduced incidence of tetanus toxin and maternal deaths because of tetanus shots. Even neonatal deaths, because of tetanus are now a rarity. Also, another would specific protection be the wide distribution of iron tablets by the Government of India. These tablets not only alleviate hemoglobin levels but also address immunity issues and pregnancy induces hypertension and reduce the incidence of preterm delivery and low-birth weight among other things. However, most of the time these tablets are not consumed as possibly people don't value them because they are free.

Coming to the early diagnosis and treatment, it is said that a woman should be examined at least ten times during these nine months, some say five times. At each visit, her blood pressure, urine albumin, hemoglobin, and sugar examination should be recorded so that early detection of pregnancy-induced hypertension, gestational diabetes, anemia, and other conditions is possible. It can be treated in time, thus saving lives.

Going a step ahead, we come to disability limitations. Now disability in this case pertains to the disabilities caused to the newborn because of the complications on account of the mother's health. For instance, on account of pregnancy-induced hypertension, she delivers a preterm birth who is weak because of intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR). Regular monitoring will ensure that IUGR is restricted and preterm birth is prevented.

The final aspect is rehabilitation. Despite all these measures, access, and affordability, some women are going to have problems and deliver a mentally challenged baby. And therefore, rehabilitation also happens to be an important part of all these health strategies.

We need to see to it that proper diagnosis is made as well as reference services are made available. It is important to rule out any congenital anomalies and see to it that the baby is supported and is able to lead a socially and economically productive life.

## Q. How do cultural, social, psychological, and economic factors play out?

One has to be aware of the cultural aspects of epidemiology. A common complaint that women have is white discharge or leucorrhea or Dhat Janey in colloquial terminology. Many women because of the social and family pressures present with white discharge as a surrogate complaint. They come with body pain as they are overworked, or are anemic and are usually subject to domestic violence. Traditional medicine teaches that discharge or 'Dhat' should remain in the body; if you lose that, you become weak. So, women interpret that if they feel weak it is because they are losing 'Dhat' and not because of an infection or lack of nutrients.



### Interview of the Month

Coming to the socio-economic aspect, the white discharge could be due to several reasons from a readily treatable trivial infection, to some type of a difficult-to-treat chronic infection or it could be due to the insidious onset of cervical cancer. Further, with her compromised health, she will be unable to take care of her family adequately which may impact the psychological well-being of the family members, especially the children. In the long run, it even affects the economic well-being as well as treating this cancer could lead to a drain on the family resources.

In final words, preventive measures become extremely crucial as they help in educating, preventing, detecting, and timely treatment. This not only ensures that a family is psychologically unaffected but is financially secure. In rural areas, we still do not have adequate screening and treatment facilities and it becomes important that we have a proper detection mechanism like a good cytology set-up and screenings such as pap smear. This is how we can reduce the psychological, social, and economic burden because of a relatively common important problem. this example leucorrhea.



#### **COVID-19** and contraceptive access

Globally, reproductive health services such as contraception and abortion services are either shut down or not accessible.

On their website, the International Planned Parenthood Federation reported anticipated shortages of contraception as lockdown and measures put in to curtail the pandemic lead to a reduction in the manufacturing of contraceptives. A UNFPA technical note estimated that due to measures taken for COVID-19 containment, about 47 million women in 114 low- and middle-income countries, including India, will not be able to use contraception and this would result in 7 million unintended pregnancies.

A Lancet publication stated that "only when public health responses to COVID-19 leverage intersectional. human rights centered frameworks. transdisciplinary science-driven theories and methods, and community-driven approaches, will they sufficiently prevent complex health and social adversities for women, girls, and vulnerable populations". Pandemics such as Ebola and COVID-19 further weaken the health systems that are performing at a suboptimal level due to constraints such as shortages of skilled human resources, logistics issues, infrastructure issues.

Excerpted from: Vora KS, Saiyed S, Natesan S. Impact of COVID-19 on family planning services in India. Sex Reprod Health Matters. 2020 Dec;28(1):1785378.doi:10.1080/26410397.2020.1 785378.PMID:32552622;PMCID:PMC7888100.



## **Spotlight**

### Shine on Amchi

Swathi Chaganty, Programme Manager, Amchi, Population First

## The New Advocates of Adolescent Reproductive Sexual Health

"I miss meeting you all every month," said Nikita Nichite to her friends, "just the way we used to when Sangita Madam, Jyoti Madam and Vishakha Madam used to call us together." In the month of June, Population First completed its last meeting of Adolescent Reproductive Sexual Health activity as the project came to a close. Throughout the project period, the adolescent girls' group would meet once in a month and attend sessions conducted by AMCHI team on adolescent reproductive and sexual health. This intervention provided our young girls a safe space to learn about themselves and also created an environment of solidarity among each other.

