

## BREAD, CEMENT, CACTUS

In this exploration of the meaning of home, Annie Zaidi reflects on the places in India from which she derives her sense of identity. She looks back on the now renamed city of her birth and the impossibility of belonging in the industrial township where she grew up. From her ancestral village, in a region notorious for its gangsters, to the mega-city where she now lives, Zaidi provides a nuanced perspective on forging a sense of belonging as a minority and a migrant in places where other communities consider you an outsider, and of the fragility of home left behind and changed beyond recognition. Zaidi is the 2019/2020 winner of the Nine Dots Prize, which seeks to reward creative thinking that tackles contemporary social issues. This book is also available as Open Access.

Annie Zaidi is a freelance journalist and scriptwriter based in Mumbai, India, and was named by *Elle* magazine as one of the emerging South Asian writers ‘whose writing ... will enrich South Asian literature’. Her first novel, *Prelude to a Riot*, was published in 2019. Other books include *Known Turf: Bantering with Bandits and Other True Tales*, a collection of essays based on her experiences as a reporter, which was shortlisted for the Crossword Book Award in 2010, and *Love Stories # 1 to 14*, a collection of short fiction published in 2012. She also edited the anthology *Unbound: 2,000 Years of Indian Women’s Writing*, published in 2015.

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Annie Zaidi  
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India, showing places mentioned in the text.

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**ANNIE ZAIDI**

**BREAD**

*A Memoir*

**CEMENT**

*of Belonging and Dislocation*

**CACTUS**

With original illustrations by Yasmin Zaidi



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## ABOUT THE NINE DOTS PRIZE

The Nine Dots Prize was established to promote innovative thinking as a means of tackling pressing problems facing the modern world. Its name, which comes from the lateral-thinking nine dots puzzle, sums up what we were hoping it would result in – outside-of-the-box responses to the biggest issues of the day.

In 2018, for the second cycle of the prize, we asked the question ‘Is there still no place like home?’

The prize was judged anonymously, as always, with the Board selecting its winner based solely on their 3,000-word essay. As a result, new writers jostle with experienced authors, and submissions have come from people of all backgrounds with one shared ambition: to develop their ideas into a full-length book.

We were delighted by the several hundred submissions we received and the vast number of different ways each dealt with the question we posed. Despite having proven herself already as a journalist and a fiction writer, it was an honour to be able to give our winner, Annie Zaidi, an international platform fully to explore the ideas of home and belonging about which she is so passionate. Annie had been thinking about a project along the lines of *Bread, Cement, Cactus* for some time. We are proud that the Nine Dots Prize has provided her with the opportunity to do her vision justice.

It is our hope that once the book is published, Annie’s ideas will find a wide readership and prompt ongoing debate. Hers is a powerful and compelling voice with a unique insight into what home means for citizens of the world today.

Annie follows in the footsteps of our inaugural winner, James Williams, a former Google strategist turned Oxford student and philosopher, whose book, *Stand Out of Our Light: Freedom and*

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*Resistance in the Attention Economy*, was a warning on the societal impact of the attention economy and the political power held by just a few major tech firms. Published in May 2018, it received critical acclaim ('A landmark book' – the *Observer*; 'Switch off your smartphone, slouch in a comfy chair, and pay your full, undivided, attention to this short, absorbing, and deeply disturbing book' – *Financial Times*). While their subjects, backgrounds and expertise differ dramatically, Annie and James share a commitment to finding new ways of looking at important societal questions. It is in that spirit that the Nine Dots Prize was established.

We hope you will continue to follow the Prize, as we seek to ignite new discussions on the issues that affect us all.

Professor Simon Goldhill  
*Director of the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and  
Humanities (CRAASH) at Cambridge University and Chair  
of the Nine Dots Prize Board*

For more about the Nine Dots Prize please visit [ninedotsprize.org](http://ninedotsprize.org)

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