

# SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE MADE ON MEMOIR



## ARITRA SINGHA

Born to parents with British ancestry Jillian Haslam who grew up in the slums had written many memoirs. Based on her writing which was more of an autobiography the famous film Slumdog Millionaire was made. In the year 2015 by Jillian Haslam, also established the National Speaking Academy. This academy has been keen to impart quality communication skills upon a wide range of people. These include students, the young members of society and professionals.

The adage truth is stranger than fiction defines the life of Jillian Haslam more than anything else. Born in 1970 to parents with British ancestry (most commonly known as Anglo Indians) who decided to stay on in India after independence, Jillian and her family led a life far removed from what you would expect people of their background to lead.

A series of circumstances and inopportune decisions made by her parents led them to homelessness and living among the poorest of the poor. So poor that Jillian lost four siblings to hunger and poverty. Two of them had to be buried in tea cases because the family could not afford to buy proper coffins. Jillian and her siblings grew up near destitute in the slums and mean streets of Kolkata foraging for food and fending off bullies and tormentors.

She and her family were viewed with suspicion and distrust by the people that they lived amongst on account of their different looks and language. They were subject to racist and every so often physical abuse, even though they were as poor and desperate as their tormentors. However there were a few people among all those poor and desperate people who would help them every now and then. The Haslams survived those difficult years largely due to such gestures, infrequent as they were.

Jillian had even as a child resolved to better things for her family even though she had no clue how, or even what that meant. She had a start in that she received free education in a school started by the British in Kolkata. Little by little and one painful step at a time she rose from the quagmire that destiny had willed her, and completely transformed her own life, and that of her family.

She found employment with Bank of America in Delhi, and rising through the ranks made it to the

President of the Employee Charity Division, a position she excelled in on account of her own life experiences and her utter empathy for the poorest of the poor. Eventually Jillian emigrated to the UK where after an equally successful banking career; she started her own motivational speaking and training company.

Jillian Haslam's life is a living testament to the resilience of the human spirit, which needs just the hint of hope, to reach out and achieve even those things that are considered beyond its pale. Jillian's circumstances were such that she didn't have a snowball's chance to lead even a normal life, leave alone achieve what she has. Yet she managed a stunning reversal of fortune by never succumbing to hopelessness, even in her darkest hour. She did this by willing herself to believe that better days lay ahead, if only she persevered. She believed like Churchill did, "If you are going through hell, keep going." Jillian's incredible saga of moving from a life lived under a flight of stairs in a Kolkata slum to owning a three storey house in England is the stuff of fairy-tales. The poignancy lies in the fact that hers is a true tale. A tale of sweat, blood and tears amounting to something—a tale of redemption.

Not content with her extraordinary achievements, Jillian Haslam has made it her life's mission to help the poorest of the poor to emerge from their desperate situations and make something of their lives, just as she did. Her memoirs, Indian.English. Chronicle her travails as a twice cursed slum dweller from Kolkata who rose to dizzying heights by the dint of her own hard work, an incorrigibly positive attitude, and an ability to persist against all odds.

In 2012 Jillian won the first runner up award for The Asian Woman of the Year in the Social and Humanitarian category in recognition of her business achievements and charitable contributions. In April 2015 The Telegraph of Calcutta presented Jillian with a True Legend Award for her exceptional contribution to social and humanitarian causes and in July of 2015 she was presented with the Star Recognition Award in London for 'Lifting Lives' and delivering numerous speeches across the UK's educational institutes. In September 2015 she was nominated by members of the public for ITV's 2015 Inspirational Woman of the Year award.

This book which is now an international best seller is in the sights of major Hollywood production houses

who hope to turn into a blockbuster movie along the lines of Slumdog Millionaire. As a matter of fact the first draft of a screenplay based on the book won the first best screenplay award at the Monaco Film Festival. Already renowned producer Cyrus Yavneh and celebrated director Jack Sholder have come on board in their respective professional capacities to give shape to a grand cinematic expression of Jillian's truly inspirational true story.

