

## A STUDY OF MIGRATION AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN SUKETU MEHTA'S "MAXIMUM CITY: BOMBAY LOST AND FOUND" AND "THIS LAND IS OUR LAND: AN IMMIGRANTS MANIFESTO"

V.Sathya

M. Phil research scholar in English  
Prist University, Pondicherry.  
Contact: 9940828290/7598975413  
E-mail Id: sathyavasu14@gmail.com

### Abstract

*The Diasporic Indian is like the banyan tree, the customary pictogram of the Indian mode of life, he extends out his roots in numerous soils, getting sustenance from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes, and that is the only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world. Diasporic writing raises questions regarding the definitions of 'home' and 'identity'. In "Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found" the journalist and fiction writer Suketu Mehta, newly returned from New York and searching for a way to understand the place he left as a youth, similarly faces identity crisis and sense of belongingness. The gentle and genteel world of Mehta's remembered childhood no longer exists and he arrived with a simple question: can you go home again? In this paper, we will examine the identity predicament and struggle for existence faced by the protagonist in the novel. The book's three sections "Power," "Pleasure," and "Passages". In the present paper the elements like search for home and identity crisis will be examined in a work written by the fiction writer and journalist Suketu Mehta, Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found. The author himself is the protagonist in his work, who left for New York in his youth and when returned; his remembered childhood does not exist. The identity crisis, searching for home and plight for the existence faced by the protagonist in the novel will be examined.*

*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. 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.*

**Keywords:** Identity Crisis, Protagonist, Nostalgia, Immigration, Multiculturalism, Cultural Identity, Diasporic, Existence, Protagonist, Belongingness.

### INTRODUCTION TO MIGRATION AND IDENTITY CRISIS

Migration is a major life transition. Like any such transition, it is stressful. One of the main stressors is dissonance between the host and incoming cultures. Immigrants are displaced between two conflicting cultures. Resettlement is often traumatic. Immigrant women transit complex geographical, cultural, and emotional spaces. Trapped between bicultural demands and values, they navigate socio-cultural realities of the adopted country in the absence of the familiar and the known. Thus immigrants experience geographical, cultural, linguistic, and displacement and consequent identity crisis. The focus of this chapter is on the experiences of immigrants and the impact on their identity. When people migrate from one nation or culture to another they carry their knowledge and expressions of distress with them. On settling down in the new culture, their cultural identity is likely to change and that encourages a degree of belonging; they also attempt to settle down by either assimilation or biculturalism. In this paper, various hypotheses explaining the act of migration and its relationship with mental distress are described. A new hypothesis is proposed suggesting that when sociocentric individuals from sociocentric cultures migrate to egocentric societies they may feel more alienated. In order to assess and manage migrants, the clinicians need to be aware of the pathways into

migration. The present research begins with Suketu Mehta's "identity crisis". It examines various features of his approach to crisis and its implication in eight-stage life span context. The crisis is a recurring phase in psychosocial development because it occurs in every phase of life from early childhood to late adulthood. Therefore, it has become an integral part of the identity formation process.

According to Suketu Mehta, culture is a way of life. It is an interactive process in which culture influences people and in turn is influenced by human activities. Mehta's views culture from an organic interdependent perspective, rather than an atomistic perspective. Suketu Mehta in Notes Towards Definition of Culture says, "It is only by overlapping and sharing of interests, by participation and mutual appreciation that the cohesion necessary for culture can obtain". Suketu Mehta is a writer who lives in New York, but Bombay is the city where he grew up. 'When I moved to New York,' he remembers, "I missed Bombay like an organ of my body." (Mehta,8). It might be nostalgia that led him back to Bombay. The writer discovers the city of his past through the people who make up its present. Culture refers to shared cognitive (mental) maps that provide us with guideposts and guidelines for social life. It provides shared definitions of given kinds of situations.

### AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Suketu Mehta is an Indian writer based in New York who has authored the book *Maximum City- Bombay Lost and Found*. Mehta's most recent book *This Land is Our Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto*. He writes, 'The first thing that a new migrant sends to his family back home isn't money; it's a story.' Mehta was also a finalist for the 2005 Pulitzer Prize and has worked on the screenplay of the Bollywood movie *Mission Kashmir* (2000), with novelist Vikram Chanda. He also worked on the screenplay of the movie *Wazir* released in 2016. In 1977, A 14-year-old Suketu Mehta moved to the US with his parents and two sisters. In Bombay, he left behind his closest friends. To them he would write letters, not of the aching loneliness or isolation he felt at the all-boys' Catholic high school in Queens, New York. In 2016, Mehta released an online novella *What is Remembered*, which detailed an immigrant's experience of loss and recovery of the self. For many years, since the release of the epic *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (2004), Mehta has been working on a biography of New York tentatively titled, *City of Second Chance*. He put aside that book to write *This Land is our Land* as a response to the building of walls, the cries of 'send her back', and the creation of lists that divide people into 'citizens' and 'infiltrators'.

### "MAXIMUM CITY: BOMBAY LOST AND FOUND" AND "THIS LAND IS OUR LAND: AN IMMIGRANTS MANIFESTO" – AN INTRODUCTION

In "Maximum City: Bombay Lost And Found", a native of Bombay, Suketu Mehta gives us an insider's view of this stunning metropolis. He approaches the city from unexpected angles, taking us into the criminal underworld of rival Muslim and Hindu gangs; following the life of a bar dancer raised amid poverty and abuse; opening the door into the inner sanctums of Bollywood; and delving into the stories of the countless villagers who come in search of a better life and end up living on the sidewalks.

Bombay native Mehta fills his kaleidoscopic portrait of "the biggest, fastest, richest city in India" with captivating moments of danger and dismay. Returning to Bombay (now known as Mumbai) from New York after a 21-year absence, Mehta is depressed by his beloved city's transformation, now swelled to 18 million and choked by pollution. Investigating the city's bloody 1992-1993 riots, he meets Hindus who massacred Muslims, and their leader, the notorious Godfather-like founder of the Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena party, Bal Thackeray, "the one man most directly responsible for ruining the city I grew up in." Daring to explore further the violent world of warring Hindu and Muslim gangs, Mehta travels into the city's labyrinthine criminal underworld with tough top cop Ajay Lal, developing an uneasy familiarity with hit men who display no remorse for their crimes. Mehta likewise deploys a gritty documentary style when he investigates Bombay's sex industry, profiling an alluring, doomed dancing girl and a cross-dressing male dancer who leads a strange double life. Mehta includes so-called "Bollywood" in his sweeping account of Bombay's subcultures: he hilariously recounts, in diary style, day-to-day life on the set among the aging male stars of the action movie *Mission Kashmir*. Mehta, winner of a Whiting Award and an O. Henry Prize, is a gifted stylist. His sophisticated voice conveys postmodern Bombay with a carefully calibrated balance of wit and outrage, harking back to such great Victorian urban chroniclers as Dickens and Mayhew while introducing the reader to much that is truly new and strange.

In "This Land Is Our Land: An Immigrant Manifesto", drawing on his family's own experience emigrating from India to Britain and America, and years of reporting around the world, Suketu Mehta subjects the worldwide anti-immigrant backlash to withering scrutiny. The West, he argues, is being destroyed not by immigrants but by the fear of immigrants. He juxtaposes the phony narratives of populist ideologues with the ordinary heroism of labourers, nannies and others, from Dubai to New York, 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. This Land is Our Land also 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. 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.

Suketu Mehta 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 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 a literary polemic of the highest order.

### **A STUDY OF MIGRATION AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN SUKETU MEHTA'S "MAXIMUM CITY: BOMBAY LOST AND FOUND" AND "THIS LAND IS OUR LAND: AN IMMIGRANTS MANIFESTO"**

Suketu Mehta traveled the same route five times. As a child, he settled with his family, originally from Gujarat in India, in the United States. As an adult, he returned to India, where he lived in Mumbai (Bombay) for two and a half years and wrote a book about the city. Titled Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found and published in 2004, it was a highly acclaimed work that he can't recommend enough. Mehta later returned to the United States, only to retrace his footsteps years later but this time in his reminisces and feelings in a new book, where he returns to the memories of his family voyage, to the story of how they, like so many others, moved to America, the promised land of generations of migrants.

The second titled of 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. The author 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. 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 he 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. Mehta knows everything about being on the borders of a culture, not here and not there, but with all the bane and boons of being able to travel between the two zones. He experienced racism in the United States and at the same time has felt the benefits of possessing an American passport when travelling elsewhere.