So, as the project ended, the adolescent girls, missed this feel of companionship and bonding that they had gotten used to over the last one year. And it was then that Nikita, took the initiative to continue to have group meetings like before with her friends. The young girls reached out to Jyoti Mahajan of Population First and received guidance as to how they could continue their meetings. On her instruction, the girls got together regularly and began reading the Menstrupedia books that they were provided with before the end of the project.



On Jyoti's direction, the adolescent girls also started new groups for their younger peers. Girls who started their 7th class were formed into groups by their seniors, and soon the latter began teaching them concepts from books Menstrupedia on adolescent and reproductive health. Since August 2022, these girls have started conducting meetings with their younger peers and continue to have their own meetings. "I feel a sense of achievement teaching my younger peers who are like my sisters," Nikita said, "Not only them, but I am also sharing my knowledge and information with my friends in junior college, by showing them the books that we received from Population First on menstrual hygiene and reproductive sexual health," she concluded.

And thus, the impact that AMCHI team set out to achieve continues to multiply.





## **Spotlight**

### Shine on Amchi

Swathi Chaganty, Programme Manager, Amchi, Population First

## Girls and women got through employable skills training

"During one of the last Village Health and Sanitation Committee meetings that were held in Shere and Sherevadi villages, the PF team saw considerable interest in attending this meeting not just by VHSNC members but also by other Gram Panchayat members stakeholders such as ANM, AWW, MPW, etc. This interest was readily encouraged by the PF team and the meeting was conducted. The meeting was undertaken by VHSNC trainer Datta Urmude, renowned governance, and Gram Panchayat trainer. It was during the question-and-answer round after the meeting was concluded on the topics of VHSNC, that Gram Panchayat members asked questions regarding the Panchayati system and especially how to use the funds for development, especially for women and girls. It was during this session that Datta Urmude, shared how 10% of the Gram Panchayat funds under every department could be used for women and girl child empowerment programs. It was during this discussion that one of the Gram Panchayat members suggested, "why don't we have courses for our women and girls that will help employment?" gain "But participates when we have such events," said another member.

It was at this moment, VHSNC member, Anju Dongre, took the onus of mobilizing the women and girls. "Do not worry about participation in the courses, I will mobilize them, you just go ahead and organize the training," she had said. And the Gram Panchayat members did. They approached an NGO, Konkan Kala Shikshan Sanstha, which is known to train rural women and girls with employable skills. This NGO conducted courses on tailoring and beauty parlors for our women and girls. Anju Dongre, true to her word, was able to mobilize a total of 27 women and girls who participated in the month-long courses in tailoring and beautician. They also completed the course and gained a certificate that is recognized by the government which will help these young women to access raw materials and equipment if they want to set up their own shops. Such is the power of informed decision-making and collective action that accelerates the opportunities contributing to the empowerment of girls and women.





#### **Book Corner**

#### **Interrogating Motherhood**

Mandira Sen, Stree-Samya Books

## Motherhood oscillates between the ambivalence of power and powerlessness

In this nuanced and yet incisive look at motherhood, Jasodhara Bagchi's effort is particularly apt for the series, which introduces the basic concepts of women's studies, of understanding the world through a gender lens. A book for all readers who wish to grasp the underpinnings of society.

## Dr. Samita Sen, Professor, School of Women s Studies, Jadavpur University

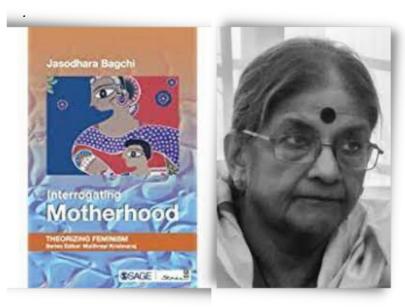
Interrogating Motherhood, the fourth title in the Theorizing Feminism Series, reveals that an understanding of motherhood is vitally important to understanding Indian society. As the main pillar supporting all societies, in motherhood is expected of most women. The Mother Goddess was used as a counter to the colonizer s criticism on the condition of women by making her a protector of nationalism. This strengthened patriarchy rather than women. Limiting motherhood through family planning was not to free women but to attempt to control the fertility of the lower classes. Motherhood under globalization changes to accommodate technology that enables perpetuating husband s lineage, pressurizing women, both the wife and the surrogate. This book by Jasodhara Bagchi, one of the most well-regarded scholars in women's studies in India, provides an overview of how the motif of motherhood has evolved as a space to allow for advanced and sustained rhetoric centered on women and the subject of motherhood. It explores the many insights of western feminists (where motherhood too has changed) and of Indian feminists to show what are the current belief structure and its resulting practice. It seeks to juxtapose 'Third World Feminism and feminist theorizing in the broad sense of conceptualizing social reality.'

