Migration Studies

What is the issue?

- Migrants have made notable contributions to their countries of origin as well as destination, which is especially true for South Asia.
- Migration studies need to put in perspective changing patterns of movement.

What is the status in India?

- For several years, India has ranked the highest among countries that receive remittances from migrants.
- States such as Kerala have benefited enormously from migrants to countries in the Persian Gulf.
- We need to understand the distinctive characteristics of migrants from different states of the country, their choice of destinations and the patterns and purposes of migration.
- There has been very little by way of research to understand the changing patterns of migration from India.
- We need fresh thinking at both the national and state levels.

What is the current state of research on migration from India?

- Kerala has conducted a series of 8 migration surveys while Tamil Nadu, Goa, Punjab and Gujarat have produced state-level data only once.
- Migration is a changing phenomenon and understanding its dynamics requires research at adequate intervals.
- Moreover, state-level surveys have focused only on legal and voluntary cross-border migration.
- And, surveys have focussed on households to understand the emigrants or return migrants.
- It was only last year that a survey in Kerala tried to understand the people intending to migrate.

Why migration studies shouldn’t be confined to labour?

- There is much work on labour migration from India.
- Studies should be done on cross-border human trafficking, Indian entrepreneurs in different countries, student migration, family migration, undocumented migration and the challenges faced by migrants in

integration.
- These themes need both **methodological and theoretical attention**.
- We must **conceptualise migration studies** beyond producing databases - though that too is important.
- We need to understand migration through the lens of historians, psychologists, sociologists, geographers and legal specialists.
- An **interdisciplinary approach** could make the field that is currently dominated by economists and demographers much richer.

Why gender based study should be done?

- The migration patterns are dissimilar between genders.
- So, migration studies would benefit from a gender studies perspective.
- Current research focuses on a small sub-population of woman migrants such as nurses and domestic workers.
- However, Indian woman migrants also comprise students, professionals, beauticians, sales associates and hotel workers.
- Besides, women are trafficked to different countries in the Gulf for a variety of purposes ranging from domestic work to immoral activities.
- Therefore, much work is needed to deepen our understanding of migration and gender.

Why should the study focus on destination choices?

- Of late, there have been changes in the destination choices of Indian migrants.
- The preference seems to be for non-Anglophone countries despite the integration challenges.
- Indian students are moving to China, Japan, Germany and the countries of the former Soviet bloc.
- We can see a South-South pattern of student migration along the India-Nepal corridor.
- Yet, the predominant focus of migration studies is on Anglophone countries.

Why distress migration needs attention?

- The distress migrants are victims of human trafficking, workers who do not have proper documents, migrants trapped in a war zone or conflict areas or those who have been involved in workplace place accidents.
- There is no much data about Indian migrants jailed in different countries or cheated by fake recruiting agents.
- However, there is a lack in the national- and state-level data on deceased Indian workers.

- In recent years, there have been reports of Indian workers held captive by pirates in African countries.
- There have also been reports of human smuggling from Punjab to Greece and Italy.

What could be done?

- **Social media** has become a powerful tool to highlight the plights of migrant workers.
- In several cases, the **Ministry of External Affairs** has taken swift action after there were reports on the plight of migrants in social media.
- But migration studies have not given much thought to increasing the use of social media for migrant welfare.
- **Centres for migration studies** can be established in universities and research institutions.
- One way to bridge the knowledge gap is to **replicate the Kerala model** of migration surveys in all states.
- Finally, it is equally important to frame a comprehensive national migration policy to address the issues faced by migrants.

Source: Indian Express

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