

## Book Review

### GLJ-RC44 Book Panel Melbourne 2023

**Agarwala, Rina (2022) *The Migration-Development Regime: How Class Shapes Indian Emigration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
ISBN 9780197586402. 288pp. US\$110.00  
(hardcover); US\$32.99 (softcover)**

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[Editors' note: At each meeting of the Research Committee on Labour Movements (RC-44) of the International Sociological Association, the *Global Labour Journal* organises an Authors-meet-critics panel as part of the RC-44 programme. This review and two others in this section were first presented at the June/July 2023 ISA Congress in Melbourne, Australia.]

India has received a large global focus over the past decade wherein the country has emerged as the fastest-growing economy and the most populous country in the world. India has seen stellar growth in terms of being an attractive consumer market for entities across the globe. The sheer strength of the population is also visible as India is also recorded to have the largest migrant outflow, with almost 20 million Indians living overseas and receiving the highest share of global remittances. Despite the overwhelming presence of Indian migrants across various countries and the large contributions made by Indians employed overseas, India lacks a comprehensive migration policy that accounts for the complexities of Indian migration.

It is in this context that Agarwala's book makes several unique contributions. First, it shifts the global focus of migration discourse from the dominant perspective of the receiving countries to the control enabled by the sending countries on their emigrants. