

HYPOCRISY AND HOPE BEHIND AMERICA'S IMMIGRATION BELIEFS IN SUKETU MEHTA'S THIS LAND IS OUR LAND: AN IMMIGRANT'S MANIFESTO

V.Sathya

M. Phil research scholar in English
Prist University, Pondicherry.
Contact: 9940828290/7598975413
E-mail Id: sathyavasulu14@gmail.com

Abstract

In this paper the author "Suketu Mehta's This Land is Our Land begins with an anecdote about his grandfather an immigrant well-versed in Britain's colonial experiments who, when confronted in London in the '80s by a fellow Briton asking 'Why are you in my country?' responds: 'Because we are the creditors. You took all our wealth. Now we have come to collect.' It's the thesis of the book but just the barest hint of the argument that Mehta will marshal by the time he's finished presenting his sweeping history of how solidly our world has been built by immigrants." Mehta took pains to travel and collect various stories of migration – he took these pains quite literally, as a large part of the book is a cataloging of sorrows that people shared with him. Focusing mainly on the United States as a destination country, he provides statistics and cases to show where and how migration policies are failing. Mehta wrestles with the exorbitant fears of the "Other," with the myth that the influx of migrants will sweep the country away. There are few subjects in American life that prompt more discussion and controversy than immigration. But do we really understand it? In This Land Is Our Land, the renowned author Suketu Mehta attacks the issue head-on. Drawing on his own experience as an Indian-born teenager growing up in New York City and on years of reporting around the world, Mehta subjects the worldwide anti-immigrant backlash to withering scrutiny. As he explains, the West is being destroyed not by immigrants but by the fear of immigrants. Mehta juxtaposes the phony narratives of populist ideologues with the ordinary heroism of laborers, nannies, and others, from Dubai to Queens, and explains why more people are on the move today than ever before. As civil strife and climate change reshape large parts of the planet, it is little surprise that borders have become so porous. But Mehta also stresses the destructive legacies of colonialism and global inequality on large swaths of the world: When today's immigrants are asked, "Why are you here?" they can justly respond, "We are here because you were there." And now that they are here, as Mehta demonstrates, immigrants bring great benefits, enabling countries and communities to flourish. Impassioned, rigorous, and richly stocked with memorable stories and characters, This Land Is Our Land is a timely and necessary intervention, and a literary polemic of the highest order.

Keywords :Immigration, Cultural issues, Identity crisis, Cultural identity, Objectives, A Public declaration of intentions, Motives, Sovereign, Expat, Migrant, Refugee, Multiculturalism.

INTRODUCTION TO HYPOCRISY AND HOPE BEHIND AMERICA'S IMMIGRATION BELIEFS :

America's origin myth is that we're a nation of immigrants, a haven for the Pilgrims arriving on the Mayflower, and the millions who followed in the centuries since. Yet the country's relationship toward newcomers is much more complicated than that storybook view. Ever since President Trump rode to power, xenophobia has been on the rise. His administration has separated thousands of migrant children from their families at the southern border, and most recently pushed to upend decades of family-reunification policy with a system that favors what he calls the "totally brilliant." Journalist Suketu Mehta, an associate professor of journalism at New York University, enters the fray with "This Land is Your Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto," an urgent and impassioned call for why countries should accept more migrants. "I am not calling for open borders. I am calling for open hearts," he writes. "The false story of the populists, their fear-mongering, their bigotry, can be fought only by telling the true story better, so it isn't lost in a fog of numbers and arguments and counterarguments."

The book's four sections "The Migrants are Coming," "Why They're Coming," "Why They're Feared" and "Why They Should Be Welcomed" examines the drivers of immigration, which includes the impact of climate change, global inequity and the legacy of colonialism that continues in the guise of multinational corporations. With scathing wit, he points out hypocrisies such as the past mass migrations of Europeans that led to the genocide of native peoples and details the many ways that immigrants contribute to the places where they settle. In upstate New York, Guyanese immigrants revitalized the decrepit industrial city of Schenectady; nearby in Utica, Bosnian refugees did the same; and so, too, in Hamtramck, Mich. (a city almost entirely surrounded by Detroit),

which is now dense with newcomers. Countries with too many restrictions will lose their competitive advantage, Mehta argues, citing the example of Germany, which sought out tech workers from abroad to fill a shortage, but only if they left their families behind, went home after five years, and learned German beforehand. Only 160 Indians applied for the 20,000 entry permits, with no desire to come to a country whose “welcome mat was studded with nails.” Mehta himself is among the quarter billion people living in a country other than the one they were born in. In the United States, 44 million, or 13% of the population, is foreign-born.