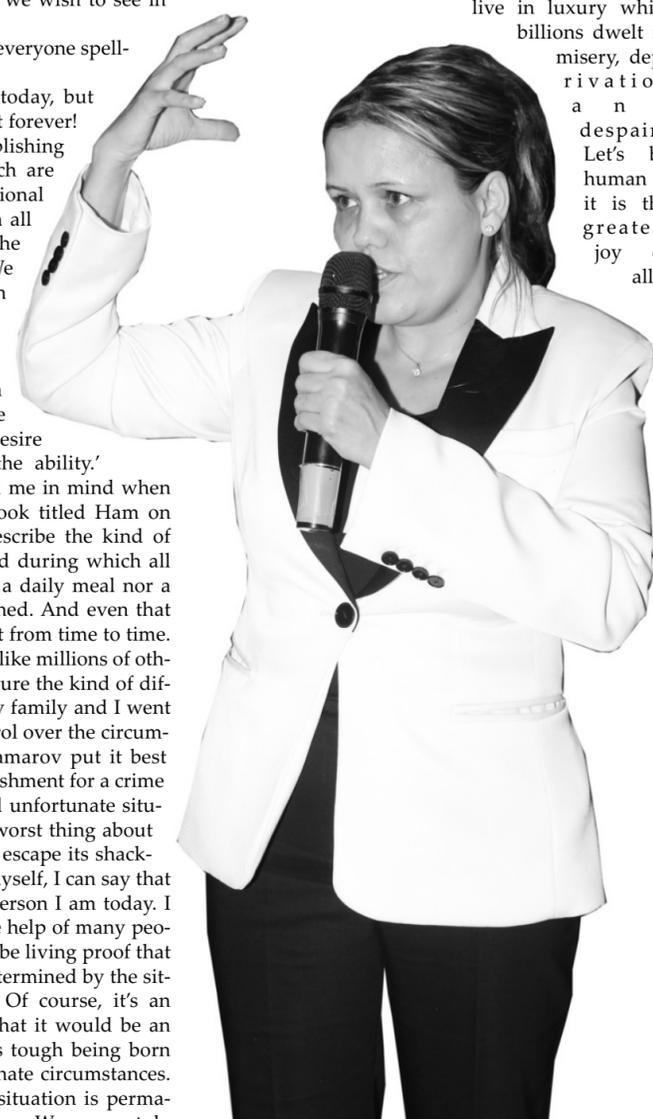
It is Jillian's fervent hope that by sharing her story, she will inspire many others to strive for betterment, no matter how desperate their circumstances may seem. Putting her money where her mouth is Jillian is actively involved in advocating and promoting programs geared to alleviate poverty. She has been holding lectures, meetings and training sessions for years hoping to draw attention to the pressing problem of poverty. In Jillian's own words, "I am Indian and if I failed to feel that or admit that, despite my ancestry or bloodline, it would be a disgrace." My hope is that my story is able to touch the hearts of people across the world (and whether I'm Indian, English, American or Jewish it does not matter). India is the land of my birth) and to firstly show forgiveness, loyalty and gratitude for what was done for us rather than what was taken from us is the most empowering mindset that anyone can adopt if they wish to succeed but it has to start with me as Gandhi said – We first need to be the light that we wish to see in others!

One of her work which has made everyone spellbound is

Give a man a fish, he will eat today, but teach a man to fish and he will eat forever! The motivation behind my establishing the various charities, all of which are married in a way to the National Speakers Academy is because I'm all too aware that feeding fish to the people in itself is not enough. We need to teach them how to catch fish as that is the most surefire way to ensure they make something of themselves and go on to change the world in their own small ways. 'What a weary time those years were – to have the desire and the need to live but not the ability.'

Charles Bukowski must have had me in mind when he penned these words in his book titled Ham on Rye. For they are words that describe the kind of childhood I endured. A childhood during which all that was guaranteed was neither a daily meal nor a place to sleep; but the air I breathed. And even that would come under constant threat from time to time. The worst thing about it is that I – like millions of others who have and continue to endure the kind of difficult poverty-stricken life that my family and I went through – do not have much control over the circumstances they are born in. Eli Khmarov put it best when he said: 'Poverty is like punishment for a crime you didn't commit.' It's a bad and unfortunate situation to find oneself in. And the worst thing about poverty is that it is really hard to escape its shackles. Hold my hand Speaking for myself, I can say that my early days have shaped the person I am today. I have been fortunate – through the help of many people along the way – to realise and be living proof that a person's whole life cannot be determined by the situation in which they are born. Of course, it's an unfortunate card to wield such that it would be an understatement to say that life is tough being born and growing under such unfortunate circumstances. But the beauty of life is that no situation is permanent: and we can change our fortune. We may not do

it singlehandedly – and I am yet to meet or hear of anyone who has – so if we are lucky we will meet good Samaritans along the way to lend a helping hand. Indeed. My life story is a winding tale and delving into it would take an entire book. So allow me to compress it into a few words by saying that the first half of it was mostly characterised by destitution. But it's a half that directly had a bearing on the second part of my life, and I'll tell you why. Had I not gone through what I went through in my younger years, I am not so sure I would be doing what I do today – helping as many as I can, not just to hope but to be!!! Your Brother's Keeper It's an amazing feeling just thinking about it: from growing up on the streets myself to helping kids going through the kind of deprived childhood that I went through by setting up a charity not just for them, but also other underprivileged members of society: the old, the disabled, the youth and women in need. A kind of feeling that would be hard to describe in words other than just to say it brings sheer joy into my heart knowing that I can help transform someone's life positively. I have been blessed with an incredible team that helps me teach these members of society how to fish by ensuring they get a formal education. And not just that: we also make it a point of imparting upon them one of the most potent tools for success in the 21st century: self-confidence!! Communication linked to success "We recognise that most people are exceptionally talented. However, their potential is widely curtailed by their ability to communicate effectively. This is why we maintain a keen interest in public speaking training because we acknowledge the vital role it plays in empowering our people to be the best that they can be. At the NSA, we have different courses tailored specially for each group. Our speech courses can help you build confidence in any school, social or business situation that calls upon your ability to communicate clearly and articulately. "We have assisted hundreds of individuals overcome their fear of public speaking, and many others to enhance their public speaking skills while finding a whole different level of confidence. Because we hold the view that good public speaking skills have a snowball effect on every facet of your life. A positive one at that." Hidden Gem As an Entrepreneur and Inspirational Speaker, it is not lost on me that it is this one skill that helped unearth the potential that lay within me as an individual. It is a skill, if perfected, that unlocks virtually every other aspect of a person's life – and does so in a most positive way. In my opinion, this is one of the most powerful gifts anyone can ever offer you. After all, when all is said and done, we are all human beings, and the least we could do is help the less fortunate amongst us. For what good is it if you can't help others. Muhammad Yunus captured it best by writing these glorious words: 'Once poverty is gone, we'll need to build museums to display its horrors to future generations. They'll wonder why poverty continued so long in human society – how a few people could



live in luxury while billions dwelt in misery, deprivation and despair.' Let's be human – it is the greatest joy of all!!!

