

[Sakhi and Jahajee Sisters unite to empower survivors of domestic violence](#)



By Sudhir Vyas

New York: The Queens Museum of Art in Flushing-Corona Park became the setting to break the silence around domestic violence, as Sakhi for South Asian Women partnered with the Jahajee Sisters to sponsor an Arts and Empowerment event focused on women's empowerment in the Indo-Caribbean community.

Indo-Caribbean women, clad in traditional garments, put on spoken word performances that described their diverse cultural backgrounds and unique experiences, both in their ancestral lands as well as in United States, their adopted motherland.

Each artistic piece was crafted during the women's empowerment workshop, a series of sessions held in Richmond Hill, Queens, and co-hosted by Sakhi and the Jahajee Sisters. "At our workshops, we had conversations. We are not isolated, we are not alone and we create faces for that here," said Taij Kumarie Moteellal, co-founder of the Jahajee Sisters.

Many of the performances were included in a chapbook, titled, *Bolo Bahen! Speak Sister!* and released free of cost to attendees. It was co-edited by Sakhi Executive Director Purvi Shah, who in 2006 won a Many Voices Project prize for her own poetry collection, *Terrain Tracks*.

What became clear was that domestic violence does not discriminate against any community. Many of the pieces performed at the event were inspired by abuse the women had endured in their lifetimes. "Sakhi increased our interest in domestic violence issues," said Moteellal. "It's not just about women. It's about ending violence in our community over all."

Sakhi Communications Coordinator Mohammad Levesque-Alam, who co-facilitated two of the workshop sessions, also spoke to audience members, addressing the importance of confronting domestic violence in the community. "What we are seeing here tonight is a clear example of what empowerment truly entails," he said, adding that it is important for men specifically to "raise awareness and help create safe families and safe communities."

More than 100 people came out for the event and showed enthusiastic appreciation. "It speaks about the Indo-Caribbean community as a whole," said a student from St. Johns University. "We've made a lot of progress and it's just nice to see everyone from all cultures in the same room for a unified purpose."

Attendees found the showcase poignant and relatable. "One incredibly moving moment for me came when an audience member stood up, unsolicited, and stated that 'I have never said this in public before, but I am a survivor,'" said Shivana Jorawar of the Jahajee Sisters, and a former Sakhi staff member. Jorawar added, "In that moment, I reflected on how witnessing our audacity might give other women the strength to be bold themselves."

She spoke of the performance's further impact on the artists themselves, some performing for the very first time. "As part of the production team for the launch of Bolo Bahen! Speak Sister! I witnessed women growing in their strength before my eyes. Most of the women had never read their own, very personal poetry to an audience," Jorawar said. "However, challenged with the task of broaching a topic considered taboo by our community, they all rose to the occasion. They empowered themselves by using their voices in protest and in celebration of womanhood. And, their words of truth, now documented in book form, will continue to empower others into the future."