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Editorial: Focus on Indian migrations

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Abstract

In this issue, we have brought together articles focusing on Indian and South Asian migration experiences and patterns. India has been a major player in international migration, including remittances flows, but also a major scene of internal migrations. This is to an extent perhaps expected as the second largest population in the world residing across a vast geography rich with ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. The 2018 United Nations World Migration Report states that the Indian diaspora is the largest in the world, with over 15.6 million people living outside the Sub-continent. International migration from India can be traced back even before indentured labour flows initiated under the British colonialism. India is a leading country of origin and a major supplier of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled work force. These migration flows from India has attracted significant interest among scholars of migration studies. In this editorial, we are offering some insights and an overview of Indian migrations since the British era.

Keywords: international migration; India; historical context; indentured labour; skilled migration

Introduction

Rather coincidentally, there appeared several papers accepted for publication with a focus on Indian migrations, and it prompted us to consider highlighting Indian migrations in this editorial introduction to encourage more studies at the highest level. A simple screening on search engines generate millions of scholarly entries on migration and not surprisingly, half of these are mentioning India. Nevertheless, among the most influential works in migration literature, there are only a few studies mentioning the country (Sirkeci *et al.*, 2017). India has been the largest supplier of international labour migrants with a diaspora population exceeding 17 million, followed by Mexico (11.8 million) and China (10.7 million) (McAuliffe and Khadria, 2019). Again, in the same report, it is stated that more than 40 per cent of all international migrants worldwide in 2019, i.e. 112 million, were born in Asia. Indian migration history, like many others, can date back to prehistoric times, and today millions of Indians are dispersed around the world (Rajan and Kumar, 2010). India has also been marked as a major source country supplying human resources across the globe since the 1930s (Khadaria *et al.*, 2008; Shirras, 1931; Skeldon, 2010). It is essential to underline that both internal and international migration played a role in shaping India's cultural and social history (Bhagat, 2015).

We are not claiming that Indian migrations are unique, in fact, in many respects, these flows show similar patterns and characteristics with other flows and corridors around the world.

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Davis (1951), in his study half a century ago, indicated that 30 million Indians moved across borders and only about 24 million returned to India between 1834 and 1937. He also highlighted that 1.5 million Indian workers were sent to British colonies under indentured labour system during 1834-1920. Mehmud (1997) has divided history of migration from India in British era into three distinct categories: a) indentured labour from British colonial territories to other parts of the Empire; b) migrations propelled by notions of sovereignty and nationhood; and c) migrations characterised by compulsory exchanges and moves around the division of India into distinct different nation states.

In recognition of the place and importance of Indian migration, in this issue, we have chosen India as a focus and brought together articles dealing with different aspects of Indian mobility. It is not a special issue by design and we have included some regular articles in the second part of the issue. We do hope these articles presented together will be of use in enhancing debates and scholarship on Indian migration.

Despite motivations (i.e. seeking security and betterment of life in broadest terms) remain categorically the same, there are significant changes in trends and patterns of international migration responding to critical historic shifts such as the abolition of slavery. Contemporary Indian migrations can be said to have started with indentured labour mobility and continued, more recently, with a large volume of skilled migrants in sectors such as medicine, engineering, management etc. India provides the largest number of skilled migrants in industrialised countries. Otherwise, it was long perceived as a source country for cheap labour. Most Indian migrant workers in the British era were indentured labourers in British colonies. In this issue, readers will find scholarly work and insights shedding light on various aspects of Indian international migration to various countries such as UAE, US, UK, and Canada.

Beginning of mass migrations from India

International migration from India is often traced back to the indentured labour system in Indian migration history despite the fact that emigration of Indian has a much longer history than what the reference point of British era or what we call colonialism seems to suggest (Jayaram, 2004). In ancient Indian history, there are evidence of Buddhist Bhikkus who travelled into remote corners of central and eastern Asia. It is also known that there were constant contact between pre-colonial India and the Coromandel coast and the islands of South-East Asia. It was observed that “there is some reason to think that a colony of Indian merchants lived permanently in Memphis, Egypt from about 500 BC” (McNeil, 1963: 210). In the 19th century, when European explorers like Burton first ventured into central “Africa, they were guided on their way by Indian merchants” (Tinker 1977:2-3). They were mostly Muslims, Bhoras and Banyas from Gujarat region. Others reaching Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Malaya and Indonesia were mainly from southern India Nattukkottai Chettyars or Chettinad in the Tamil region of India.

Few scholarly attempts to understand migration before the indentured labour system offered insights on Indian migration history, but research on the same era is very scanty and dispersed. There is no clarity on Indian emigration history before the indentured labour system. Therefore, in Indian migration history, the most crucial phase was emigration due to the penetration of mercantile capitalism in Asia.



