

REFUGEE, MIGRATION, DIASPORA

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Lecture 55

Lecture 55: Internal Migration in South Asia: Santal Tribe in "November is the Month of Migration"

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Refugees, Migration, and Diaspora. So, today we are going to talk about the internal migration of the tribal population in the South Asian context. We are going to discuss a case study based on our reading of this short story titled 'November is the Month of Migration.' So, 'November is the Month of Migration' is a short story by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, who is himself from a tribal community in India.



But before that, we need to understand the different kinds of migration. Migration refers to the movement of people from one place to another, across the globe or within a region. It could be across the globe. It could be within a country as well. The world has witnessed significant internal as well as international migration for a long time now,

and this has increased further since the 1990s, since the turn of the century, due to various factors. Factors that trigger migration include rapid globalization, employment opportunities, as well as better economic and social conditions in the host societies. The 21st century has drawn huge attention towards migration and its impacts on national and

international levels due to the involvement of international regulatory bodies, such as the United Nations (UN) as well as the International Labour Organization (ILO). Most importantly, the entire discourse on migration has been understood from the perspective of crossing national boundaries.

Thus, it often neglects internal or regional migration. So, when we talk about migration, we are mostly referring to transnational journeys and experiences. In a bid to discuss the longer distances or journeys traversed by individuals, we tend to neglect regional migrations, which include movements of laborers, employees, as well as students from one region of India, the same country to another. So, a lot of the population within the country has to move from their home to another part of the country, right, in order to get a better job, to be admitted to a school of their choice, as well as due to other constraints.


It could also be something like medical treatment. So, all these things, and definitely the movements of laborers, the laborers who move from one region to another. So, all these factors comprise internal or regional migration from one part of a country to another. So, according to Jack Goldstone, I quote, 'Discussing external migration issues is impossible without discussing internal migration issues,' unquote.

Migration can be of various kinds based on factors such as geography, duration, age group of the migrants, sex, and ethnicity of the migrants. And so, the entire experience or the discourse of migration can be classified as regional or internal, international, seasonal, or permanent. Furthermore, the experiences vary based on whether a migrant is young, an adult, male, female, tribal, among others. So, all these categories actually influence one's migration experience. One's experience lies at the intersection of all these different categories, these different factors.

International and internal migration

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— Jack Goldstone

- Migration can be of various kinds based on geography, duration, age group, sex and ethnicity, and can be classified as regional or internal, international, seasonal, permanent; and experiences vary based on whether a migrant is young, adult, male, female, tribal, among others.
- International and internal migration **share some similarities at social and cultural levels**: they take place in **search of better living standards**, mostly in education and employment;
- They may result in alteration in lifestyle due to **cultural exchanges**




International and internal migration share some similarities at social and cultural levels. They take place in search of better living standards, mostly in education and employment. They may result in alterations in lifestyle due to cultural exchanges. So, international and internal migrations are broadly distinguished based on geographical or territorial leaps taken by the immigrants. However, there are other factors, including socio-cultural, economic, and political, which play a key role in understanding both international and internal migrations.

So, let us take a look at this table. On one hand, we have international migration; on the other, we have internal migration. In the case of international migration, the displacement happens across national boundaries. In the case of internal migration, displacement happens within national borders. Definitely, international migration is costlier because it involves more paperwork and means of travel.

Migration type Differentiating factors	International migration	Internal migration
Displacement	Across national boundaries	Within a national border
Financial cost	Costlier (documents and means of travel)	Lower in cost
Regulatory barriers	Immigration laws, employment restrictions	No such laws, securities and regulations
Issues of integration	Socio-cultural and linguistic differences	Less pronounced

Table based on the discussion paper by Ravi Shekhar and Arvind K. Pandey titled "Internal and International Migration in South Asia" (2017)




A passport and visa are required when trying to migrate internationally. Comparatively, there is less protocol, less paperwork, fewer policies and rules involved, and the cost factor is lower in internal migration. Further, in international migration, regulatory barriers include immigration laws and employment restrictions. There are different kinds of visas, and they expire. These visas have their time limits or time brackets.

Right. So when we try to migrate internationally, when we cross the border of a nation and enter another nation, we have to fulfill the immigration laws and keep in mind the employment restrictions. In the case of internal migration within the same nation, no such laws, securities, or regulations apply. What is more, in the case of international migration, sociocultural and linguistic differences are very significant. So we move to a new country, and we are from a different background.

