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BANKER ON A CHARITY MISSION: Jillian Haslam

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Kolkata: Jillian Haslam left Kolkata 12 years ago, following in the footsteps of thousands of Anglo-Indians who had migrated to England in search of a career and a better life. She lived up to her dream but refused to sever ties with the city which had been both 'cruel and kind' to her, she says.

A banker, Jillian is on the verge of giving up her job to turn into a motivational speaker and launching a career in writing. Her goal, though, is to help the poor and the underprivileged in Kolkata, particularly the Anglo-Indians and help them change their lives through motivational and charitable programs.

Through Help Yourself Associates, a trust that she runs in England, Jillian has been arranging for charitable help to Indian cities, including Kolkata. "I plan to embark on charitable work on a bigger scale for my city Kolkata and other metros soon. The idea is to help the poor, the sick, the dying, the destitute, the aged and especially the children who are our hope for tomorrow, through funds generated in England. I plan to rope others in my community and Indians in general and we shall extend our support to all communities, not just Anglo-Indians," said Jillian, through an e-mailed response to ToI from Hertfordshire, where she is based.

She said talks are on with "some parties" to bring these programs to India this year. "It is also my intention to use any revenue generated in India in a fashion where people in power cannot siphon away any of the funds (since this is the opinion that the world has) and that the same is delivered to the people who really and truly need it. I want to try and change that opinion but the only way we can do that is by showing the world "results" and not a country where the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer," said Jillian, whose book *Indian. English* has been much acclaimed in England for its poignant depiction of poverty and exploitation of the poor and underprivileged in India. She has also won the Asian Woman of Achievement award recently.

Having grown up in a Kolkata slum, where people faced "severe abuse, defilement and hurt from an ignorant few", she also developed a bond with the city which, she says, removes the pain despite the adversities she faced.

"A bond that moves you to love the country even when you have been humiliated in the worst manner and a bond that lays no blame but replaces everything with forgiveness and respect, more so for a majority of the people including the poorest of the poor who saved our lives, and in some cases put their lives on the line in order to save ours. While some people hurt us for no reason, so many others helped us survive and gave us the hope to go on," said Jillian.

This is why she, along with many others in England, was left shocked by the city's response in the aftermath of the Park Street rape in February. "While rapes and atrocities of this nature can take

place anywhere in the world, it's hard to comprehend why some politicians refused to believe a lady who has been through this traumatic and humiliating experience. She was accused of trying to malign the state government. This is shocking. To be honest, I doubt if she even knows who the members of the assembly are, let alone trying to malign them. To a community who already feels so alienated, this is even further humiliation."

The community needs to draw inspiration from success stories and learn to take setbacks in its stride, she said. "I will campaign endlessly to try and make a difference and feel proud to be able to share my story for people to know that not everyone is bad."

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