

# ROOTS & ROUTES

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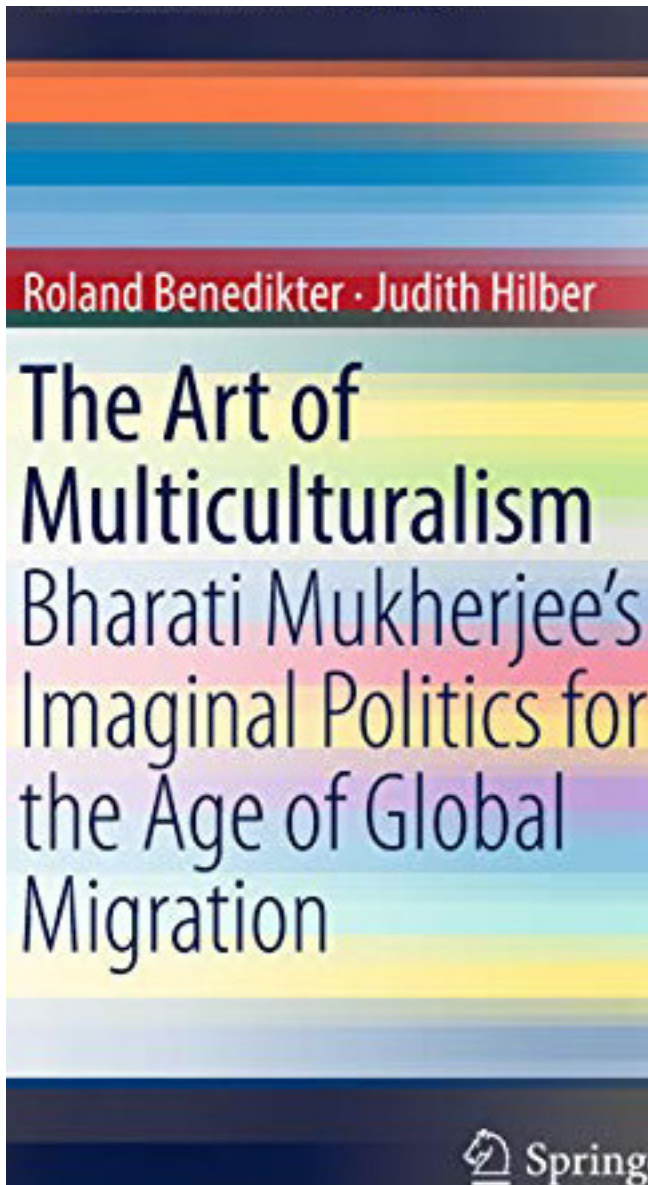


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Dear Readers,

Greetings!

Dear Readers! A Very Happy and Prosperous New Year to All!

With your kind support, encouragement, and feedback, GRFDT has completed 11 years and is ready to move forward with the same enthusiasm and energy. The year 2022 witnessed major movements in the areas relating to migration, diaspora, refugees, and asylum seekers. At one end, the Russia-Ukraine war pushed many people to forcefully migrate and look for a safe place in the neighbouring countries; at the other end, the rise in COVID-19 cases in China and many other parts of the world has had an impact on people's mobility. The year 2023 will carry forward many of the issues related to migration that have adversely impacted 2022. We hope and wish that the situation around the world will normalise and we will focus on more core areas that are related to migration and diaspora.

The current issue of Roots and Routes presents two articles and a book review. The first article of the issue is written by Tawafuddin Azimi, titled "Afghan Refugee Crisis and the Taliban Takeover: An Overview," which focuses on Afghan crisis. The article noted that Afghanistan refugees constitute the third-largest displaced population in the world today after Syria and Venezuela. The article argues that the political, social, and economic turmoil that ensued after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan has worsened the already precarious economic conditions. This situation has led to an increase in the number of refugees from Afghanistan. The second article by Himani Chauhan is titled "Greek police use asylum seekers to push other asylum seekers back to Turkey", raising the issue of how Greek policy keeps asylum seekers out of the country. The article argues that the policy is an attempt to push asylum seekers back to Turkey. The current issue also carries a book review titled "The Art of Multiculturalism: Bharati Mukherjee's Imaginal Politics for the Age of Global Migration," written by Deokar Mohini Arjun.

We invite readers to participate and share their experiences with us to have a meaningful engagement. You can communicate with us through email at [editorinchief@grfdt.com](mailto:editorinchief@grfdt.com). We wish you happy reading and look forward to your suggestions and comments.

