



# Home Between Crossings: author of Bead Bai Kila ndege huruka na mbawa zake

*Sultan Somjee*

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It's mid-twentieth century. Uprisings and nationalism shake Great Britain's East African Empire. It's the beginning of exoduses, expulsions and migrations of Asian Africans to Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and generally to the West. Concurrently, dramatic changes in vernacular languages, styles of dressing and worship are happening among the Satpanth Khoja community. It's the pivotal moment in the history of this cloistered minority in Africa in the process of alteration of its traditions, and subsequently its identity. Moti Bai, the middle aged wife of a bead merchant on the savannah, feels confounded. She lives through the turmoil with the resilience of a mother questioning her children's shifting identity and the future. Where do we belong? Where will we go? Who are we now without a country? Without our language? Without our our traditions? When tormented by the compelling inner voices, Moti Bai seeks affirmation in the communal chanting of the Satpanth song. That was how her Khoja forefathers faced the turbulent voyage from India to Africa and then the strain of pioneer days by singing to the scared. She would talk to the bandhani, her wedding shawl and two other art objects of female decor. One is the Maasai beaded necklace. The other is a Swahili kanga gifted to her by grandmother Nana (also called the Mouth of Mombasa) to settle the family divided by religion and race. At heart, Moti Bai is an artist, a lover of sacred music, and of colours and patterns of the savannah. Her art objects lie hidden in her English suitcase under her bed. In them she reads the beauty of the landscape and vastness of the blue sky of Africa where she was born. Home Between Crossings carries an enthralling feminine voice spoken in Frame Story. The literary genre embeds Saurashtran Oral Traditions as spoken in homilies called waez in the jamat khana.

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