

'Contesting Spaces & Negotiating Development:

A Dialogue on Domestic Migrants, State and  
Inclusive Citizenship in India'

National Seminar, March 25-26, 2016

Sponsored by Indian Council of Social Sciences  
Research (ICSSR) New Delhi

Organized by:

Center for Public Policy, Habitat & Human  
Development

School of Development Studies  
Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai)

## **Rationale of the Seminar**

### **Introducing Space, State and Citizenship**

Indian seems to have been reinvented by the unintended electoral-political insurgencies in circa 2014. And in this reinvention of the republic, space is at the center of political struggles and contestations over conventionally normalized narratives of power, politics and policy. Shifts or alternations in political regimes often present an opportunity to interrogate the 'empty homogenous time-space' of development and contrast it with 'heterotopia' of spatial and political dispersals in contemporary India. The gap between political equality and social and economic equality is disturbingly high, especially in post-reforms India. And some groups, especially dalits, tribals, women and minorities of various persuasions suffer from a disproportionate share of burdens and are also barred from participating freely and fairly in the collective political and moral life of the nation. Not surprisingly, India lives in several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible and normalized by the utilitarian ideology of modern statecraft in India. It imagines history as a linear seriality of past, present and future that can be measured, stored and retrieved at post-dated time in the spatial utopia. More importantly, it is freed from the external constraints of politics. It is well-known that spaces are not innocent territories or so-called sacred spatial flows; they are discourses of power that produces particular understandings about the world, characterized by internal debate, the evolutionary adoption of new ideas, and blurred boundaries of utopias and dystopias (Agnew et al. 2003; Painter, 1995). If spatial exclusion has resulted in increased violence of displacement, spatial management of vast populations of free-floating groups has lent more legitimacy to technocratic

practices of governmentality leading to further oppression of the poor and marginalized. (Agamben; 1998, Sunder; 2005). In short, revolving around unpacking experiences of spatial mobility of domestic/internal migrants and their political consequences, the seminar proposes to spatialize relations between the state and society in a way that state, nation, territory, citizenship and development are mediated by interloping and overlapping complex forms of real or illusory power, politics and policy in their discursive, analytic and historical context.

## **Conceptualizing Domestic Migrants & Inclusive Democracy in India**

We increasingly live in an era of migration; migration of goods, services, capital, banking, technology, culture, ideas and - most importantly - people. According to some estimates, there are around 100 million temporary domestic migrants in India. Migrants are undoubtedly guaranteed protection by the Indian constitution under Article 19, which states that 'all citizens shall have right to move freely throughout the territory of India and 'to reside and settle on any part of the territory' and also under Article 29, which protects their right retain their regional identity by sending their children to schools conducted in their own regional languages. But more often than not, domestic migrants, especially so-called un-domiciled domestic migrants, suffer from a lack of formal residency rights; lack of identity proof; lack of adequate housing; low-paid, insecure or hazardous work; no access to state-provided welfare services including denial of rights to participate in elections even though elections in India have acquired the mythical status of 'the greatest show

in Earth'. Thus, these exclusionary practices lead to their disenfranchisement and treatment as second-class citizens.

Recently, in response to a petition in the Supreme Court of India regarding the extension of voting rights to Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), the Court has proposed to the Election Commission of India that a similar system also be made available for domestic migrants. Facilitating the participation of domestic migrants in the country is of utmost importance if elections are to become truly inclusive. According to Census of India 2001 and National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) 2007-08 estimates, three out of ten Indians can be classified as domestic migrants who have moved across district or state lines. In 2001, 309 million persons were migrants based on place of last residence, which constituted about 30% of the total population of the country. (Data from the latest census is unavailable). The major reasons for migration have been work/employment, business, and education, marriage, moved at birth, and moved with family/household. Scholars argue that government data tends to underestimate the flows of seasonal/circular migration, a stream dominated by people belonging to socio-economically deprived groups with an extremely low asset base and poor educational attainments and skill sets. It is this floating segment of the migrant population, mostly comprising people working seasonally in brick kilns, construction, plantations, mines and factories that is most vulnerable to exploitation by labour contractors and faces relatively greater hurdles in participating in elections and politics.

Inspired by Myron Weiner's classic work 'Sons of the Soil', the workshop interrogates the relationship between the state and migrants and attempts to revive interests in studying ethnic demography- a branch of political demography that examines the size, composition and distribution of population in relation to

both government and politics and deals with the political determinants and political consequences of population change. In the words of Rajani Kothari, 'In India, politics and government are something that cannot be explained away. To no small measure, the state has become the arbiter of the society'. Thus, examining the relationship between the state and migrants has acquired urgency both in politics and the policy universe. We note here that in addressing the fundamental clash between migrants' claims to equal access to their country and the claims of the local groups to equal treatment and protection of their 'space' by the state, Professor Weiner considered some of the ways in which government policy makers might achieve greater equality among ethnic groups without simultaneously restricting the spatial and social mobility of some of its own people. In short, though his prophesy that 'domestic migration in a multiethnic society like India has more destabilizing effects and tends to arouse intense conflict over 'protection of space and economic opportunities' has somewhat moderated by increasing regionalization of politics and economic growth, his insightful analysis still remains relevant. Also, the seminar presents us an opportunity to critically interrogate the continuing relevance of the modernization paradigm in migration studies, which views the process of modernization as providing incentives and opportunities for mobility and creating conditions for increasing internal migration. Also, we propose to reexamine 'development-induced' economic migration resulting from unequal development trajectories to go beyond neo-classical and structuralist interpretations of migration.

New generation migration studies suggest that existing studies have often overemphasized the 'impoverishing effects of migration', arguing that the returns from migration are beneficial especially in the spaces of high growth. In other words, migrants are often illiterate, uneducated and dwell in

slums, but they can also be entrepreneurs, traders, shopkeepers, call-center professionals etc. undertaking economic activities in the core or periphery. Recently, scholars in migration studies have contested the 'powerless and impoverished image' of migrants and noted that the returns from 'accumulative migration' can improve over time as migrants acquire more knowledge, confidence and skills. Using a social exclusion and livelihoods approach they also highlight why some migrants have succeeded in entering 'accumulative migration pathways' while others have been excluded. Thus, migration, especially seasonal/circular migration has increasingly been recognized as a part of the normal 'livelihood portfolio' of poor people and does not always occur only during times of emergency or distress.

In the seminar we emphasize the relationship between the state and so-called mobile/migrant citizens and contemplate various forms of citizenship including hyphenated ones in India. We are aware that despite the state's claim to neutrality, migrants' citizenship rights are often violated. In fact, the state often arbitrarily constructs various categories of citizenship, privileging one over another in a complex maze of power relations and the interplaying claims to identity and citizenship. Being an ambiguous category, 'domestic migrants' encompasses various shades of human movement within the territorial boundaries of the nation - permanent, short-term, temporary, seasonal, circular, development affected, conflict-ridden etc. Thus, the seminar aims to discuss the interaction of these varied societal groups with the state; dwelling on the notion of citizenship, electoral inclusion, migrant politics, engagement with civil society etc.

While there is a vast literature on the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of domestic migrants in India, there is little information about their participation in elections and

politics. Thus, the seminar proposes to review the historical trends, extent, patterns and types of domestic migration in India and identify the legal and political barriers/obstacles faced by domestic migrants in exercising their voting rights. Also, the seminar examines the impact of voting by domestic migrants on voter-turn outs and electoral outcomes as elections are at the centre of democracy in India. Thus, it is crucial to examine whether or not voting by domestic migrants has the potential to alter the political fortunes of winners and losers at the centre and the states of India. Further, the seminar focuses on dalits, tribals, women, minorities, children and various excluded groups including migrants from the North East for developing a social justice and inclusive development perspective.

Informed by International experiences in tackling political inclusion of domestic migrants, the seminar also highlights administrative and governance challenges in the nature of creating a database of domestic migrants, identification issues and related electoral malpractices and logistic nightmare besides also reflecting on unintended consequences of altering existing political and electoral relations between the state and voters (such as employment, citizenship and the potential of disturbing inter-communal relations, and the rise of violence by so-called 'sons of the soil' against the domestic migrants especially poor and disadvantaged ones). Policy makers, however, may take comfort in the memorable insight of Prof Weiner that "it is not inequalities between ethnic groups that generate conflict, but competition. Inequalities, real or perceived, are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for ethnic conflict" and extend voting rights to migrants in their place of destination. Last but not least, the seminar proposes to initiate a dialogue on theorizing domestic/internal migration across social science disciplines, thus, enabling policy makers, academics and activists to recognize that migrants not only need formal identity but also

require actual realization of citizenship rights through public action.

## **Structure of the Seminar**

This two-day seminar from 25 March to 26 March 2016 aims to bring together leading social theorists, social scientists, policy makers, development researchers, demographers and civil society practitioners to examine the contested relationships between the state and domestic migrants and their implications for discursive and material practices of space, territory, nation-state, development and democracy in India.

As we plan to publish selected papers in the edited volume by a reputed publisher, we welcome papers addressing, but not limited to, the following themes/issues:

### *Introducing Migration Theory & Research: Talking across Disciplines* (Roundtable led by Director, TISS)

- Theme 1 - Who are We? State, Domestic Migrants & Citizens (or refugees)
- Theme 2 - Counting or Forgetting?: Concepts, Methods & Data on Domestic Migrants
- Theme 3 - From Invisibility to Identification; Aadhar cards, ration cards, election ID cards, pan cards etc.
- Theme 4 - Ready to Move? Debating whether Migrating for Poverty or Growth
- Theme 5 - Land, Livelihoods & Domestic Migration



- Theme 6 - Travelling Voters or Invisible Citizens? Legal and Policy Challenges
- Theme 7 - Extending the Franchise: Elections, Political Parties & Domestic Migrants
- Theme 8 - Domestic Migrants, Sons of the Soil and the Politics of Violence
- Theme 9 - Domestic Migrants and Gender perspective
- Theme 10 - Dalits, Tribals and Minorities: An Inclusive perspective on migrants
- Themes 11 - Children & Domestic Migration
- Themes 12 - Domestic Migrants in Slums; Urban-Rural Migration Challenges
- Theme 13 - Migrants on the Margins: Bonded Labour, Forced-migration/Displacement/Project-Affected/ Conflict-ridden migrants and others
- Theme 14 - Public Action, Civil Society and Domestic Migration
- Theme 15 - Migration from the North East
- Theme 16 - Domestic Migration and Social Protection Programs
- Theme 17 - Domestic Migrants, Remittances and Market: Financial Inclusion or Exclusion of Domestic Migrants

- Theme 18 - Experiencing Migration Archives: Case-studies of Domestic Migrants

## **Public Lecture: Concluding Session on 'State & Domestic Migrants'**

The seminar will conclude with a public lecture by an eminent public intellectual in a field of his/her choice or expertise. It would be an open event, publicised and promoted across the city of Mumbai in its various educational institutions.

### **Seminar Details**

The seminar is open for senior researchers/academics, independent researchers, post-doctoral, PhD and MPhil scholars from relevant social science disciplines. **The seminar also plans a poster session for select papers/ visuals/ documentaries from students in any discipline or course.** An abstract of maximum 500 words, with a brief resume of maximum 300 words should be sent by **15<sup>th</sup> January 2016**. A committee will review and select from the proposals the final list of presenters to be invited. Invitations will be sent by **20<sup>th</sup> January 2016**. The deadline for the submission of papers is **20<sup>th</sup> March, 2016**. We plan to invite presenters/speakers as well. Though we will try our best to accommodate all participants, due to limited budgetary support, only select participants will be provided travel and stay expenses.

The convener of the seminar is Dr. Ashwani Kumar and co-convener is Dr. Sandhya Iyer. Abstracts may be sent to Shashwat Dhar (conference coordinator) at [shashwatdhar@yahoo.com](mailto:shashwatdhar@yahoo.com) & Souradeep Banerjee (conference coordinator) [banerjeeakash33@gmail.com](mailto:banerjeeakash33@gmail.com)