Happy Reading!

**Feroz Khan**

## AFGHAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND THE TALIBAN TAKEOVER: AN OVERVIEW

### Abstract

Afghan refugees constitute the third-largest displaced population in the world today after Syria and Venezuela (UNHCR, 2022). Recurring natural disasters like earthquakes and droughts, chronic poverty, ethnic and religious persecution, and a state of perpetual war for the past forty years are the main factors that prompt Afghan citizens to seek refuge elsewhere. Refugee and migration movements have been commonplace in Afghanistan's history. The [Taliban](#) takeover of 2021 exacerbated these pre-existing problems, engendering a dramatic increase in the migration of Afghans (Watch, 2021). This article provides an overview of the Afghan refugee crisis and attempts to trace the factors behind the protracted crisis with an emphasis on the resurgence of Taliban rule in 2021. Furthermore, the socio-economic conditions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, one of the major host countries, are explored in the penultimate section. This article makes use of primary and secondary data from sources, including books, journals, and news reports to analyze the issue.

Keywords: Refugee, Taliban, Pakistan, Afghan

### Introduction

Around 6 million of the 70.8 million displaced people around the world are Afghans (IDMC, 2022), and more than half of Afghan refugees are internally displaced (IDMC, 2022). As of late 2021, Afghanistan has more than five million internally displaced persons, the majority being women and children. In fact, the displacement crisis is concentrated within the country's borders as the exodus of refugees to other countries is relatively low (IDMC, 2022). Many of them subsist in compromised living conditions and are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. Those moving out of the country seek refuge predominantly in neighboring Pakistan and Iran.

Reports indicate that more than 80 percent of Afghans who have fled their country reside in Pakistan and Iran,

while international migration to western countries is much lower in contrast. Official estimates show as many as 1,425,500 registered Afghan migrants residing in Pakistan, in addition to one million unregistered migrants (Staff, 2021). [The life of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is a matter of concern as many refugees experience injustice and discrimination in the host society.](#)

### Drivers of Afghan Migration.

The factors which persuade its citizens to flee Afghanistan include a wide range of social, economic, political, demographic, and environmental issues that have been prevailing for long. These conditions worsened as a consequence of the Taliban takeover in 2021, triggering a dramatic increase in the number of refugees. The retrogressive measures adopted by the Taliban government have nullified the progress gained by Afghanistan in recent decades. Women and girls are the worst affected as their rights to livelihood and education are severely curtailed, with the Taliban imposing a total ban on girls' education and subjecting women to heavy restrictions at the workplace. (Peace, June 2021) [Afghanistan has been ranked in The Global Peace Index among the world's three least peaceful countries for the last ten years.](#)

In 2021, the Index ranked Afghanistan the lowest, dubbing it the least peaceful country in the world, mired in wars, terrorism, and internal conflict. In the Human Rights and Rule of Law Index 2021, Afghanistan ranked 44th out of 173 countries with index points of 7.40. (Economy, 2021) "Afghanistan is marked by a history of conflict, which is interstate and intrastate, as well as non-state conflict. In particular, the increased resurgence of the Taliban in 2006 was accompanied by an increase in violence in the country. Combat-related deaths increased from 1,595 in 2005 to 29,940 in 2019. The internal conflict between the Taliban and the government has intensified since 2013 and was the deadliest conflict in the world in 2018. In addition, the Islamic State (IS) became active in the country in

early 2015, leading to an increase in terrorist attacks, particularly in the capital Kabul. There are already first signs of increased terrorist activity in the country.” (Clara Albrecht & Britta Rude & Tanja Stitteneder, 2021, p. 51)

Afghanistan has historically been affected by ethnic conflict. Ethnic violence in Afghanistan reached unprecedented levels with the rise of the Pashtun-majority Taliban in the 1990s. The Taliban espoused Pashtun nationalism and carried out ethnic cleansing against other ethnic groups, particularly the Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks. (Times, 2001) The Taliban government of 2021 backed away from its promises of a more inclusive and tolerant rule as it continues to commit barbarous injustices against other ethnicities. According to Human Rights Watch, “in early October 2021, the Taliban and associated militias forcibly evicted hundreds of Hazara families from the southern Helmand province and the northern Balkh province. These evictions followed earlier evictions from Kunduz, Daikundi, Uruzgan, and Kandahar provinces.” (Malikzada, 2022)

As per estimates, almost 50 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line in 2020. The country had a GINI coefficient of 0.3, which indicated a relatively equitable distribution of wealth. But the return of the Taliban rule in 2021 aggravated poverty to such an alarming extent that 97 percent. Afghans are estimated to be at risk of extreme poverty by 2022. (UNDP, 2021) “According to a World Food Program survey, nine out of ten respondents suffer from food shortages (WFP 2021). In addition, food prices are rising dramatically. There are reports that the prices of flour, oil, gas, and beans have increased by 63 percent in one month (Save the Children 2021). Many public-sector employees have not received money for at least a month (Al-Arabiya News 2021), and the United Nations warns of a humanitarian disaster (UN News 2021).” (Clara Albrecht & Britta Rude & Tanja Stitteneder, 2021, p. 49)

Afghanistan is frequently exposed to natural disasters like droughts and earthquakes, and the country is ill-equipped to deal with them. Afghanistan ranks at 175 in the ND-GAIN Index 2019 (Gain-ND, copyright 2022) and is calculated to be the 12th most vulnerable country to climate change disasters. “The Afghan population is

facing severe drought this year, similar to 2017 and 2018, with the last drought resulting in 13.5 million people suffering increased food shortages (Climate Change Project 2021).

### **Afghan refugees in Pakistan**

The first major influx of Afghan refugees to Pakistan corresponded with the Saur Revolution in 1978. Pakistan’s current refugee population of 1,438,955 is almost entirely composed of Afghans. But in recent years, Pakistan has been adopting policies that seek to restrain Afghan immigration. For example, between early 2017 and January 2022, the country reportedly fenced around 90 percent of its border with Afghanistan, making formal and informal border crossings much more difficult. However, due to the ‘porous’ nature of the border, undocumented crossings continue to occur (AEAA, 2022).

Despite constant protests by Afghan refugees in crisis, the authorities have failed to pay heed to their demands. “The situation is more oppressive for families of more than four members as affordable rented housing is inaccessible to them. Furthermore, providing families with food and other necessities has become increasingly difficult as prices of essential commodities are soaring...The prevalence of corruption in the administrative setup of the UN High Commission for Refugees hinders asylum seekers from accessing appointments. For example, an appointment is possible with 200 USD, but someone who lacks the money has to wait for months with no certainty of an appointment” (Malikzada, 2022).

Afghans seeking asylum in Pakistan are vulnerable to extreme poverty and insecurity. They face a myriad of problems which include lack of food and shelter, lack of access to basic education and proper healthcare, and discrimination and harassment by local authorities. A constant risk of deportation looms large for undocumented migrants. A factor that worsens the plight of these refugees is the corruption and inefficiency of the UNHCR in Islamabad, which deters them from accessing welfare schemes.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, almost half of the Afghan refugees who are deprived of their rights to basic health and education are under 18 years of age. The report adds that 74 percent of the

2.8 million Afghan refugees estimated to be currently residing in Pakistan were born in Pakistan (International, 2022).

## Conclusion

The political, social, and economic turmoil that ensued after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan has worsened the already precarious economic conditions. Afghanistan has long been in the vortex of international military campaigns and ideological confrontations. This has led to chronic economic and political instability. The Taliban takeover, instead of stabilizing the situation, has exacerbated it. Internal and international agencies monitoring the situation unanimously state that the standard of living of the people has dramatically deteriorated. Malnutrition and poverty have become endemic. Occasional natural calamities like earthquakes have worsened the situation. Obviously, people look for ways to escape from the country, and thus legal, and not-so-legal ways are utilized by emigrants. The influx of refugees into neighboring countries like Pakistan and Iran has exponentially increased. Eschewing the extremist positions and embracing moderation in policies by the ruling establishment may lead to an improvement in the life of the Afghan people.

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## GREEK POLICE USE ASYLUM SEEKERS TO PUSH OTHER ASYLUM SEEKERS BACK TO TURKEY

An innovative yet callous measure used by the Greek police to keep asylum seekers at bay was revealed in the Guardian article – *‘Revealed: Greek police coerce asylum seekers into pushing fellow migrants back to Turkey’* – written and published by Katy Fallon, Klaas van Dijken, Bashar Deeb, Jack Sapoch, and Mohannad Al-Najjar (Fallon et al.). This article talks about the Greece-Turkey border and how Greece uses asylum seekers to pushback other asylum seekers. This has strong implications for migrants as they often cross borders to live a better life, but in reality, they end up facing harsh brutalities during the process. The article focuses on Greek police using Syrian as well as Moroccan migrants to push newly arriving asylum seekers back to Turkey. This article is of significance to other asylum seekers and migrants as such acts have been occurring for over two years, but it was not until recently that they were shown in the limelight.

Historically, Greece-Turkey relations have been strained since the time of the Ottoman Empire. To summarise, Greece won its War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire in 1821, and that was only the beginning of the straining relationship between Greece and Turkey as since then, both countries have fought numerous conflicts and crises against one another (Cross, 2021).<sup>[1]</sup> In effect, Greece is not a desirable place for people of Turkish origin to seek asylum. However, that does not stop asylum seekers in Turkey from crossing the border into Greece, as they are unaware of the circumstances they will face upon arriving.

The Greece-Turkey border was also a significant entry point into the European Union (EU) during the 2015 Syrian Crisis. Syrians can enter Turkey without a visa and from there, they can travel to Greece or Bulgaria, which serves as their entry point into the EU and can thus claim asylum there (Fargues & Fandrich, 2012). However, during the early years of the Syrian Civil War, Greece significantly increased its guards on the Greece-Turkey border to keep Syrians out (Fargues & Fandrich,

2012). In addition, the Syrian entry point to Turkey has been “kept closed since March 2015,” and Turkey even “completed a border wall in 2018” (Adar et al., 2020, 2). This reflects how Turkey has a large population of Syrian refugees as they had to place border controls to stop Syrians from entering the country.

However, in early 2020, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that the country would be opening its border to Europe and since then the number of pushback reports from Greece to Turkey has significantly increased (Adar et al., 2020; Fallon et al., 2022). Fallon et al. detail the experiences of migrants in these pushback operations. The article highlights how these migrants did not want to be involved in these operations but were instead forced into those roles like “slaves” (Fallon et al., 2022). Upon arriving at the Greek-Turkey border, specifically the Evros River, asylum seekers were met with Greek police who were ready to “strip, rob and assault” them before either sending them back across the “river to the Turkish bank” or cramming them into cells at the local police station (Fallon et al., 2022).

The police would then identify if any of the asylum seekers spoke English and approach them with a deal to “work for the police or be charged with human smuggling and go to prison. In return for a permit to remain in Greece for one month, [they] would remain locked up during the day and released at night to push back other asylum seekers” (Fallon et al., 2022). This reflects how the asylum seekers were blackmailed into working against other asylum seekers like slaves since this was the only way that they could stay in the country. In effect, Greek officials outsourced and weaponised their asylum seekers against other asylum seekers.

This article used real-life experiences to place this issue at the forefront, rendering it an accentuated emotional quality which can strike a chord among the readers by showing how fascinating yet disturbing their experiences are. Interestingly, the article included photos of these

migrants pushing other asylum seekers back to create some sort of fear and intimidation about them, which shows how the media is quite biased and often used to create fear amongst others. Further research into this issue led to more local articles repeating what Fallon et al. stated in their piece. This makes one wonder why such experiences are often only reported on a local scale rather than on an international scale. The article was published by the Guardian, so only regular followers would have read it when it first came out, robbing the issue of the attention it deserves.

It is so unfair that such experiences are very much unheard of. If more people knew about it, then more action could be taken globally to counter it, which shall help improve the lives of asylum seekers. It is saddening to know that asylum seekers have left their homes and environments under brutal circumstances to find safer places where they will receive adequate care, but instead, they face more harsh realities at the borders. As such, we are all aware that borders are often regulated through violence, but why are the experiences of asylum seekers at these borders often unheard and neglected? Also, why is nothing done to improve their lives? These questions continue to evoke the conscience of the global civil society and the promises of human rights for all.

[1]See Cross 2021 for a more detailed overview of Greece-Turkey relations

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## THE ART OF MULTICULTURALISM: BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S IMAGINAL POLITICS FOR THE AGE OF GLOBAL MIGRATION

**Ronald Benedikter, Judith Hilber (2018), The Art of Multiculturalism: Bharati Mukherjee's Imaginal Politics for the Age of Global Migration: Published by Springer Briefs in Sociology, ISBN 978-3-319-89667-0, Pages 142**

Currently we are witnessing an ongoing global refugee and migration crisis. There are millions of people who are leaving their home, city, and country and working as migrant workers across the world. Most of them are subjected to exploitation, the multidimensional problem of multiculturalism and discriminatory treatment as a way of “unwelcoming people” but at the same time refugees have been welcomed. In this context, this book makes an original and timely contribution to a topic whose importance and need will continuously increase throughout the world.

Ronald Benedikter's and Judith Hilber's book is about Bharati Mukherjee, born in 1940 in Calcutta, India. She passed away in 2017 in the Manhattan United States of America (USA). She was an acclaimed American writer of novels on multiculturalism, globalization, and the postmodern condition. It focused on her imaginal world, as disclosed through literature and an interdisciplinary concept of art. She was an immigrant herself from India and then became a citizen of Canada and the USA. In this book, Mukherjee explored the internal culture clashes of her immigrant character, and also shared some experiences with racial discrimination and xenophobia during this journey. She highlighted the relation between multiculturalism, global cultural alignment, and the role of politics and its impact on the migrant peoples. *“Mukherjee was a genius in her own right, was a strong voice, charismatic character, and as energy-rich in imaginary power as in practical will (The New York Times wrote on the occasion of her death).*

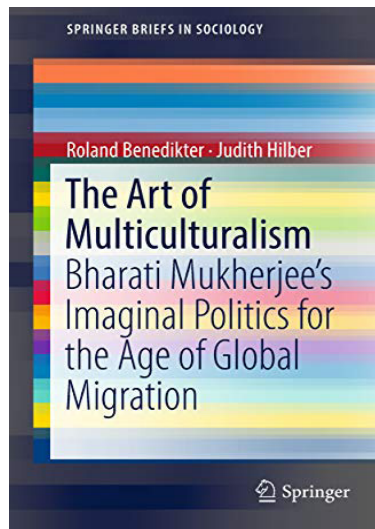


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This book has six sections and highlights the contribution of Mukherjee for rethinking contemporary ‘Imaginal Politics for the Age of Global Migration’ in new ways through the literary work. It is about her search for new ways to translate the principles of literature and art into the socio-political sphere. It also described her imaginal world through literature and an interdisciplinary concept of art. She dedicated her work to nurturing “differences in unities” and “unities in differences” by the literature and painting as a tool. It aimed to inspire the creation of a “new society with outsiders or Immigrants” through “Imaginal Politics”. The basic idea of the book is that how could we understand multiculturalism only as a specific policy for the marginalized and disadvantaged? In short, can multiculturalism be understood, in a more inclusive way to bridge the gap between social cultures, populations, and strata, including residents and immigrants by imaginaries?

The introductory section provides an overview of the relationship between literature, art, and a reason-oriented concept of multiculturalism for the present age. It also highlighted the use of ancient Indian miniature painting techniques for highlighting western postmodern writing which was used by Mukherjee. In the introduction section, the authors gave a short overview of the intentions and contents of this book. Mukherjee's core intention was the integration of “imaginal Politics”, social investigation, and humanization of politics through inner human experiences.

The first section begins with explanation of the idea of multiculturalism in the neoliberal version. Mukherjee said that it's become an instrument for a retreat from overall solidarities and political responsibilities for social standard and welfare. In other words, the multiculturalism became an ideological instrument. It

gives an overview about the practice of multiculturalism in 1970 to 1990s in western countries in the context of postmodern pluralism and decentralization. Mukherjee said that the idea and practice of multiculturalism had to go beyond the ideologies toward a new “social imaginary” capable of connecting minorities and majorities socially and culturally and which could be provided by literature and paintings. Benedikter and Hilber sheer lights on Mukherjee’s opinion about the cultural minorities (immigrants). The cultural minorities should have an equal participation, support, and stimulation. She also talks on the equal narrative rights for the minorities particularly for non-traditional immigrants because she experienced racial discrimination herself.

The second section deals with the Hybridization of Art which is a core method of Mukherjee and is explored through various examples. Mukherjee strongly believes that restructuring imaginary “spaces” both within the self and in the social realm through literature. It can take inspiration from architecture, design, and an interdisciplinary science dedicated to complexity. She also believes in merging literature, and architecture in a broader and inter-disciplinary sense.

The third section begins with a description of Mukherjee’s artistic agenda. “Fusion is a key term for the imaginary merging of the East and the West”. It is explained as a contextual dimension and social perspective by Mukherjee. The idea of “fusion” as a method of integrating different artistic disciplines like writing and painting as the socio-political utopia of a pluralistic multicultural society. However, the alternative raw material for such transformation of the various cultures brought by migrants. Another technique is an unique artistic characteristic is the literary employment of a technique that belongs to the 16th and 17th-century Indian court painting.

The fourth section explores the tricks and procedures that Mukherjee smoothly applied to connect and integrate the Indian legacy with western postmodernity. She sheared light on the four crucial techniques for connecting the immigrants and the West. They are, *Foreshortening Paralogy*, *Simultaneity Incommensurability*, *Polyfocus Dissemination*, *Demarginalization Decentralization Trace*. In Indian miniature painting, the “foreshortening” is the perspective which is used for close-up and

zooming in on the unseen or marginal details. The “Paralogy” means a method of rendering that contradicts logical rules. It is a technique to enlarges the particular sections in the picture, while shortening others. The *Polyfocus Dissemination* means a *compressed*, but at the same time *free floating* world between “*equal*” emerges. The *Demarginalization Decentralization Trace* is a technique of the majorizing and minorizing of positions in paintings. This section explored the procedure by comparing the teachings of Indian Mughal painting with Western Postmodernism.

The fifth section brings to the foreground the sources of the 20th century used by Mukherjee. One of the most important was the Pop Art of the 1960s, coined by Lawrence Alloway in 1958. Pop art is characterized by syntactic complexity (merging two forms of expression). It’s an interdisciplinary extension of media that becomes manifest in assemblages and collage. The familiarity of the subject and literal presence of the object by which paradoxically an alienation is achieved, and close connection with technology which mean that art and technology fuse or mutually transform each other and are not opposing rival. It was the core inspiration of Mukherjee taken from the art of storytelling in Indian Moghul miniature painting. She used Pop Art to merge the metaphoric with the liberal, like art with concrete reality including politics. Mukherjee did a comparative analysis of Pop Art and explored how it is inspirational after 400 years after the Moghuls?

The sixth section, “Mukherjee and the features of multiculturalism as Imaginal Politics” glance at the features of multiculturalism through various examples. It highlights the interconnection of future art with technology for bridging the two cultures. Also, the section also explained the broader concept of multiculturalism and the potential fusion of modernism and postmodernism and the process of mainstream multiculturalism. It also provides the explanation about the relationship between mainstream culture and multiculturalism in a broader sense. Lastly, the authors underpinned the opinion of Mukherjee. For Mukherjee, multiculturalism was like postmodernism was a reservoir and receptacle of plurality, diversity, difference, and variety.

Lastly, Mukherjee highlighted the outlook of multiculturalism, radical pluralism, and the dangers of

“Imaginal Politics” in the world. Where processes of de and acculturation occur on too broad a scale and in too short a time, counter-reactions occur. As seen in the recent re-nationalization of Western democracies and other countries around the world. It has marginalized the idea of multiculturalism in reflections on its too radical increase and impact. These reflections are taken very seriously by Mukherjee. In fact, they are considered critical. There is no novel or story of Mukherjee of the 20th century that does not dedicate a good part of its pages to mirroring and reflecting the dangers of radical difference.

The last section is about the conclusion. It deals with the shifts in the perception and reality of applied multiculturalism since the 2000s, the recent shifting of the notion of multiculturalism in the framework for the refuse crisis, and the migration crisis in 2014. Mukherjee explained their opinion about the refugee crisis at global level and migration crisis, combined with increasing mobility in the world. This section highlighted the changing framework of multiculturalism and its application as said by Mukherjee in 1970-90.

Overall, this book serves to open up a new inclusive and boundary-transcending view on “Imaginal Politics”. This book is analytical, intellectually sharp, in narrative style, and has an original take. It is a very comprehensive and inspiring book with the simplicity and complexity of multiculturalism. It is characterized by playful, original, and highly accessible style, great accuracy, philosophical depth, and success in creating awareness about the necessity of “differences in unity” and “unity in differences”. The book is very engaging because

the authors explore the new crucial viewpoints on the concept of multiculturalism with the combination of socio-political engagement with sophisticated aesthetic inter-and trans art texture. It is brilliantly plotted with a straightforward narrative structure and use Pop Art technique to enrich the book with pictorial elements wherever possible.

This book gives an important message that we must exercise inclusion, transcending societies by thinking of them as multicultural and global to eliminate forms of discrimination against immigrants and cultural minorities. It is an excellent book for educators, politicians, and cultural professionals for the inclusive study of multiculturalism and immigration where fiction, literature, and art infuse the socio-political aspects with new imaginaries. It would be helpful for all interested in contemporary writing, contemporary politics, and in achievements of a great female artist.

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Review by **Deokar Mohini Arjun**

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