His first book, Maximum City, was a vision of India's prime metropolis by someone who had lived there as a child but spent most of his life in the United States. And yet, the book is so thorough and inquisitive in the way it tells the stories of Mumbai that, I 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: "I would [always] return to America with relief, because here I could be American. I couldn't be English in England even when I went to India, I wasn't wholly 'Indian.' I 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.

More importantly, *This Land is Our Land* is a bit idealistic in its message, contrary to the brutally down-to-earth *Maximum City*. Mehta points out that even the doubling or tripling of the United States' population would not make the country unlivable, compared to the demographic congestion of some other countries. Perhaps so, but regardless of anybody's opinion on this, can we imagine any government in Washington allowing this? "I am not calling for open borders," the author declares, "I am calling for open hearts." A noble idea, but unfortunately it may only be partially translated into good policies. "America has been good to my family. And we have been good to America. In my extended family, we are engineers, writers, doctors, businessmen, prosecutors, infrantymen, teachers," Mehta points out. It is a strong point and it largely reflects the general situation of Indians settled in the United States. A stereotypical Indian professional in the United States nowadays is a doctor or an IT specialist; as of 2011, the annual average income of an Indian family based in that country was twice that of a white American family.

But not every other community has seen such tremendous success and the settlement has not been so smooth in every case. For all its advantages, *This Land is Our Land* focuses mainly on strengthening the main argument rather than telling stories. The narrative is like a flame of the lamp that throws light on many spaces, but also makes shadows longer and is unable to cover everything equally. To be sure, I am not claiming that Suketu Mehta has looked only from the perspective of his community and that this has clouded his vision. As with *Maximum City*, his homework is painstaking. Among others, he talked to people on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, to poor Africans trying to get from Morocco to Spain, and to many others. The author's sources, both in people and references to written works, are significant.

But it needs to be pointed out that the United States has for a long time been a land of opportunity that selectively chooses whom it give that opportunity to (even if not always that precisely and sometimes even randomly). The United States has been, as Mehta himself points out, picking out the cream of the crop of other societies, draining the brains of other countries to its own benefit. Nations like India invest in their own education and support their own companies, only to see their best graduates and professionals in fields like IT move out to the United States. While this has nothing to do with morality – and here Mehta and I would agree – the trouble is that whether we like it or not, this cherry-picking attitude is arguably one of the reasons the United States is now so strong and so attractive to its own citizens. To put it brutally: The United States is not a refugee camp, but a multinational company that decides whom to hire. It is both moral and idealistic to believe that the state could behave otherwise. Its government could certainly behave better, to a certain degree, for example by reforming some of its unfair migration policies, and here *This Land is Our Land* makes a strong point that needs to be heard. Suketu Mehta's new book works on two levels: On a personal one, as an account of an Indian who had settled in the United States with his family, and on a general one, as an immigrant's – and not only an immigrant's – manifesto. Despite my reservations about some of its approaches, the book is valuable on both levels, and is written from a perspective we should consider in today's world.

The first part of the title of Mehta's work says it all "Maximum City: Bombay Lost And Found". There are so many definitions of 'identity' but as Sudhish Kakar quoted in *Modern Indian Novel* in English "at some places identity is referred to as a conscious sense of individual uniqueness, and at yet another places as a sense of solidarity with a group's ideal" (Pathak,52) seems to be more relevant with the discussion about search for identity. Our identity is an amalgamation of both the cultural difference and identification with the cultural tradition and the lack of either generally results in a state of 'loss' in the minds of many Indians by developing a kind of feeling of superiority or inferiority to fulfill his dream of developing the colonial mentality among Indians.

Suketu Mehta is a writer who lives in New York, but Bombay is the city where he grew up. 'When I moved to New York,' he remembers, "I missed Bombay like an organ of my body." (Mehta, 8). It might be nostalgia that led him back to Bombay. The writer discovers the city of his past through the people who make up its present. *Maximum City* is also a memoir of migration across cities. At one point, Mehta describes how when he was in high school, his father had shouted at him, 'When you were there, you wanted to come here. Now that you're here, you want to go back.' This was in New York, but it doesn't really matter; it could have been Bombay. The

episode made Mehta aware of a truth about himself: "It was when I first realized I had a new nationality: citizen of the country of longing." (Mehta, 33)

But more than memoir, *Maximum City* serves as a record of a writer's engagement with the city he lived in his childhood. When Mehta went back to Bombay in 1998 with his wife and kids, twenty-one years after he had left, his foreign-born children began to suffer from a variety of illnesses. One of his sons contracted amebic dysentery. "The food and the water in Bombay, India's most modern city, are contaminated with shit. Amebic dysentery is transferred through shit. We have been feeding our son shit." (Mehta, 30)

The frantic realism of this passage, mixture of panic and exaggerated irony, is not unselfconscious. It doesn't simply reflect the visitor's nervous response to the sight of a man defecating in public in India. Rather, Mehta notes the obvious--he has seen men relieving themselves on the rocks by the sea every morning, and twice a day, when the tide washes out, he can smell from his window the stench that rises from those rocks and sweeps over the half-million-dollar flats that spread toward the east--and as a good journalist he goes and talks to people who can tell him more.

One of Mehta's informants is Prahlad Kakkar, who made Bombay, 'a film about shitting in the metropolis.' Kakkar explains, "Half the population doesn't have a toilet to shit in, so they shit outside. That's five million people. If they shit half a kilo each, that's two and a half million kilos of shit each and every day. The real story is what you don't see in the film. There are no shots of women shitting. They have to shit between two and five each morning, because it's the only time they get privacy." (Mehta 137-138)

According to Mehta, the problem is that the Indians lack 'civic sense.' The private spaces are perfect, the public ones intolerably dirty. As the government cannot make the physical city any better, it resorts to frequent changes in the names of its streets and crossroads. Mehta knows this too, but he seeks to complicate the picture further. He sees in the renaming of his beloved city the assertion of the poorer people in Bombay, the Maharashtrian ghaties, those people who for him had so far generically been the 'servants.' One is tempted to say that the city was taken aback by those who don't have any toilets.

As Mehta points out, this is how the ghaties took revenge on us. They renamed everything after their politicians, and finally they renamed even the city. If they couldn't afford to live on our roads, they could at least occupy the road signs. Mehta, at the railway station feels his individuality being crushed by the endless rush of bodies, Mehta discovers a vision of belonging. "All these ill-assorted people walking toward the giant clock on Churchgate: they are me; they are my body and my flesh. The crowd is the self, 14 million avatars of it, 14 million celebrations." (Mehta, 581) It is tempting to view such a declaration as a direct response and even a resistance to the fear about the loss of the self amid the 'white stream in and out of Churchgate Station'. But it is just as probable that Mehta's response is over determined by Bombay's own recent history. After the razing of a mosque by Hindus in Ayodhya in December 1992, riots broke out in Bombay. In January 1993, there were fresh clashes instigated by the Shiv Sena, and Muslims suffered terribly in that round of violence. Then, two months later, on March 12, which was a Friday, ten powerful bombs were detonated in the city by the Muslim underworld. *Maximum City* began as a story on the 1992-93 riots. There is another way in which nothing human is alien to Mehta as a writer. He is comfortable in the company of murderers, or at least they are in his, since they offer him their stories. He asks a man who had set fire to a Muslim bread-seller during the riots, 'What does a man look like when he's on fire?' The rioter tells the writer: "A man on fire gets up, falls, runs for his life, falls, gets up, runs. It is horror. Oil drips from his body, his eyes become huge Oil drips from him, water drips from him, white, white all over." (Mehta, 3) Mehta writes about Monalisa-a bar girl from Bombay whom he met in a bar named Sapphire. Mehta writes that he was puzzled by the beer bars and couldn't understand why men spent large amounts of money there? he drawn his witnessed experience in the city of Bombay.

The second part of the title of Mehta's new work says it all "This Land is Our Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto". In 1977, a 14-year-old Suketu Mehta moved to the US with his parents and two sisters. In Bombay, he left behind his closest friends. To them he would write letters, not of the aching loneliness or isolation he felt at the all-boys' Catholic high school in Queens, New York. He did not tell them that a bully had christened him 'Mouse', and would trip him in the hallways. He did not mention the time when his family found hate painted across their car. Instead, he would share with his friends pages from comic books, which were available in the US, and were coveted back in India. Speaking on the phone from New York, he says, "The stories immigrants send back home is, 'Look, we've gone to America, this is the dream.' But it is actually not. It is a very emotionally fraught kind of storytelling." As an immigrant, even a teenage Mehta knew that the stories one shares with those one has left behind, are stories of success, anecdotes of joy, to prove that the move to the new land has, indeed, been a successful one.

The role of stories, those which we tell ourselves, those we recount to our family, and those which politicians

tell us, play a pivotal role in Mehta's most recent book *This Land is Our Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto* (Jonathan Cape; Rs599; pages 287). He writes, 'The first thing that a new migrant sends to his family back home isn't money; it's a story.' It could be about the first snowfall, or the first sight of Brooklyn bridge or the first taste of a hotdog.

But if stories bind, they can also sever. And of late, they've been used as tools to create discord and divisions. Mehta writes, 'Stories have power, much more power than cold numbers. That's why Trump won the election; that's why Modi and [Viktor Mihály] Orbán (prime minister of Hungary) and the Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte won power. A populist is, above all, a gifted storyteller, and the recent elections across the world illustrate the power of populism: a false narrative, a horror story about the other, well told.'

It is these false narratives that Mehta redresses in his book. He says, "The debate around migration is a contest of storytelling." He believes that all "these populists" whether it is Trump on television, or Bal Thackeray at Shivaji Park know how to tell a story, how to build a brand, and they do it adeptly, through lies. The only way those false stories can be fought is "by telling a true story better." And that is the job of journalists and writers. "Why are all these people demonising writers and journalists," he asks, "it is because they are truth tellers."

In 2016, Mehta released an online novella *What is Remembered*, which detailed an immigrant's experience of loss and recovery of the self. For many years, since the release of the epic *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (2004), Mehta has been working on a biography of New York tentatively titled, *City of Second Chance*. He put aside that book to write *This Land is our Land* as a response to the building of walls, the cries of 'send her back', and the creation of lists that divide people into 'citizens' and 'infiltrators'. He adds, "I felt I had to write this book now. The US 2020 election will be won or lost on the basis of immigration. It is the single most pressing issue for Americans." He decided to write this current book as a response to the present worldwide emergency. He adds, "I felt it almost like a calling. I did this because I felt angry. This book was born out of rage. Because of the staggering global hypocrisy built around migration."

*This Land is our Land* is an excellent example of crystallised rage. This is not the rage of spit and bluster, that leaves the recipient of it annoyed, but unmoved. Instead it is a rage borne from moral clarity and fostered by the truth. It is a rage that has been harnessed into adamant arguments, and which only the wilfully blind and selectively deaf can choose to ignore. Mehta comes to the issue of migration from personal experience, but through the stories of others, and in-depth research on the topic, he proves that we are all migrants. The fear of immigrants is stoked only by politicians to earn votes, make money, and to vilify the 'other'.

"Trump calls migrants robbers or rapists, I call them ordinary heroes," Mehta says. He tells us about families who get to meet only through a hole in the fence at 'Friendship Park' (a patch of land on the US-Mexico border between San Diego and Tijuana). There is no possibility for families to hug here, but a mother can put her finger through a fence and her daughter can touch it from the other side. Mothers who have not seen their sons in 17 years, or brothers who have not met in 20, can reach each other only through this 'pinkie kiss'. In Tangier's old town Mehta meets a young man Khalil from Guinea, his wife and their week-old baby boy. The couple had been in Tangier nine months, and were waiting for the baby to be a month old to make the crossing to Spain. An African smuggler promised to get them across, he took their money (€ 2,500), only to disappear. They planned to drug the baby for the boat ride, the only way they knew to keep the baby quiet through the crossing. They realise the journey that awaits them is perilous, possibly lethal. Mehta writes, 'Khalil wants to go to Europe. No matter the difficulties, he won't turn back, because, he says, 'my family needs my aid.'

"I felt I had to write this book now. The US 2020 election will be won or lost on the basis of immigration," says Suketu Mehta, author. In this book, Mehta underscores that the great animating force of migration is that most human and innate of desires to do better for one's family, to provide for one's children, and to toil towards a future that is brighter than the present.

AN 'IMMIGRANT'S MANIFESTO' is an apt title for the book because it is as much an exploration of migration, as it is a proclamation. *This Land is Our Land* is a public declaration of the belief and aims of all immigrants. It is a manifesto, which in no uncertain terms declares, 'I claim the right to the United States, for myself and my children and my uncles and cousins, by manifest destiny. This land is your land, this land is our land, it belongs to you and me. It's our country now. We will not reassure anybody about their racist fears about our deportment; we're not letting the bastards take it back. It is our America now.'

Mehta stakes a claim to America, as he believes all immigrants can lay ownership to the richer world, because of the past workings of colonialism and the present machinations of capitalism and climate change. Migrants from poorer parts have a right to settle into richer parts, and that right is essentially restitutionary. He opens the book with an incident in the 1980s, when his maternal grandfather was sitting in a park in London. An

elderly British man accusingly asked him, 'Why are you here? Why are you in my country?' To which his grandfather replied, 'Because we are the creditors. You took all our wealth, our diamonds. Now we have come to collect.' For Mehta the restitutionary nature of immigration can be simply explained by—we are here, because you were there. Mehta adds, "The British ran India not as civilising endeavour. But to make England rich."

While the US can choose to obfuscate and declare that they don't owe anything to India, since they were a colony themselves, they need to be held accountable for the ruin they are unleashing upon the planet today. While the US military alone is a bigger polluter than 140 countries combined, the "US has walked away from the Paris Accord and will do nothing about climate change," says Mehta. "Indians are suffering, and will continue to suffer, at enormous rates," he adds, "because the developed countries, built up their economies, with fossil fuels." Climate change of today has replaced the colonialism of the last century, as we will continue to see the rich countries get richer, and the poor countries get poorer. Mehta believes that the catastrophic effects of climate change, when entire countries get submerged, will unleash the kind of human migration that history has yet to witness. "You ain't seen nothing yet, when it comes to movement," he says, and even over a trans-Atlantic phone line I can hear his assertion in all capitals. "People who came to the US in the '60s, they are professionals, they are expected to be really grateful to America for letting them in. My book points out that this country would fall apart without immigration"

It is little surprise that Mehta's book has been met by a range of reactions. His article in the Washington Post 'I am an uppity immigrant. Don't expect me to be 'grateful,' and the book itself which released in the US in June, garnered the expected criticism from expected quarters. He notes how one reviewer on Amazon said he should be 'skinned alive' and must return to his 'turd-world country,' while someone else tweeted, "This cockroach needs sent back to whatever shit hole he crawled out of." But for Mehta what is interesting and meaningful is the appreciation he has received from people like him. He says, "I have been getting all these letters from Indian Americans, saying that my book has really made them stop apologising, for moving. People who came here in the '60s, they are professionals, they are expected to be really grateful to America for letting them in. My book points out that this country would fall apart without immigration." Now is not the time for the Indian American community to merely enjoy its economic success, instead they need to contribute to the public sphere, possibly join politics and "claim our place in the country," he asserts.

According to Mehta, everyone benefits from migration. For the refugees, it might make the difference between life and death. For the recipient country, it will bring young and enterprising migrants who having left home and embarked on an arduous journey will work hard and honestly. The immigrants will send back money to their homes, and the remittances will benefit the countries that they've left behind. As Mehta writes, "They will make their new countries richer, in all senses of the word. The immigrant armada that is coming to your shores is actually a rescue fleet."

## CONCLUSION

At the end of this, titled "Maximum City: Bombay Lost And Found", Mehta 'goes home' to the United States and at last he has found what he was looking for: a beautiful, varied, warm human nest, standing Tower of Babel whose inhabitants communicate in a dizzy mix of Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Urdu, Tamil and sometimes English. Through it all – we hear Mehta's own story: of the mixture of love, frustration, fascination, and intense identification he feels for and with Bombay, as he tries to find home again after twenty-one years abroad. Mehta follows his everyday life and the extreme poverty that comes with it. The poet's perspective on Bombay offers a poignant closing analysis of the city. It is a city filled with both despair and hope. Further informing this view, he notes how being away and coming back reveals the change in the city more clearly.

Mehta might have written "This Land is Our Land: An Immigrant Manifesto", from anger, but it is ultimately "an angry book with a happy ending". And the happy ending is that immigration benefits everybody. Mehta adds, "The end of the book is also a renewal of my faith in America." He loves America because it is one country made up of all other countries. 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.

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