

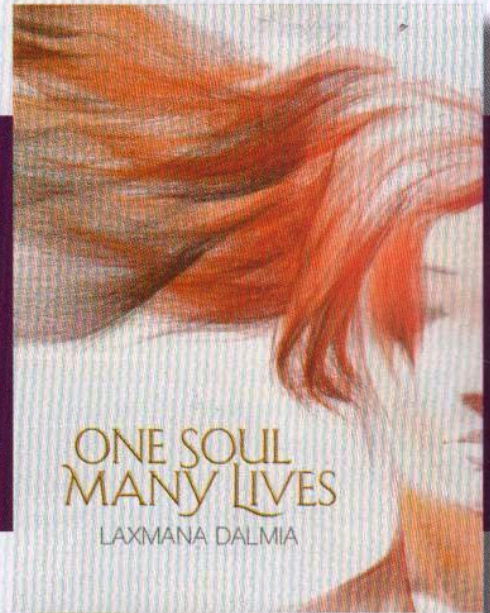
## “I Was Brought Up With Large Doses Of **Fear, Superstition, Dichotomy & Paradoxical Values**”

**T**he soft spoken, Laxmana Dalmia's poetry instantly draws you and makes you feel the sentiment that she has so beautifully elucidated through her writings. It was no wonder then that the painters were able to illustrate her words in their true sense on canvas without much difficulty. And this remarkable collaboration has come together in a book of poetry *One Soul Many Lives*. Launched this month, the book was conceptualized by Artistic Director of Artspeaks India, Ashwini Pai Bahadur. A multidisciplinary arts, design and cultural development initiative, Artspeaks India, is involved in the promotion of the arts over the last decade. And Ashwini combines a unique inclusive artistic vision with her entrepreneurial expertise. This book is an outcome of the collaboration of two unique personalities with a common goal of serving art and its aficionados.

We spoke to Laxmana Dalmia about her book. An accomplished poetess, Laxmana has many feathers in her cap. She is a renowned screenwriter, producer and director for TV, radio, documentary cinema and theatre, who has produced over five hundred short films. An educationist and spiritual practitioner, she is also the Treasurer of the seven-decade-old Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). Inspired by her unique life experiences, her poetry has an unpretentious and fresh quality that is both inspirational and pithy.

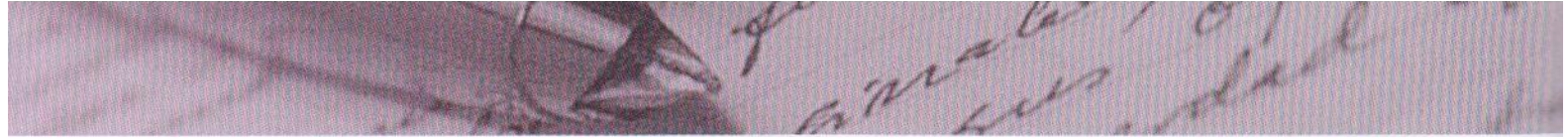
**How did the idea of bringing poems and other art form together in a book come about?**

I have always wanted to do things which were strikingly different from the 'run-of-the-mill' poetry books published. Coffee table books that combine poetry with illustrations/paintings of a single artist, or



A screenwriter, director and producer... Laxmana Dalmia wears many hats, the latest being that of a poetess. The daughter of business tycoon Ramkrishna Dalmia spills the beans on her book of poems — *One Soul Many Lives*

| By **MEETA MISHRA** |



photography with poetry are commonplace. The inherited illusion of medium-specificity needed to be forgotten. I chose to combine interdisciplinary arts to incite change. This interdisciplinary premise is refreshing and distinguishes my book from many of its predecessors.

Why did I want my poems and multiple art forms to come together? Poetry, unfortunately, has had to take a backseat in today's world of superficial and instant gratification. Could I make poetry more easily approached, understood and judged if it were introduced through a natural coupling with a visual or auditory mode of expression? With this in mind, about two years ago, I got together with Ashwini Pai Bahadur to find a way of exploring possibilities and combining my poetry with the visual arts to see and feel in a new way.

