

An English millionaire from the slums of Kolkata

Her father was born in India to British parents in Calcutta during the 1920s. Her mother was an Armenian-Scot. She lost four siblings to malnutrition and poverty and spent nine months living on the streets of Kolkata and under staircases. Then she found a home in the slums of Kidderpore where she grew up. Later on she moved to Delhi, did a secretarial course, and joined the Bank of America. She was made the President of the Charity Network, and was accorded a special package that allowed her to migrate to the UK. Today, she is a motivational speaker, has her own company and is a millionaire living in Hertfordshire. She has penned her story, Indian English. She is Jillian Haslam! In an exclusive interview, she speaks to BE's Abhijit Ganguly.



Motivation....

We had lost four siblings to malnutrition, poverty and dehydration. When the fifth sibling fell ill and the doctor gave her three days to survive, I guess, that was the first thing that gave me the motivation to better our situation. I do believe in the adage, "Success means when you refuse to accept the circumstances that you find yourself in." People don't understand the significance of this quote, but the truth of the matter is that neurologically when you refuse to accept circumstances that you are in, the mind starts to channel all the ideas and ways for you to get yourself out of the situation. When I saw my sister lying on the bed, I thought to myself that I am not giving up. I am going to fight and do what I can.

Secondly, my parents were truly motivational people. My mother was an extremely charitable person. She brought all kinds of people off the road to our one little room and say that they would be staying with us. My father was very inspirational, too.

Thirdly, my teachers at school were a tremendous inspiration. I was never good at anything at school. I was very weak, very nervous, very poor and had no confidence at all because of malnutrition, starvation and the trauma of being locked in a

toilet for months on end that was full of cockroaches by a lady who volunteered to take care of my sister and myself. After going through all of that, I was put in school and it was the teachers and the matrons who went that extra mile to help me, motivate me and give me the strength to become what I am today. There are pageants for Miss Universe, Miss World, etc. but there are no pageants for the soul and hence, the people, mainly teachers, who impart the most valuable skill of all, that is, education, never get recognized. It is up to people like us to tell the world how we have been helped, to bring pride to our nation, our city, our school, our family, our friends and most of all, to show our teachers that we were worth it and that everything they did for us, irrespective of how small the deed was, we valued it and took it seriously. This is what brings such people joy. These are true leaders; they are in the business of changing lives and no physical award presented to them makes up for what they have chosen to do with their lives and that is to see potential in even the worst cases on earth. I want to thank every teacher on behalf of students all over the world for what they do for so many and I want to encourage students to recognize their teachers and their extraordinary dedication.

Rising crime against women in India...

Clothes bring respect to women. The maxim should be: "Do in

WOMEN

Rome as the Romans do”. There is a tendency in the magazines, movies, billboards and on the internet to show women wearing scanty and provocative clothes in order to entice young minds to do the same . Rape occurs in London, South Africa and everywhere else in the world, some of them horrific. It is nothing exclusive to India but when something like this happens in India, it is made global news, why? Young men in India from villages etc., some not even adults yet, are not used to such pictures on the billboards, etc., which has a pernicious effect. They do not receive the proper education to take it all in, the same would happen to a man in Africa. We cannot stop the world from advertising or the internet from producing such exposure but we need to understand the mindset and instead of condemning, educate them. Women here should also be represented as they are imagined to be in India’s social milieu. So our minors need sympathetic education. Mahatma Gandhi had said “hate will only bring more hate”. So, punitive action will not do wonders.

Women entrepreneurs...

You need to have business acumen. However, there is also a side of giving back from an entrepreneur’s perspective. It is not all about taking. It is the circle of life. You never take more than you give. As President Obama said, it is when you attach yourself to some bigger purpose, that money flows in; you are not worried about it but about what you contribute to the bigger purpose.

When I went to the UK, I attached myself to the cause and to charitable missions. In India, an entrepreneur can do business but also at the same time, serve a bigger cause in areas like education, poverty alleviation, etc.

Advice for today’s youth...

How we most often choose the bad type, that is, the external appearance of a person, their clothes, their make-up etc., as a marker of identification, and yet fail to understand that all through history, there are no two Mahatma Gandhis, Shah Rukh Khans or Aishwarya Rais. There will only be just one of me to prove what I can do and likewise, you should be really proud that there is only one of you (this is part of a poem that has always helped me). We need to find that uniqueness in ourselves and excel once we find that strength. I want people to understand that 5, 10 or 15 years after leaving school, no one remembers or truly cares who had the best legs, who had the best lips or who wore the shortest skirts; what matters is who is the most successful and for one to get there, all it takes is for one to concentrate on the inner strengths of the person and not the external images. One needs to realise that they are 100% worth it and that they do not have to use L’oreal products in order to feel capable of doing something or trying something (self worth is crucial) in the area of self development and I want people to understand the real meaning of this. ■