Beginning of mass human migration from Indian sub-continent can systematically be traced back to the abolition of slavery in 1834. Pre-independence migrations can be divided into periods of: indentured labour migration (1834-1910), emigration under Kangany system (1910-1935) and free migration (1936-47) (Rajan and Kumar, 2010). Indentured labour from India was mostly to Mauritius, Natal and Fiji. During the period 1834-1910, over half a million indentured migrants entered Mauritius; in Natal, 152,189 arrived between 1860 and 1911, while total of 60,965 Indians landed in Fiji between 1879 and 1916 (Gillion 1962). Calcutta remained the main “coolie attachment” centre and port of embarkation until 1870, after which the recruiters cast their net towards the united Province and Bihar. The literature also shows that roughly about 30 million migrants migrated out of which 24 million had returned to the country due to unfamiliar cultural environment and hostility from natives (Vertovec 1995; Thiara 1995). Shirras (1931) highlighted the statistics of British India and its dependency on the rest of the world. A large number of migrants emigrated to Ceylon, Malaya, Mauritius, South Africa, West Indies, British Guiana, England and Wales, Scotland, East Africa (Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, Zanzibar, Rhodesia, Nysaalanad), Fiji, USA, Australian Commonwealth, Hongkong, Canada, Egypt and Japan) total 2,795,000 in 1921 or later (Shirras,1931).

Migration in British colonies was managed under two systems: The coolie system and the penal system. Under Coolie system, which was a kind of slavery and wage free system, workers were sent to colonies governed by Europeans to work on plantations, mines, railroads, canals and various other similar projects in the 18th and the early 19th centuries (Mahmud, 1997). Indian migrations in the British era, in coolie system, included indentured labour, the maistry system, the kangany system and penal transportation. The rapid expansion of colonies had led to a huge demand for labour in public works such as roads, harbours, offices and jails. The alternative to forced work for the convicts was the death penalty or long term imprisonment.

Indian labour migrants (part of the slave trade) were having a major share in British colonies settling in Burma and Malacca straits during 1753-59 (Bates, 2003). The abolition of slavery in Britain in 1833 marked a turning point in the plantation sector. British abolition of slavery was followed by the French (1848), Danish (1848), and the Dutch (1863). This led to a shortage and immediate crisis of labour force in plantations, agriculture especially in sugar production, leading to a dramatic decline in agricultural production. There was a dire need for the emergence of a new system of work force which so far was met by slave labour.

British Guyana was the first territory of the Caribbean to receive Indian indentured labourers in 1838 (Roberts and Byrne, 1966; Audebert and Dorai, 2010; Raza and Habeeb, 1976; Kondapi, 1951; Vertovec, 1995). It was followed by other parts of the world such as South Africa, Mauritius, Fiji and other colonies of Europe (Brain, 1985; Gerbeau, 1986). Over half a million Indian indentured labourers were sent to the Caribbean between 1838 and 1917. With characteristics such as being very much adjustable in agricultural fields, industrious, respect for sanctity, contract and authority displayed by Indian labourers, there was a rapid increase in indentured labour flows from India (Kale, 1995).

Though migration motive of these migrants was supposed to be better economic opportunities, for most, it was an exile into bondage as they moved from one form of poverty and servitude to another (Roberts and Byrne, 1966). This refers back to the dynamic nature of conflict and insecurity as drivers of human mobility (Sirkeci and Cohen, 2016). Crossing

borders always pose many threats and challenges to emigrants (Sharma et al., 2015; Behera, 2011).

History of indentured Indians has been very well documented in South African historiography in terms of migration and settlement offering a wealth of information on migratory and labour experiences of indentured labourers from India (Hiralal, 2013). Table 1 offer insights into the magnitude of Indian indentured labourers in various parts of British colonies from 1834 to 1917.

Table 1. Indentured Indian Migrants in various parts of British Colonies

Colony	Period	Immigrants
Mauritius	1834-1871	>5,000,000
Natal	1860-1911	152,189
Fiji	1879-1916	60,965
British Guiana	1838-1917	238,909
Trinidad	1845-1917	143,939
Guadeioupe	1854-1885	42,326
Jamaica	1854-1889	36,420
Dutch Guiana	1873-1916	34,304
Martinique	1854-1889	25, 509
French Guiana	1856-1895	4,354
Grenada	1857-1885	3,200
St.Vincent	1860-1880	2,472
StKitts	1860-1865	337
St. Croix	1862	321

Sources: Roberts and Byrne (1966); Twinker (1977); Gillion (1962) and Rajan and Kumar (2010)

Post-independence migration from India

1947 is the beginning of the post-independence migration in India. In this period, we can identify two major groups of international migrants. First, dating back to the 1950s, is migration of people with technical and professional skills and expertise destined to countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia and often settling permanently. The USA and the UK received the majority of Indian migrants and flows to the USA and Canada had increased in the 1990s (Nayyar, 1994). Migration to the UK is largely pinned down to the colonial links, kinship and friendship networks and those leaving Punjab during the partition were a significant segment in these flows (Campbell, 2000).

It is evident that, Indians along with Polish and Pakistanis form the largest immigrant groups in the UK (McAuliffe and Khadria, 2019; Khattab et al., 2011). Indians comprised the third largest immigrant group in Canada (319,000) in 2000. Understandably, migration between India and the UK received a lot of attention as a major corridor in the 21st century migrations (Khadria, 2006).

The large stock of Indian migrants worldwide includes unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers. Indian skilled migration to developed nations in the North has been dominated by IT professionals (Khadria, 2008; Ray, 2013). Emigration policies at home and in destination countries played a role in development of these migration flows (Coseman and Goddereis, 2013; Banerjee, 2013; OECD, 2011; Ruhs, 2011; Khadria, 2009). In STEM fields, India and China has been leading origin countries of high skilled workers. India has emerged as the most



sought-after source country for the supply of professionals to the developed countries (Khadria, 2009, 2006, 2001). Migration from Maharashtra and Karnataka were dominantly characterised by these high skilled IT workers often destined to the EU and the US. At the same time, entrepreneurship migration mainly from Gujarat and Punjab were inclined towards the US, Malaysia, Singapore and Australia (LLP G.T.T, 2016). It is also argued that these particular migration streams have also led the development of IT industry in Bangalore in India, and considered to be an example of social and economic remittances (Dobbs, 2012).

Second major stream of migration in post-independence era from India has been characterised by flows to the Gulf countries meeting the labour needs in growing oil extraction businesses and related growth in construction sector (Weiner, 1978). Six GCC countries together account for about 96 per cent of labour migration from India and with 2.8 million Indian immigrant population, Saudi Arabia was the main destination country in 2015 (LLP, G.T.I, 2016). More recently United Arab Emirates surpassed that to become the number one destination with 3.1 million of a total of 8.5 million Indians in the Gulf countries (Calabrese, 2020). The total number of Indian labour migrants in the Middle East rose from about 800,000 in 1972 to 1.7 million in 1975 and then to about 2.8 million by 1980 (Demery 1986). This destination region hosts roughly about half of the Indians abroad: The 2018 UN World migration report puts the total figure around over 15.6 million. In the five years to 2019, on average about 450,000 Indians migrated to the Gulf countries per annum (Calabrese, 2020).

Certain states of India, such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana and Rajasthan have been main source countries for those migrating to the Gulf countries. Many of these mostly unskilled migrant workers employed in construction sector and retail sector. On the other hand, migrants from Kerala, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in southern states of India were semi-skilled and were mostly employed in healthcare and retail sectors. The literature also shows that Indian migration to these destinations in the Middle East and in general have been male dominated (Tumbe, 2014, 2015).

India has also been known for the large volume of remittance inflows which has been an important strategy to diversify risk and reduce credit constrains in rural households (Singh, 2018). India is leading country in receiving remittances and remittances from the GCC countries alone constitute about half of total remittances received in India (Wadhwan, 2018).

India has a large share (about 2 million) in tertiary emigrants arriving in OECD countries, followed by China (1.7 million) and Philippines (1.4 million). Together these three countries account for one fifth of total tertiary educated immigrants in OECD countries (Goldin *et al.*, 2018). The 2017 OECD report also showed that one in every five highly educated migrants in the G20 countries were from India.

In this issue

We wanted to draw attention to the Indian migrations as part of the effort of decolonising migration scholarship. As brief and selective notes and quotes above show India is one of the key players with very large diasporas and busy migration corridors. Yet, not enough attention is paid to these patterns and experiences. We encourage our colleagues, and particularly those from India to submit their good research to *Migration Letters*.

In this issue, our coincidentally India focused articles include a study by Sahoo and Pradhan that focuses on adaptation and acculturation process of displaced tribal communities in India.

They discuss data from three wildlife sanctuaries and despite exceeding our standard word limit twice over we wanted to allow space for this interesting study. Singh and colleagues introduce a detailed analysis of internal migration in India with a focus on three key states with the lion share of domestic migrations. Sati also analyses the drivers of internal migration in Uttarakhand Himalaya and also throws in a case study alongside the rich data presented. The following article by Ghatak and Jha draws our attention to the role of economic reforms on reducing barriers for inter-state migration in India. Parwez and Pedi looking at the receiving end of internal migration in India, offer a detailed analysis of the effects of internal migration on economic growth and convergence between states. Ansary and Rath bring us a more topical analysis as they examine migration flows from Murshidabad district of West Bengal and also touching upon the impact of COVID-19 pandemic with reference to current interviews with returnees.

Alongside these articles focusing on India, we have also regular articles on a recent migration policy change in Slovakia and on ward level deprivation among Muslim, Hindu and Sikh minorities in Birmingham, UK. Final article in this issue, by Liversage explores remarriage patterns among three groups of older migrants compared to Danish peers using the Danish administrative data.

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