We are from a different culture. We carry our own history and background with us to the new land. And so there is the question of integration. There is the question of conflict with society, other social groups, which is less pronounced in the case of internal migration, where the cultures—when we talk about different regions within the same country—the sociocultural and linguistic differences are relatively less pronounced.

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So, the issues of integration are not that prominent. Now, South Asia has a distinct history of migration. The migration of laborers, both national and international, has been taking place for a long time. It has its own distinct history, and this includes indentured laborers to the British colonies and tea plantation workers to different states. Right.

In both cases, the migrant workers have suffered huge and irreversible losses, including suffocating voyages, attacks of diseases such as cholera, as well as other epidemics. Right. So, the most important reason for internal migration in South Asian countries is finding jobs, employment, and it is rapidly increasing to cover the growing economic disparities. Therefore, internal migration becomes more important than international migration in terms of volume as well as the flow of remittances.



Right. So, in the case of poor migrant workers, we see that they suffer significantly from displacement, whether it is international or internal, because they the migrant workers who are at the lowest rung of the socio-economic strata do not have much choice. So, during colonial times, the Santal populace from the eastern belts of India—from states such as Bengal, what is today known as Jharkhand, Bihar, and Odisha—were taken as tea tribes to work in the northeastern states, especially in Assam.

But one problem that the tribal people faced, the Santals faced, is not being given the recognition of tribal status, their housing, their amenities where they lived in deplorable conditions. And as I will discuss in my subsequent lecture, they had conflicts with the local tribes such as the Bodos from Assam, who are an ethnic group, a tribal group from that locality. So, the Santhal-Bodo conflict in Assam is very well known because the Santhals do not get the same status as tribals and the benefits associated with the ST or Scheduled Tribe status. So, they lag behind, and their succeeding generations lag behind, right?

So, in the international scenario, governments regulate and manage the records of migrants. However, such policies may or may not be followed in relation to internal migration because of the underlying assumption that internal migrants and non-migrants are entitled to equal treatment and opportunities under the same country's laws. So, the example that I was giving—when a Santal is forcefully taken by the British to work in the tea plantations in Assam—their own consent is not taken into consideration, and it is assumed that they enjoy the same rights and privileges as the local tribes or the Bodos, which may not be true.

You know, when they don't get the same ST status and cannot return to their original homes in eastern India, they feel a sense of unbelonging, right? The push and pull factors

are directly involved in internal migrations. The pull factor of the urban area is interlinked with the push factor of the rural area, which is characterized by the employment opportunities provided by the cities, right? as juxtaposed with the labor surplus, which is disguised as unemployment and the exploitative relationships that exist in villages. So, we see that the villages—to put it very plainly—have conditions that lead to a push factor.

A population, a youth population, is being pushed out of the village owing to unemployment and the exploitative relationships that are prevalent in rural societies, and this is juxtaposed with the pull factors in urban spaces in the form of job opportunities. Right. And the need for labor, the fact that the cities can absorb labor surplus.

So, what happens is a constant movement of the population from rural areas, from villages to urban areas, to the cities. The tribal communities continuously migrate as laborers from their original rural homes for various socio-political and economic reasons, as well as because of education and employment opportunities. However, this internal migration within the borders of the same nation requires further research and study. So, these migrations differ not only in the purpose of migration but also in terms of time intervals. Some studies by scholars of migration studies, including Ravi Shrivastava in 2010 and

Tribal Migration in South Asia

- The tribal communities continuously migrate as labourers from their original rural homes for various socio-political and economic reasons, as well as education and employment opportunities, but have not been given adequate attention. These migrations differ not only with respect to the purpose of migration, but also in terms of time interval.
- Some studies by scholars of migration studies, including Ravi Shrivastava (2010) and Priya Deshingkar (2009), shed light on the **reasons and significance of internal migrations by tribal communities** in South Asian countries. According to them, internal migration mostly occurs in these countries due to the pattern of regional developments: economically poor areas to economically advanced or developed ones.





Priya Deshingkar in 2009, shed light on the reasons and significance of internal migrations by tribal communities in South Asian countries. According to scholars like Shrivastava and Deshingkar, internal migration mostly occurs in these countries due to patterns of regional development. Economically poor areas to economically advanced or developed areas. So, even a country does not develop uniformly.

Some states are relatively more developed. They are economically prospering. The different regimes, the different state regimes, actually develop, determine how that area is prospering in terms of industry, in terms of factories, in terms of agro-based resources and production, right, and earnings. So, as well as the education sector, the health sector, private job and public job sectors, all these different domains are differentially developed in different areas, in different states, in different

provinces of the same country, right? Some are more developed, others are less. So, there is a tendency of internal migration from the less developed provinces or states to the economically, you know, medically, agriculturally, industrially more advanced or developed regions. So, it is important to note that seasonal and circular migration comprises an important part of internal migration in South Asia. Unlike permanent migrants, seasonal migrants are much more likely to be from poorer rural areas.