"The significance of this lies in its melding of debates from a particular thematic focus, drawing upon theories and frameworks from diverse locations, to delineate the strands of arguments that continue to influence analyses and interventions on the ground," notes Indu Agnihotri in her review of the book.

The discussion draws from earlier debates starting with colonial times—to examine 'why motherhood became a determining influencing both 'the shaping of state formation' and the 'everyday'. While recognizing that the discussion on motherhood emerged as a conceptual framework within which women's lives as well as their questions first surfaced in the context of colonialism in India, Bagchi further notes that it also resulted 'motherhood's emergence as a kingpin of Indian feminism both as a myth and a reality (p. 6).

"Feminist understanding of motherhood has been central to the unfolding of Indian society from the moment of insertion into the global capitalist system through the colonizing process to the present day, when it is directly under the thumb of a market-driven neo-liberal regime of globalization."

Jasodhara Bagchi, former Chairperson of the West Bengal Commission for Women. This is her last book, she died in January 2015. Maithreyi Krishnaraj, senior honorary fellow, Research Centre for Women s Studies, SNDT Women s University, Mumbai.



#### Reel World

## Porgai(Pride): A Film on the Revival of Tamil Nadu Lambadi Embroidery

By Malathi Kembhavi, Laadli Coordinator

Set in the serene rustic landscape of South India, Porgai pleasantly meanders through exploring the essence of rural sustainability and its challenges, especially for women. Translating to mean Pride it is a film on the revival of Lambadi art which is undertaken with support from Dr. Lalitha Regi and Dr. Regi George of Tribal Health Initiative in Sittilingi valley in Tamil Nadu.

Sittilingi Valley in Tamil Nadu is the second southernmost settlement of Lambadi's in India. The women of the community had a rich tradition of hand embroidery but as time passed, the craft was lost for more than two generations. With the help of tribal health initiatives, they started reviving the craft and started a society called Porgai Artisans Association. Porgai in Lambadi dialect means pride. Now, the Lambadi women make home decor, accessories, and kids and women's clothing in traditional embroidery coupled with contemporary style.

Filmmaker Anagha Unni has made a 51-minute short film called Porgai which is about the revival of Lambadi art. Dr. Lalitha Regi, who has been working with the Lambadi community, for the past 27 years, notes "After we started the Porgai society, people came to know about the work the women do. But we wanted the world to know about the life of these women artisans so that more people can support them by buying the products.



A documentary seemed the best way to showcase the lives of the Lambadi community. This film is a tribute to a group of Lambadi women and their revived craft of rich traditional hand embroidery."

This short film has beautifully captured the lives of Lambadi community. The film explores the essence of rural sustainability and its challenges, especially for women. The film is weaved together with various insights from experts from the field of craft in India and also showcases the plausibility of achieving a modest life of equity and happiness. The film captures the joy of Neela and Gammi who had learned the art from their grandmothers and are now teaching to the rest of their tribe.

Through montages of tribal living and the serene surroundings, the film peeks into the simple lifestyle of the people and the joy and pride in reviving an almost extinct art form. Not only did they pull it out from near non-existent status, but have converted it into a thriving business that supports sixty women and offers hope to scores who have migrated to the cities, but whose hearts still lie back in the village. It beckons them to come back to the fold of the nature they are so familiar with. At a time when everyone marches towards radical development, these artisans show courage in walking the opposite way aiming for an organic way of livelihood and sustainability.











# Odisha journalists gain deeper insights at a media workshop"Reporting Through a Gender Lens"

On October 27th and 28th, twenty journalists from Odisha came together for a two-day program at Bhubaneswar. Second, in the series of three on-site workshops, it was aimed at providing them insights into reporting on various issues from a gender perspective. It was supported by UNFPA and The Royal Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi.

Six sessions and two-panel discussions took the attendees through topics as diverse as gender-based violence, media and gender representation, post-Covid media and challenges for women, and more. Acclaimed faculty shared their experiences and latest trends with the participants.

