Passage From India

In the UK, 21 years does not a native make

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It’s one thing to assume you’re HIV positive,” Sunil Gupta says, “and another to be told you actually are.”

For Gupta, 43, that day came two years ago, when he and his lover went together to be tested. “He was negative,” Gupta says. “And I was positive.”

By now the Indian expatriate should be used to cultural chasms. He left his native Delhi at 15, stopping in Toronto before settling in the United Kingdom. “There was a problem with racism,” he says of London in the mid-‘70s. “It’s not like North America, where you can lose yourself. I didn’t fit in.”

Gupta’s outsider status contributed to his developing artistic talents, and two decades later, he has gained international recognition. A large body of his recent work—which combines photography, video, computer print-outs and new multimedia—is titles “Trespass.” Its theme? “Being an alien in Europe,” he says.

Gupta met his current lover at an archetypal British function: A Sunday afternoon tea party. Still, after two decades, he still finds the famous English restraint frustrating. “The most outrageous thing anyone has said to me is, ‘How are you feeling today?’—which at times can drive you nuts,” Gupta says.

Thanks to saquinavir, 3TC and d4T, Gupta is feeling quite well today. In facct, he’s never been ill. Still, he admits that his initial response to his diagnosis was terror. “I thought, ‘This is it. I’m going to die,’” he says. “Two years later, I’m over it.”

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