Tribal Migration in South Asia

- It is important to note that seasonal and circular migration comprises an important part of internal migration in South Asia. Unlike permanent migrants, seasonal migrants are much more likely to be from poorer, rural areas, the most deprived and vulnerable sections of society, and they are likely to have a low level of education (Shrivastava, 2011).
- However, there is still a dearth of literary perspectives on it because these communities are unable to avail the facility of education. Apart from a few tribal writers, including Hansda Sowvendra Sekhar and Rejina Marandi, we scarcely find any writings based on the issue of internal migration of tribal communities.



Source: marandi.com

They go to another place to work seasonally, especially to work on lands, to till the lands, to work as agriculturalists. Right. They come from rural backgrounds and they are the most deprived and vulnerable sections of a society and they are most likely to have a low level of education. However, there is a dearth of literary perspectives on this entire phenomenon because these communities themselves are unable to avail the facility of education. They are still not writing from within their own communities.

They are not so literate to write down, to pen down their own experiences in the form of creative works or any form of artworks or even scholarship. So apart from a few tribal writers that have now emerged in the recent times, which includes Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar and Regina Marandi, we scarcely find any writings that are based on the issues of internal migration of tribal communities. Having said that, I would like to add that there are writers who are writing from the tribal communities, writers who are actually

making it big, who are talking about the threats, the vulnerabilities that they are susceptible to. However, they are writing in their mother tongue, in the vernacular, which is the tribal language. And most of the times these works do not get translated and

Published in English. So, the audience is not very large, and the publishing houses from which these works come out are not very well known. So, the question of great tradition and little tradition, unfortunately, comes up. These works become part of the little tradition, and they remain only regionally recognized within a small group, within the tribal group itself. One example would be

the writings by Damayanti Besra, who is a female tribal writer and has also been awarded the Padma Shri. So, she has that literary acclaim, but her works are not yet found being published by major publishing houses. So, these are some of the challenges we face. Now, coming to writer Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, he is a doctor by profession. He is the author of a notable short story collection titled *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, which came out in 2015, and this work was shortlisted for the Hindu Prize.





And he's also the author of the novel titled *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupī Bhaskar*, which came out in 2014. This novel won the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar and was nominated for the Hindu Prize, the Crossword Book Award, as well as the International Dublin Literary Award. He has published two more novels titled *Jwala Kumar* and *the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champak Bagh*, which came out in 2018. And *My Father's Garden*, which also came out in the same year. Shekhar, apart from writing his own novels,


Novels and short stories, also translates prose and poetry from Santhali and Hindi into English. So, Shekhar is one of the first prominent writers from the tribal community who

is writing, who is contributing major works on the tribals, on the experiences of tribals in the English language. So, we see that this is one writer from the tribal community who is writing in English, translating into English the experiences and the perspectives of the tribal people, and so his readership is really large.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar

- Writer Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar is a doctor by profession. He is the author of a notable short story collection, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015), which was shortlisted for The Hindu Prize; and a novel, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2014), which **won the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar** and was nominated for The Hindu Prize, the Crossword Book Award and the International Dublin Literary Award.
- He has published two more novels *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh* (2018) and *My Father's Garden* (2018). He also translates prose and poetry from Santhali and Hindi into English.

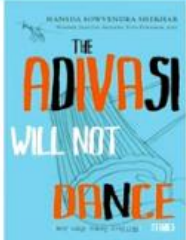




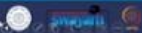

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It comes from both tribal and non-tribal groups. So coming to *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, it is a collection of 10 remarkable short stories by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, which was published in the year 2015. It was included by the Frontline magazine in August 2022 in a list of 25 books that light up the path to understanding post-independence Indian literature, according to Frontline. These stories reflect on various socio-cultural, economic, and political issues faced by the tribals, such as discrimination, economic exploitation, as well as social stigma that they face on a day-to-day basis. Although the stories are primarily set in tribal society, stories such as *They Eat Meat* as well as *November is the Month of Migrations* provide us with experiences of tribal people outside of their own home culture.