Ritu Motial, program director, *Laadli* Media Initiatives, Population First, welcomed the attendees. She shared statistics on the status of women in India in the next session Status of women in India: Striking Stats and noted, "There are many stories that lie beyond what is evident. While examining the figures, care has to be taken that one looks at the sample groups, the methodology, and the ground realities. For instance, while the overall sex ratio in India may have apparently improved, one has to be careful about interpreting the data correctly as the sex ratio at birth continues to be low, which means that we still have a long way to go."



The second session on Sex, Patriarchy, and Gender acquainted all present with the complex concepts. Rukmini Panda, a gender trainer elaborated on the difference between sex and gender and helped the participants in clearing their concepts. She said, "It is important that we develop a nuanced approach while looking at gender and questioning patriarchal mindsets in reporting various instances. One has to be wary of the many myths, biases, and stereotypes that abound in the society, it critical to question those and have as many diverse voices as possible."



Professor Swarnamayee Tripathy, former head of the Dept. of Public Administration, at Utkal University, presented various aspects diversity, equality, and inclusion and their importance in her session titled Diversity and Inclusion in Media. She noted that social exclusion is a rupture of social bonds which leads to the closing of doors on sections of the society without giving any weightage to their perspective. This is where the role of media becomes critical as it can highlight these inequities by including diverse perspectives. Inclusion is not just about more gender representation but even the shift in the roles assigned to them.



## Odisha journalists gain deeper insights at "Reporting Through a Gender Lens"

Talking about women in media in the session Women in Media and Women and Media, Ritu Motial, shared several examples of how women were ill-represented in the media. The participants shared their views and robust discussions urged them to look beyond the apparent.

The penultimate session of the day saw a robust discussion Challenges on opportunities to promote gender sensitivity in the media. Panelists deliberated on what ails the media when it comes to gender sensitivity. They highlighted how the media houses increasingly becoming lax and lacked content development. It was important that the hunger for knowledge be developed, and the need to look at various aspects of reporting. Gender sensitivity should not be limited to reporting but should be a part of the corporate culture of the media house. The panel discussion was deftly steered by Supriya Dash, well-loved and awarded TV presenter at Naxtra Media, Mrinal Chatterjee, head IIMC, Dhenkanal Elisa Patnaik, columnist and communication expert, Kasturi Ray-Senior News Editor, TNIE and Dayanidhi Dash, a veteran journalist.

The day ended with the screening of Mumbai 400008 - A Story of Betrayal, Pain and Desperation, a documentary by Santoshee Mishra, a journalist, documentary filmmaker, and investigative researcher. The narrative captures the plight of nearly 7000 sex workers of Kamathipura, Falkland Road, and Faras Road during the trying and devastating COVID-19 pandemic. The film has traveled the globe as an official entry to many film festivals.

Day two commenced with a recapitulation of the previous day's learnings. Ritu Motial took the participants through an understanding stereotypes and unconscious biases. In her session Stereotyping and Unconscious Biases, she elaborated on what was stereotyping and how it stymied cogent information flow. She also looked at the types of stereotypes, how they are formed and the detrimental effect they have on society. She also provided insight into various kinds of biases and how they colored the way we look at various issues. She demonstrated the unconscious biases we all carry through a series of group activities.

Ghasiram Panda, Programme Manager, Action Aid conducted the next session- Reporting on Gender-Biased Sex Selection. He spoke of sensitivity in reporting on GBSS and highlighted the importance of not criminalizing abortion and ensuring that its integrity as a legal right of women under certain circumstances in India is not compromised at any point. Rakhi Ghosh, an independent journalist spoke about reporting on GBV. She shared a comprehensive list of mandatories while reporting on various aspects of Gender-Based-Violence including Intimate Partner Violence, child sex abuse, and sexual assault.





## Odisha journalists gain deeper insights at "Reporting Through a Gender Lens"

The next session was a panel discussion that looked at how COVID has affected women journalists. Titled Women in Media: Covid and After the panel comprised Jyotshna Dalei, Video Journalist, OTV, Dhrutikam Mohanty, GM, Sambad Digital, Itishree Nayak, News Anchor, News 7 and was moderated by Dr. Manoj Dash, Founder, Forum for Odisha Dialogues. The panelists noted how women reporters were at the receiving end of the pandemic in more ways than one. They not only were burdened with the increased workload, but they also had to weather stark working conditions without access to proper facilities while reporting from the field. They also spoke of their personal experiences while on the field or in studios.

