

Bambaiyya

By: Venita Coelho

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Back in Bombay, and everyone is speaking a different language. I am suddenly aware of the voice of the city — unique, unmistakable, unputdownable.

Respect and familiarity jostle each other in the compound 'aapun'. When someone says 'Kharcha pani de kya?' they aren't offering to subsidise you, but to knock your block off. The Eunuchs begging at the signal flatter you with 'Eh heroine — teri jodi chumma rahe.'

It is a whole alternative language constructed out of the essence of the city. Isolated in far states and foreign countries, Bombayites find each other by the secret language that they have learnt as part of their Bombay experience. The building blocks of the language are Hindi films and ambition — where you're judged as either 'superhit' or 'flop'.

The language has spilled over into Hindi films, with Aamir doing an irrepressible Bambaiya in Rangeela and singing 'Aati kya Khandala?' elsewhere. Back in town I find myself slipping into khiskela mode. Talking the talk again, I find that it gives me an expression that I had forgotten.

Something in me that is essentially Bombayite wakes up and bounces energetically into each day saying 'Aapun bhi hit hain yaar!' I am even moved to compose an ode to all the cacophony of words and expression that make up the sound of the city.

*This city has its own voice
Jerry built language
Refuse sifted from many tongues
That the rhythm of the city
has hammered into shape*

*Ragged syllables raise a thin spine to the sun
Sentences are given as communion
Words pass as coin
Among those clinging by a handhold to the city*

*Here language is a poised abstract sculpture
Compounded of garbage scroungings
It is a whistle in the mouth of misery
To pipe the rich to shame
It is the city too vast to swallow
Broken to bits that fit in the mouth*

*It is a passport of belonging
in a city few can possess
It is the clanking discord of armour
Welded from tin cans, railway tracks,
corrugated iron sheets*

*It is the lifted head of the spirit
White hands rising joyous
above the dark city*