

# An Interview With Maggie

via e-mail with Mary Job

## Where are you originally from?

My parents are originally from Kerala but they moved to the North in the early 1950's. I was born in New Delhi in December 1960. I came to the United States on August 17, 1984.

## In what and where did you receive your degrees?

I got my B.A. and M.A. in Sociology from Delhi University, Delhi, India, and my Ph.D. in Sociology from the Maxwell School, Syracuse University, New York.

## How, when and why did you first become involved in Sakhi for South Asian Women?

I became involved with *Sakhi* in 1991. I started out as a researcher who wanted to study the problem of domestic violence in the South Asian community. I wanted to interview South Asian women who were abused and also understand the roles of South Asian women's organizations in addressing domestic violence in the United States. *Sakhi* in New York, *Apna Ghar* in Chicago and *SEWAA* in Philadelphia were extremely helpful in the research process.

## What has been your role(s) at Sakhi over the years?

While I came as a researcher and my role has been primarily as an "action researcher," over the years I found myself being involved in other aspects of *Sakhi*'s work too. Much of the credit for this goes to many of the women who have been part of *Sakhi* and from whom I have learnt a lot. In the last few years, Prema Vora--the former Executive Director of *Sakhi*--has played an active role in helping me to find the linkages between research and activism. Over the years at *Sakhi*, I have been a resource person, a public speaker at various events, assisted in immigration cases, and helped to address some of the organizational restructuring.

## What other organizations are you involved in and briefly describe their mission/ purpose and your desire to join them.

Besides my academic and professional affiliations, I am involved with APICHA (Asian and Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS). This is an organization that fights against AIDS-related discrimination and tries to support, empower and enhance the quality of life of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the New York area. For the past year and half I have been a board member of APICHA and have tried to raise the organization's visibility in the South Asian community. Between teaching, research, *Sakhi*, APICHA and personal commitments, there really is not much time left to be actively involved in anything else.

## Is *Speaking the Unspeakable* your first book?

[This] is my first book, but I have published various articles in journals.

## What motivated you to write *Speaking the Unspeakable*?

As a teacher and as a researcher, I was aware of the paucity of monographs that examine the intersections of ethnicity, class, gender, and legal status in addressing the problem of domestic violence, particularly for recent immigrant groups. My intention in writing this book was to provide a comprehensive and integrated discussion of marital violence in the South Asian community.

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## Who is your intended audience for the work?

I had envisioned that the book would be accessible to a broad audience including academics, social workers, domestic violence survivors, the South Asian community and anyone interested in issues of violence against women.

## What did you want to accomplish in writing this book and do you think you have accomplished your goal(s)?

An important goal was to incorporate South Asian women's experiences of marital violence within the discourse on domestic violence in the United States. I also wanted to counter the myth of the model minority and draw attention to the amazing work that South Asian women's organizations have done in the past fifteen years in addressing the social problems in our community, empowering women individually and collectively.

In terms of accomplishing all the goals of my book--well that is a tough question! I wanted to write a book that was easily accessible to a diverse audience of readers but I do not think that I have achieved that completely. There are a couple of chapters that are not an easy read. There is some terminology that is not always accessible to the lay reader. However, I must say the women's narratives themselves are powerful and if readers feel they have gained some insights into the complexity of immigrant women's experiences of marital violence then I will feel that I have accomplished a major goal of the book.

## Is there anyone you would like to thank for helping with the writing/ creation/ production of this work?

There are many people who contributed to this book, but I cannot name all of them. However, I would like to mention that this book could not have been completed without the courage of the South Asian women who participated in this project and the help I received from the various South Asian organizations, particularly *Sakhi*, *SEWAA* and *Apna Ghar*. I owe a big thanks to the artist Mary Delave who allowed for her painting to be on the book cover. I would like thank Cynthia Bogard, Madhulika Khandelwal, Pradeep Singh, Shamita Das Dasgupta, Susan Wadley, and Taisha Abraham for their valuable comments on drafts of the manuscript. Last, but not least, I would like to thank Hofstra University for supporting my research endeavor.