The Adivasi Will Not Dance

- *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* is a collection of ten remarkable short stories by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar published in 2015. It was included by *Frontline* (magazine) in August 2022 in a list of 25 books “that light up the path to understanding post-Independence Indian literature.”
- These stories reflect on various socio-cultural, economic and political issues of tribals, such as discrimination, economic exploitation, and social stigma.
- Although the stories are primarily set in tribal society, stories such as “*They Eat Meat*” and “*November is The Month of Migrations*” provide us with experiences of tribal people outside their home culture.


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So these two stories especially talk about tribals moving out of their original rural, you know, setting and, you know, they are either resettling or temporarily visiting another area, seeking jobs or for employment requirements, and their experiences are generally not very positive. So, November is the Month of Migrations is a story of the seasonal migration of a tribal family from their village in Santal Pargana to Namal. Namal, which is in the Bardhaman district in West Bengal. And we see this tribal family moving from Santal Pargana to Bardhaman to plant rice and other crops in the fields that are owned by the zamindars.

They seasonally migrate to work on the land and earn some money. So the story revolves around a 20-year-old woman, named Talamai Kisku, who is a Santal woman, a tribal woman. And she is traveling with her family members and other people from her village. Like her parents, Talamai lacks basic education, which was promised by the missionaries in exchange for religious conversion.

And in the current timeline of the novel, we see this family waiting for the train on the railway platform. And as they wait, Talamai is signaled by a jawan of the Railway Protection Force to follow him around the corner. On reaching there, she is taken into the policeman's quarters and asked to do some work in exchange for two pieces of cold bread pakora and a 50-rupee note. So basically, she is sexually exploited.



She is raped by this jawan in exchange for 50 rupees and two bread pakoras. Just because she comes from a tribal background, she is not educated, and thereby, she is from the most vulnerable section of society. The story underlines the exploitation that tribal women, migrant tribal women, are subjected to because of their economic conditions and needs. There are multiple layers of exploitation that these poor migrants face.


Besides highlighting the issue of religious conversion of these tribals by the Christian missionaries on the pretext of providing education and food, Shekhar here also presents the vulnerability of the tribal women, particularly the migrant tribal girls who are seasonally going to till a land in exchange for some money. And frequently they are being exploited by those who are supposed to safeguard their rights and honors. So the jawan, the employee of the railway protection force is supposed to protect people. the people, but they are exploiting the tribals. We see that the tribals are not able to fend for themselves and they are often being exploited, especially the women.

This policeman, the jawan, like other men, uses his socioeconomic position and his privileges to sexually exploit young tribal women who come to work seasonally. The story, therefore, underscores the need for education and the improvement of socioeconomic conditions of the tribals in order to overcome the vicious cycle of exploitation by their social counterparts. Their education, their awareness would actually strengthen their socio-economic conditions and also give some force to their agential position. So, the tribals are the victims of systematic alienation from their resource rich lands, and they are often found as working in cities. As low wage workers, due to their socially marginalized status and low education, they are preferred by exploitative employers in urban areas.

Moreover, this story subtly points towards the intersectional position of the tribal woman. A tribal woman like Talamai Kisku is doubly marginalized, once based on her gender and secondly based on her ethnic identity. So, being a female and being a tribal and additionally from a very poor socio-economic background places her at the intersectional position of vulnerability. To conclude, the short story November is the month of migration plays a pivotal role in describing the situation of tribal migrant women in the Indian society, even in the current times, not only in their own homes and host society, but also in the middle of it when she is traveling abroad.

Conclusion

- “November is the Month of Migration” plays a pivotal role in describing the situation of tribal migrant women in our society, not only in the home and host society but also in the middle of it. The story traces the perils of tribal people during their migration from one place to another.
- Such accounts are significant from the literary perspective because it is seemingly difficult to portray a female perspective of multifaceted exploitation that focuses on the economic exploitation and intersectionality from a sociological angle.



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From the host society to home, on her journey back home, she is so vulnerable. She can be raped, molested, or exploited in exchange for 50 rupees, right, and some food. So, at all stages, these women from tribal groups are exposed to dangers, to the perils of society. The story, therefore, traces the perils of tribal people during their migration from one place to another, especially those of the women.

So, such accounts are significant from a literary perspective because it is seemingly difficult to portray a female perspective of multifaceted exploitation, which focuses on economic exploitation as well as intersectionality—the fact that she is doubly vulnerable owing to her gender and ethnicity. And this entire position of the tribal woman has been unpacked remarkably from a sociological angle. So, with this discussion of Swavendra's short story, 'November is the Month of Migration,' today we come to the end of our lecture, and let's meet with a new topic and another round of discussions in our next lecture. Thank you.



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