



**Solidarity Stories from Asian American and Pacific Islander  
Community Leaders, Asian American Leaders Table**

Simone Jhingoor and Shivana Jorawar, Jahajee Sisters

# Introduction

**“You are not going to be an organizer who’s making systems change and culture change if you are not holding deep self love for yourself.”**

Simone Jhingoor and Shivana Jorawar are the Co-Directors of [Jahajee Sisters](#), an organization that provides sustainable and culturally relevant programming for Indo-Caribbean women to develop leadership, organize against gender-based oppression and create paths for self determination. Jahajee Sisters works with inter-generational Indo-Caribbean women, ages 15-60, with ancestral roots in South Asia and born in the Caribbean and South American countries including Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname and Jamaica.

# Takeaways

## 1. Solidarity means recognizing the common and different histories of oppression and resilience across communities.

Jahajee Sisters is rooted in the historical experiences of Indo-Caribbeans who fled poverty in India and were oppressed by British colonizers who forced them to work as indentured laborers on sugar plantations in Caribbean and South America. Many settled in places like Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname and Jamaica but fled [political and economic upheavals](#) in the 1970s and 1980s to migrate to urban areas in the United States including New York City.

Although Indo-Caribbean communities trace their ancestral heritage to India, they have not always felt welcomed or accepted by Indian American and Asian American communities in the United States. Due to differences of caste, class, and language, Indo-Caribbeans often found themselves ostracized by other South Asians. These experiences led Indo-Caribbean elders to carve out spaces in New York City that were often separated from other Indian immigrant populations.

“In order to identify as South Asians, there’s a lot of healing that has to be done,” Simone explains. “But I feel like the younger generation sees the value and the power of building solidarity with other South Asians and Asian Americans, because we know there’s power there.”

## 2. We can’t liberate ourselves - by ourselves.

Simone and Shivana explain that Indo-Caribbeans have found ways to build meaningful solidarity throughout their histories. “What’s so beautiful about the history of Indo-Caribbean people is that when we came to the Caribbean, we weren’t alone,” explains Simone. “There were other people of color there, there were Indigenous people, and there were Black folks who had been there for centuries.” While the British colonial government attempted to drive a wedge between groups, young Indo-Caribbeans and Afro-Caribbeans realized the powerful potential for solidarity and joined together to fight for human rights.

As first-generation Indo-Caribbean immigrants in the U.S. work to heal from multiple historical traumas, the younger generation is reaching across divides and building bridges with other South Asian and Asian American communities. “The only way we can actually work for collective liberation is if we’re building power together with other folks who look like us and share similar histories of oppression,” says Simone.

# Takeaways

### 3. Center those most affected by oppression at many levels, including class and immigration status.

Shivana explains that Jahajee Sisters uses an explicit class analysis to organize and build power. “We are shifting our work even more towards economic justice and towards centering folks who are working class,” says Shivana. “The idea of centering working-class folks and being class conscious is actually deeply rooted in who we are, as a people coming from indentured laborers who were taken to different parts of the Carribean to labor on the sugar plantations post-slavery. This legacy of capitalist greed and colonialism is really deeply embedded in who we are. We come from workers.”

That’s why Jahajee Sisters became involved with a campaign to restore rights for undocumented and exploited immigrant workers in New York City who were excluded from federal benefits and unemployment payments related to COVID-19 crisis recovery. Shivana notes that Jahajee Sisters banded together with other immigrants rights organizations to support workers and demand economic justice. As a result of the campaign, the NY budget earmarked [\\$2.1 billion dollars for exploited workers](#) affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

### 4. Strong movements require spiritual and emotional care.

Movement work can be draining and stressful. “One of the things that’s really important to us at Jahajee sisters,” Shivana explains, “is taking care of ourselves spiritually and emotionally. To make sure that we can be resilient enough to stay with the work. Because we know social justice work can break you down and being in it for the long haul is so important. We want to build a very long bench but that doesn’t mean that we want leaders to leave the movement.”

Jahajee Sisters is actively seeking to build a strong team of healers, guides, and transformative justice practitioners.

# Your Turn

## Your Turn

What are the histories of your community? How do these histories shape possibilities for building solidarity?

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What are ways to address intra-community tensions?

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How does your organization make space for self and community care? How do you struggle to make your organizing sustainable, and how can you cultivate a practice of self-love?

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*Some quotes in this article have been edited for clarity.*