He weaves in his experiences of immigrating from India as a teenager to New York City, alongside the poignant stories of migrants he interviewed while reporting on the border of Mexico and the United States, Abu Dhabi, northern Morocco and southern Spain, and the border of Hungary and Serbia. His first book, the Pulitzer Prize finalist “Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found,” was a maximalist masterpiece, an account at times sprawling, at times intimate of the history, politics, culture and economy of the biggest city in India. His latest moves at a faster clip, with arguments backed by examples that skip from country to country within a single chapter. With this overview, he’s covering much ground, literal and historical, and some readers may wish Mehta could have lingered in places or followed the fates of migrants we meet only briefly. He ends on a hopeful, personal note. His brother-in-law, a progressive Democrat, became the first Indian American state senator in North Carolina after knocking on 10,000 doors and garnering the support of his neighbors. As the country heads into the 2020 presidential election, Mehta’s moving, cogent book can help us find a way forward.

AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Suketu Mehta is the New York-based author of ‘Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found,’ which won the Kiriya Prize and the Hutch Crossword Award, and was a finalist for the 2005 Pulitzer Prize, the Lettre Ulysses Prize, the BBC4 Samuel Johnson Prize, and the Guardian First Book Award. He has won the Whiting Writers’ Award, the O. Henry Prize, and a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship for his fiction. Mehta’s work has been published in The New Yorker, The New York Times Magazine, National Geographic, Granta, Harper’s Magazine, Time, and Newsweek, and has been featured on NPR’s ‘Fresh Air’ and ‘All Things Considered.’

Mehta is an Associate Professor of Journalism at New York University. His book about global migration, ‘This Land is Our Land,’ will be published by Farrar Straus & Giroux in June 2019. He is also working on a nonfiction book about immigrants in contemporary New York, for which he was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship. Mehta has written original screenplays for films, including ‘New York, I Love You.’ Mehta was born in Calcutta and raised in Bombay and New York. He is a graduate of New York University and the Iowa Writers’ Workshop.

THIS LAND IS OUR LAND: AN IMMIGRANT’S MANIFESTO – AN INTRODUCTION

Suketu Mehta’s new work says it all This Land is Our Land: An Immigrant’s Manifesto. It is a powerful defense of people’s right to migrate, a song of praise for multiculturalism, and a strong critique of Washington’s policies toward immigrants and refugees under President Donald Trump. He also reminds us of the link historical and moral between migration and colonialism. Mehta’s grandfather was once asked by a British man what he was doing in the United Kingdom, to which the Indian man replied: “We are the creditors. You took all our wealth [in the colonial period] Now we have come to collect.” This is also Mehta’s standpoint. Not only does he believe that the West has a moral obligation to accept people from countries it had once ruled or influenced, but he thinks this responsibility comes also from the West’s (mainly the United States’) current military engagements in countries like Iraq. “Before you ask other people to respect the borders of the West, ask yourself if the West has ever respected anybody else’s border,” he remarks. And then there are the practical arguments: Developed countries need migrants for demographic and economic reasons. And yet, the book is so thorough and inquisitive in the way it tells the stories of Mumbai that, he dare say, it could have just as well been written by somebody who lived there his whole life. Mehta never forgot his roots he did not forget the language, and was able to understand the cultural complexities and utilize the community networks that gave him a leg up at the beginning of his work on the metropolis. In This Land is Our Land, the author stresses how his family and community kept its traditions vibrant despite living in America (his older son, for instance, while raised mostly in the United States, was only taught by his parents to speak Gujarati until school age). And yet, he concludes in his new book: “he would [always] return to America with relief, because here he could be American. He couldn’t be English in England even when he went to India, he wasn’t wholly ‘Indian.’ he was an ‘NRI,’ a ‘non-Resident Indian.’” While Mehta’s account is sweeping, it is perhaps too sweeping. It zig-zags through themes and jumps from hope to misery in a somewhat chaotic manner. Paradoxically, while I found the bits on how Mehta’s family settled in the United States interesting, the part on South Asia the author’s birthplace was least compelling to me. That section is an account that rushes the reader through Indian history and packs its various threads in one ball, although some of them seem to have little linkage with the main topic of the book.

**HYPOCRISY AND HOPE BEHIND AMERICA'S IMMIGRATION BELIEFS IN SUKETU MEHTA'S
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND: AN IMMIGRANT'S MANIFESTO**

America's origin myth is that we're a nation of immigrants, a haven for the Pilgrims arriving on the Mayflower, and the millions who followed in the centuries since. Yet the country's relationship toward newcomers is much more complicated than that storybook view. Ever since President Trump rode to power, xenophobia has been on the rise. His administration has separated thousands of migrant children from their families at the southern border, and most recently pushed to upend decades of family-reunification policy with a system that favors what he calls the "totally brilliant." Journalist Suketu Mehta, an associate professor of journalism at New York University, enters the fray with "This Land is Your Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto," an urgent and impassioned call for why countries should accept more migrants.

In almost any other country on earth, Central Americans attempting to reach our southern border would be considered refugees, a designation that would guarantee them protection under international law. But in the United States, they are mere migrants who must, as a result of this label, fight desperately for a chance to cross over and to stay. Such tricks of language abound in the contemporary war against migration and against migrants themselves. Is it a border wall or a border fence? Are the teenagers who flee gang violence victims or criminals? Did the chain link separating children from their parents constitute a cage or a cell? "Etymology is destiny," Suketu Mehta writes in "This Land Is Our Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto," his searing new book about migration past and present. The category a person is assigned at a border asylee, refugee, forced migrant, economic migrant, expat, citizen is determined by where she comes from, and will in turn decide her fate, and even, at times, whether she lives or dies.

In an age of brutal anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy, "This Land is Our Land" offers a meticulously researched and deeply felt corrective to the public narrative of who today's migrants are, why they are coming, and what economic and historical forces have propelled them from their homes into faraway lands. We are, and always have been, a planet on the move, Mehta observes. Yet migration tripled between 1960 and 2017, and, with war, climate change and income inequality, mass migration will only get worse. "In the 21st century, your humanity is defined by your nationality," Mehta writes. So, too, your mortality. Mehta's own family immigrated to New York from India in 1977, when he was a boy. In the Jackson Heights neighborhood of Queens, he found himself part of a so-called "model minority" class of Indian-American engineers and doctors, yet this didn't spare him and his family the indignities of being new (and brown-skinned) in the United States. A teacher called him a pagan, and, during the Iran hostage crisis, a fellow teenager yelled, "[Expletive] Ayatollah," as he and the only other Indian student in his high school walked by. "We're Indians," Mehta replied. "[Expletive] Gandhis!" the kid shouted. Mehta introduces us to migrants who weren't as fortunate as he was: people who fear death in the desert, on a small boat in the Mediterranean or even high above the city of Tangier, jumping from roof to roof to evade the police. "One of them didn't make it; he fell into the alleyway and died," Mehta writes. To migrate is to risk everything. He takes us to the ironically named Friendship Park on the California-Mexico border, where family members can meet one another through thick wire fencing that is, when the park is open. "There's a semi-hidden place," Mehta explains, "where a section of the mesh ends, next to a supporting pole, big enough for part of a whole palm to slip through, four fingers all the way up to the knuckle." Week after week, a girl meets her boyfriend on the other side of the fence. One day there's a ring on her finger. "This Land Is Our Land" reads like an impassioned survey course on migration, laying bare the origins of mass migration in searing clarity. To the question of why a migrant left home yesterday or last month, one such person might answer: gang violence, drought, floods, war, lack of income. Mehta travels back further, to deeper, more distant causes; the global North's fingerprints are everywhere.

The book makes a convincing argument that contemporary migration is a direct descendant of colonialism. Europeans and Americans stole gold, silver, cash crops and human beings from the places people are now fleeing en masse. People migrate, Mehta says, "because the accumulated burdens of history have rendered their homelands less and less habitable." Put another way, "They are here because you were there." (Though one might wonder who this "you" is — the assumed reader of this book. Do migrants not also read?) How to quantify what is owed? Mehta offers some numbers to get us started. The amount of silver shipped between 1503 and the early 1800s "would amount to a debt of \$165 trillion that Europe owes Latin America today." This pattern of extraction has not waned with time, nor has the mass violence it facilitates. Mehta reports that every day 700 guns cross the United States border into Mexico, where they are sold for triple the price back home. To say nothing of climate change: Wealthy countries' enrichment is destroying the planet, hitting the poorest countries hardest of all. "This Land Is Our Land" is, in large part, a case for reparations. Between 1970 and 2010, Mexico lost \$872 billion in illegal financial outflows, most of it going from corporations doing business in the country to American banks. In nearly the same time period, 16 million Mexicans came to the United States. "They were just following the money," Mehta writes. "Their money." He points out that "forty percent of all the national borders in the entire world today were made by just two countries: Britain and France." Why shouldn't there be a formula, like a carbon tax, by which wealthy countries would be required to take in