The final session of the day entailed presentations of ideas by the participants. Attendees were grouped on Day 1 and assigned their topics. They deliberated over two days and came up with their strategies on how they would like to report on these topics. The panelists gave their inputs on how could they make their reports more nuanced. The topics were: STEM from a Gender Perspective, Women and Dress Code, Gender and Politics, and Property Laws and Rights from a gender lens.









# 12th Edition of Laadli Media and Advertising Awards held at the historic MANUU Campus



On the 2nd of November, at the DDE Auditorium of the prestigious Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU), journalists from across the nation, some with their families, and a bevy of regional and national stalwarts congregated to gender-sensitive works celebrate 76 amongst 993 entries received from in 13 different languages. These entries were drawn from electronics, print, and web categories and marked a 14% increase over the previous year. This year, the initiative was also supported by UNFPA and The Royal Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi. HSBC registered their presence as associate sponsors, while Indian Overseas Bank and Cottage Wellness were the event partner and gift sponsor respectively.

"It is indeed rewarding to see the range of subjects and entries expanding with each edition and the gradual change in how the stories are presented from a gender lens. The plethora of award-winning articles touch upon a number of topics, including marital rape, child marriages, LGBTQIA+ issues, trafficking, gender-based violence, and more. We are delighted to see the huge number of entries, and the groundbreaking realities brought to life with such unique angles. We are hopeful that we will only see more of this in the near future," said Dr. A.L.Sharada, Director, Population First.

Sriram Haridass. Deputy Representative, UNFPA India, Gareth Wynn Owen, Deputy High Commissioner, noted journalist and Andhra Jyothi, K.Srinivasan, editor. activist Suneetha Krishnan, Ranjay Mishra chief regional manager, Indian Overseas Bank, noted independent journalist Coreena Suares, Shakeel Ahmed, well-known bureaucrat, Rizwan Ahamd, Director IMC and Professor Shahida Murtaza, MANUU graced the event as guests of honor while Prof. Syed Ainul Hasan, Honorable VC, MANUU presided over the event.



"UNFPA India recognizes the fact that media can play a critical role in shaping public opinion and culture, challenging stereotypes and portraying men and women in gender-diverse roles thereby creating an environment where women and girls are valued and respected," said Sriram Haridass, Deputy Representative, UNFPA India.



# 12th Edition of Laadli Media and Advertising Awards held at the historic MANUU Campus



"It has been a long and indeed very fulfilling journey of over a decade with Laadli. It's exciting to see the change this small step has brought in terms of covering the news and depicting women, girls, and persons with alternate gender identities in the media. What started as a small drop in the ocean has indeed created quite a ripple and my heartiest congratulations to all the winners and to everyone involved in making this happen," said Dolly Thakore, national coordinator for Laadli Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity

Smt. N. Sarada Srinivasan, a renowned and well-loved Telugu radio personality conferred The Laadli Lifetime Achievement Award. Smt. Sarada Srinivasan, a veritable living legend is gifted with a mellifluous voice that has enthralled four generations of radio listeners. A multi-faceted artiste, and a producer at All India Radio, Hyderabad, she has raised the level of Telugu radio plays and other shows to the highest standards. At the age of 85, she enacted the glamorous role of the enigmatic Amrapali in the radio adaptation of the famous oeuvre of Acharya Chatursen. She continues to mesmerize listeners across the globe











# 12th Edition of Laadli Media and Advertising Awards held at the historic MANUU Campus

A total of 30 Jury meetings were conducted to identify the winners. 56 eminent personalities from various walks of life including academics, media, journalism, social activists, change makers, business strategists, authors, and more from across the country and some from overseas made up the jury panels. A total of 76 journalists were presented with the Laadli Media Advertising Award for Gender Sensitivity, while 35 received the Jury Appreciation Citations.





The actual award ceremony was preceded by a meet and greet with the winners where each one spoke about their winning work and the motivation behind it. It was followed by a sumptuous dinner comprising a host of Hyderabadi delicacies like Haleem, Baigan Ka Salan, Khubani ka Meetha and of course the world-famous Biryani.

Internationally acclaimed Warsi Brothers enthralled the guests with their energetic Sufi qawwalis. A peppy inaugural dance by the Aman Vedika Rainbow Homes set the tempo for the evening. Rajeshwari Kalyanam noted journalist, fact checker, and presenter hosted the event

The event may be viewed here













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