

BOMBAY, NOT MUMBAI & UNBOMBAY

Bombay is the city where my mother, brother were born, and parents met. Where Dadaji waved the flies from my face so I could sleep undisturbed, and Marathi was my first (now lost) tongue. It was the address on the pale blue airmail letters coming, going like a tide in our USA mailbox.

UnBombay is a space more than place. A zone of possibility

and flux. It appears when Dimple drops the map, loses her way: Like an unexpected station, it's the in-between: a swimming city.

If Bombay resonates with the past and Mumbai, perhaps, speaks of a future, UnBombay is the present – a moment that requires your presence... then is gone.

A land-escape.

Tanuja Desai Hidier

album called *When We Were Twins* traversed the sonic landscape of Dimple's adventures.

Bombay – not Mumbai, as she makes clear – is in Hidier's blood. She was born in Boston and raised in small-town Massachusetts, studied at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, lived in New York and Paris, and moved to her current location, London, with her husband, before *Born Confused* was published. But Bombay was where her mother and brother were born, and her parents courted there. As she said in an interview, "I longed to write my way towards this metropolis of myth and memory – and, hopefully, into it." So, Dimple, now 19-and-a-half, gets uprooted from New Jersey and transplanted to that city of roots.

Dimple makes some new connections and some links go miss-

ing, as she reaches Bombay for a family wedding. Somewhat like Hidier's own romance: When she was in Paris, she and her husband-to-be were neighbours but they never met until they encountered each other at a Manhattan party.

DESI COOL

Born Confused is a careening ride that sometimes gets wild as Dimple roller-coasters her way to a wide-eyed look at herself. Now, she hasn't quite lost her innocence, but, as Hidier put it, there's a "blurring and blueing around the edges." That makes it, in many ways, a more mature novel, as Dimple herself has chronologically evolved into adulthood.

As Hidier mused, "*Bombay Blues* is certainly a much more bittersweet book than *Born Confused*, much more an exploration of ambiguity." The young lady on the

cover now exhibits a bindi formed in the symbol for infinity.

The sequel retains the verve of the first; still teeming with energy and music. If once in the past, NRIs were – or thought of themselves as – the "cool ones", Bombay has its own buzz, with "antiparties", "Kingfishers at Janata, dubstep at NoSoBoHo, a KFC landmark on Linking Road". On arrival, Dimple, though being brown in a brown land, feels "white. Beige, at least." She later figures: "It's getting harder to tell them apart. Us apart." This isn't the average NRI trawling for an exotic tale, but a discovery that there's plenty of hipness happening in the Old Country; a chronicle of Bombay cool.

Hidier plays with language and each paragraph is crowded with wordplay that can be described with a word that was especially invented for the Bombay local train experience – superdensecrushload.

Dimple may still be somewhat confused, but she no longer lets that confound her. That probably mirrors the arc of younger Indian-Americans, who may just have discovered the talent to bridge both worlds. Reason enough for Hidier to hang on to an early email address, with a handle that puts a twist on ABCD – ABCreativeDesi.

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CITYLIGHTS

Versova fishmarket: Breathtaking boats, fantastically focused fisherwomen laying out the catch like jewels.

Chor Bazaar: A trove of stories whispered through shipwheels, phonographs, medicine dolls.

Gilbert Hill: Ancientest Bombay, a 65-million-year-old basalt monolith earth-ejected in the event that effaced the dinosaurs. Divine view from top.

Mount Mary: A church with darshan. Rudrakshas and rosaries. And Mother Mary.

Street Art: Chapel Road, Waroda Road. The Longest Journey Is The Journey Inwards (mural by Jas Charanjiva off Chapel Road in Bandra).

Juhu Beach: Site of my parents' courtship strolls. Where, on day one for *Bombay Blues*, I cast my

sankalp/wish: made a vow to be open to whatever adventure lay ahead, have faith in that openness...and unimaginably wonderful things would occur. And they did.



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