This was soon to become a massive, collaborative project between a writer and multiple visual artists. That was part of the

appeal; to see what could be created across many different artistic genres. It was also really challenging and interesting.

**What kind of writings do you like to read? Fiction or non-fiction? Novels or poetry?**

I am an avid reader and read everything I can get hold of.

**You have been writing since you were all of 13. How did you choose the poems for compilation in your book? Was there a theme that you had in mind?**

*One Soul Many Lives* is the result of many years of writing. When friends and family read my poems they pointed out that there was a book here. They urged me to compile and organise them. *One Soul Many Lives* is the outcome.

The poetry runs through an entire gamut of emotions, ranging from fear, insecurity, frustration, jealousy, hatred and anger to

love, comprehension, compassion and balance to finally spirituality. Though the order compiled in the book is random, all the poems chosen and the emotions expressed, in a way, follow the pattern of my life. This is the evolution of my soul and all the different roads it has traversed in its journey on earth.

**Who are your favourite authors?**

In the earlier years, when my father was a demi-god to me, I wanted to become a business magnate like him, I was inspired by the author Ayn Rand. Her books *Fountainbead* and *Atlas Shrugged* were my Bible. Her philosophy, 'To live, man must hold three things as the ruling values of his life: Reason, Purpose and Self-esteem', resonated with my aspirations.

Greatly influenced by my mother, I discovered later that I was more of an emotional being, not really made for the cut-throat world of business and that Ayn



Rand's philosophy was only a utopian concept. That was a phase. I was reading everything — fiction, non-fiction, autobiographies, romances — no particular favourites.

Life was a constant struggle as I tried to blend reason and emotion. Unanswered questions, self-doubt and a search for my life path led me into the esoteric world of occult and the books, where I believed I could find answers.

Today, any story that depicts how a person can fight against incredible odds to find their place in the world, inspires me.

### **What do you think of the future of theatre in Delhi and India?**

My love for histrionics and dramatics in real life and reel life found a medium in 'Indian Peoples' Theatre Association' (IPTA) in 1978. Initiated into this group by its General Secretary Aziz Quraishi, I was fascinated by its long and dynamic history. So much had been done through the ages and yet, I realised there is scope to do much much more!

I find that the survival of theatre has become quite difficult in the last few years. The cost of auditoriums has increased, there are less rehearsal places and plays need too much marketing. Bright young individuals out of sheer love for the medium spend the best part of their lives training themselves in a theatre discipline but end up in the job market to fulfill their bread and butter needs. Many young aficionados who start their acting career with full passion, dedication and sincerity are soon lured by the glamour of films and TV, thus using theatre merely as a springboard.

Today, the responsibility of a progressive organisation like IPTA becomes even more important. We want our youth to be able to treat theatre as a vocation and not have to give up their passion.

Though linked inextricably with the early days of the birth of the republic, IPTA Delhi is just as active today. Our focus was and is to inspire and create a new crop of talented youth who will carry socially



relevant messages forward as writers, actors, playwrights, directors etc.

However, Theatre is such a beautiful and vibrant form of expression. The most powerful and effective way to spread awareness and inspiration among the largest number of people. It cannot die and will only progress.

### **You are writing an autobiography. Could you tell our readers about your family background?**

My book *Papa...how I wonder what you are...* is a treatise on my life and my emotional voyage as the descendant of two renowned Indian parents, who had attempted to live their lives as they had thought best. My 'memoirs' reflect what I, as a daughter, had felt growing up in a family of fragmented souls.

I was brought up with large doses of fear, superstition, dichotomy and paradoxical values. I had been taught to rise above farcical traditions and was then forced to submit to them by an austere and high sounding patriarchal system.

Though born and bred in Delhi, I have a close association with Rajasthan. It is the native state of my parents. My father, Ramkrishna Dalmia – one of corporate India's most renowned men – was from Chirawa. My mother, Dinesh Nandini Dalmia, came from an erudite family in Udaipur and was known for her bold stance on education for women. She broke the Purdah System and was the first woman in the state, who did her MA. My mother had set similar high standards of education for us. 