

## Midwest Book Review

**Diane Donovan, Sr. Reviewer**

### **A Voice Out of Poverty**

Jillian Haslam

*A Voice Out of Poverty: The Power to Achieve From Adversity* is a study in rising out of poverty that comes from a woman whose childhood was experienced in the slums of Calcutta. From the start, Jillian Haslam describes powerful scenes of poverty in India which would have proved impossible to overcome had it not been for the ongoing determination of her mother: *"The rickshaw puller veered off the line of his path, forcing a dilapidated scooter that packed an entire family to swerve near us. The scooter splashed mud onto my legs and dress, and I started to cry. My only proper dress was drenched with filth. I now would have to undress to underclothes while it got washed. My mother stopped and crouched in front of me. I didn't hide my disgust. 'Oh, come on now Jillu, it's not that bad!' she said. The brusque tone harkened to how she'd counsel us not to yield to emotion."*

Given such a beginning, it would seem unlikely that life could improve. But her mother imparted a valuable message that, though resisted early in life, would ultimately drive Haslam to reach for greater goals: *"My mother relentlessly stressed that life could always have been harder. Never make a fuss. Be grateful for what you have, however paltry. Things can be worse."*

This admonition, and a work ethic instilled at a young age, kept Haslam on a track to escape her own poverty and serve as a guidepost for others seeking to understand the wellsprings of success.

Haslam's memoir moves through the ups and downs of her journey, exploring both her life and Indian society and culture, which is well known for its large, impoverished communities.

Her road to personal change led her to a mission of broader transformation for those around her as she was appointed as President of BofA's Charity and Diversity Network in India and began to help others overcome poverty.

Besides the inspirational quality of her unique story, Haslam also provides the powerful lessons she learned in the course of her upward trajectory: *"Regret can be a powerful inhibitor. I took some comfort knowing I'd injected small doses of happiness and hope into the lives of my aunt and father. I'd also made a connection that I'm sure no one in the family ever imagined possible. Both were positive marks I could exult to sap any inclination I felt to become mired in remorse. It was a perspective that allowed me to focus on the lessons*

*I could learn from the situation and reflect on how important it is to stand up for myself no matter what others say or think. I had to stay centered on being my own person, directing my own life, and fulfilling my life's mission."*

The result is more than a singular memoir of achievement, but a broader inspection of how personal experience can drive social and political change at different levels, as well as a solid inspection of Indian culture and society.

*A Voice Out of Poverty's* powerful message needs to be heard. This memoir should not be limited to library autobiography sections alone, but should be made part of book and social issues discussion groups, studies on contemporary Indian society, and examinations of the changing roles of women in leadership positions.

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