

Bapsi Sidhwa chief guest at Manavi fundraiser

A CORRESPONDENT

Internationally renowned author and human rights activist Bapsi Sidhwa was the featured guest at the 21st annual fundraising dinner of Manavi, a social services organization striving to end violence against South Asian women.

The anniversary, held recently in Edison, New Jersey, was attended by more than 250 guests, organizers said. All the attendees reaffirmed their commitment to help end violence against women in the South Asian community in the United States.

Sidhwa spoke about the adaptation of her novel *Cracking India* into Deepa Mehta's 1998 film *Earth*. In a light vein, she narrated her experiences on the sets of the film. The evening also included a performance by the Nayikas Dance Theater Company depicting the empowerment of women.

The fundraiser included a silent auction and a book signing by Sidhwa, prompting attendees to buy a large number of books to be autographed. The program was kicked off by Manavi's director Maneesha Kelkar, who brought to focus the violence that is faced by women in the South Asian community, the urgent need for recognition of this problem, and support from the community. Some victims of violence shared their experiences at the dinner. They spoke of the abuse they had faced at the hands of their spouses and their difficult journey of leaving their abusive situations and working towards living their lives independently and with self-respect.

A dinner and dancing with DJ Ankit Mathur concluded the evening, which had reinforced the determination of the entire Manavi community of supporters, volun-



■ Bapsi Sidhwa signing her book



■ Guests at the dinner

teers, survivors, and members to stay the course in calling to attention the issues, providing services, and working to end violence against women, the organizers said.

Founded in 1985, Manavi receives nearly 300 calls each year from women who are facing violence in their lives. The services are confiden-

tial, free, and include peer counseling, support groups, legal clinics and referrals, and a transitional home where women fleeing violence can live without fear while working towards autonomy. Manavi also conducts outreach and education in the South Asian diaspora community. For details, visit www.manavi.org.