

## Meghna Hindia



*My name is Meghna Hindia, I was born in Bangalore. I grew up in Mumbai. I have a teaching degree. My undergraduate degree is a degree in special-ed, and then I have a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology from Santa Clara University. I am a Marriage and Family Therapist by profession, and I practice here in Mountain View.*

### Thoughts on Gender Discrimination

*I think gender discrimination is everywhere and was...growing up. I remember at a very young age I was always attuned to what that looked like for children, and how that continued as you became an adult, and a senior, pretty much until the day that you die. Our society tends to groom young girls in subtle and overt ways to fit certain ideas and how that continued pretty much. And it was also interesting how your socio economic status dissected that that grooming, how things were different. It's surprising how sometimes for women and girls that were poor or like lower middle class versus the ones that were considered like privileged women. It was always something that I was interested in, always something that I noticed, talked*

about, and was supported by my family in exploring, Also, I noticed exceptions to these norms, women that were independent thinkers and who lived their lives on their own terms. So I was always optimistic that despite everything, ending discrimination could still be done.

### Growing up

I grew up in a progressive family that strived to give their kids the best education they could afford. Mom was very passionate about learning herself, and then teaching and service. Mom was a teacher, she's always taught the underprivileged children at our house as far as I can remember. And this wasn't like a vanity project, it was like she taught 5 days a week, individualized learning for each child that came to her. We would go get workbooks for that child, discuss what might be best, how to teach, and she was very particular that children attend regularly. Definitely my early experiences of service and of work ethic and teaching were sort of inculcated early and kept going.

### Early Days in the US

I came to the US when I was 17. I came from big city Mumbai to a small town in Illinois. I was the only Indian at a very small liberal arts university, and that certainly made 4 years pretty interesting. This experience of coming on my own made me who I am today. I think it shaped my thoughts, my values, my perspective, in a big way in those formative years; through college with my eastern upbringing, these western ideas and just how I see the world

today was definitely shaped by my undergrad experiences in the United States.

### Joining Maitri

I came to the Bay Area on an H-4 (dependent spouse Visa) and I couldn't work, and I wanted to use my skills and my time towards a worthy cause. I found the Maitri website and gave them a call, and have been working here ever since. That was twenty years ago. I played multiple different roles at Maitri, over the years. I started off as a volunteer, then I started working for Maitri as a program coordinator. I used to answer the hotline, recruit volunteers, and did anything and everything that was needed for a small organization to function. When I started graduate school, I resigned from my position and became a volunteer again, a few months later, I was invited to serve on the board of Maitri and that's what I do right now, apart from the volunteer work.

My memories of Peer Counseling and being on the helpline day after day, listening to so many women tell their stories, the details would be different, but the abuse and the exploitation stayed the same. Yet, with some support, all these women, in their own ways, at different times made some hard decisions, had great courage and determination, walked a really difficult path, towards independence and a violence free life. The work of Peer Counseling was inspiring as much as it was exhausting.

### Experiencing the Growth of Maitri

I started at Maitri having done the 40-hour training at Support Network for Battered Women (currently the Y in Santa Clara). I started doing peer counseling for Maitri. I remember answering the helpline from the single room office we had back then. Two desks, a printer, a phone line, and me. After working solo in the office for sometime, we opened our Transitional-housing program and hired a Transition House Coordinator and essentially doubled our employee count! Our volunteer meetings at the time were at Shanta's house (a volunteer's house). I remember each month looking forward to attending that meeting. I was always awestruck at all the accomplished and passionate women who were a part of this organization. The passionate debates, the hours of sweat; precious weekends spent helping clients, celebrating client wins, big and small. Most often, I was so wired after those meetings, I had trouble falling asleep! It always inspired me to see women who had full time jobs and families, give up their precious down time hours to help a common cause. Not just with talk or money but, with actual action. We (Maitri) are much bigger now of course, we have wraparound services, very qualified and dedicated staff, we've improved our processes, and we are constantly evaluating and continue to refine ourselves as we grow. It's heartening to see that the founders had a vision, and all the women who helped and joined along the way, contributed something to the organization.

### Changing Community Response

Community response definitely has gotten easier over time. Our outreach was not as robust, as it is now. Between the places that would actually allow us

*to talk about what we do, and the ones that we actually wanted to go to, where we wanted to do outreach, they were pretty limited. Now it has changed. There are people who invite us, there are young people in high school, girls and boys that actually want to showcase us. We are held as an example in the community! So definitely, I think that times have changed. The amount of work that we've done shows we have built a lot of credibility in the Bay Area, and it's definitely better, where we are headed.*

*My wish for Maitri is that we continue to be the solid organization that we've been, that we continue our work in service of helping our clients, and continue to change and be nimble, and continue to do what we've done best for many, many years.*