migrants in numbers proportional to those countries' wealth theft and contributions to climate change? "If the rich countries don't want the poor countries to migrate, then there's another solution," Mehta suggests. "Pay them what they're owed."

He began this book in the wake of the 2016 election; he confesses that it was "written in sorrow and in rage as well as hope." It's possible to read the book as a breathless rant, but it's a rant that is well argued, cathartic and abundantly sourced. If some of his arguments sound familiar, it's only because, in response to the Trump administration's bombast and cruelty, they have been made again and again. "The new robber barons have come to power, and intend to hold on to it, on the wings of xenophobia," Mehta writes a postelection explainer that has become a truism. Or take a sentence like, "The migrants are no more likely to be rapists or terrorists than anyone else." Must we read such obvious truths? Perhaps we must. The rhetoric against immigrants is so baldfaced and insipid that it's hard not to be dragged down into a wrestling match in the mud. But Mehta mostly rises above, making a strong economic case for more migration. Far from being a drain on society, migrants contribute both to the places they leave (in the form of remittances) and the places they go. They represent 3 percent of the world's population but contribute 9 percent of its gross domestic product. Immigrants constitute 40 percent of the home-buying market in the United States, and far from stealing jobs, in fact help create new ones. Places like Buffalo, with its failed industry and rows of empty houses, need people to kick-start the economy again. "For many countries, immigrants are, literally, the future of the nation," Mehta writes. "The immigrant armada that is coming to your shores is actually a rescue fleet."

CONCLUSION

At the end of this present paper titled, "This Land Is Our Land" stresses the destructive legacies of colonialism and global inequality on large swathes of the world. When today's immigrants are asked, 'Why are you here?', they can justly respond, 'We are here because you were there.' And now that they are here, as Mehta demonstrates, immigrants bring great benefits, enabling countries and communities to flourish. Impassioned, rigorous, and richly stocked with memorable stories and characters, *This Land Is Our Land* is a timely and necessary intervention, and literary polemic of the highest order. Suketu Mehta is one of our finest thinkers and writers on the subject of immigration. What begins as a journey that mixes just the right amount of humor, anger, and bewilderment at the state of our nation, ends up with a surprising double-shot of hope. This is the rare book that is pragmatic and unsentimental, and yet oddly uplifting. This is a fierce and well-told story by a patriotic American about the value and challenges of our most inspiring heroes: our immigrants. A powerful, passionate, angry, and hopeful cry for sanity and justice by one of our finest writers. Mehta's heart-felt book is a much-needed and potent antidote to the anti-migrant rhetoric that has grown so threateningly loud of late. Let them come! Suketu Mehta has written a burning indictment of anti-immigrant hypocrisy, and an affirmation of hope in the real America—the America where we treat each other as human beings with a common future, and not a faceless problem to be solved by walls and barbed wire. Rousing and immensely readable, it is an anthem for all of us. As he explains, the West is being destroyed not by immigrants but by fear of immigrants. Ranging from Dubai and Morocco to New York City, Mehta contrasts the phony narratives of populist ideologues with the ordinary heroism of laborers, domestic workers, and others, and he takes readers on a heartbreaking trip.

REFERENCES

- [1] <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/feb/06/travel.features>
- [2] Mehta, Suketu (August 15, 2013). "In the Violent Favelas of Brazil". *The New York Review of Books*.
- [3] Mehta, Suketu (October 20, 2019). "Around the world, there's a battle of storytelling about migrants and Muslims. Populists are winning". *Scroll.in*.
- [4] Neill, Daniel (February 19, 2005). "You can't go home again". *The Spectator*.
- [5] Nayar, Mandira (29 December 2018). "Truth and dare A politically charged year will see equally charged non-fiction reads". *The Week*. Retrieved 14 March 2019.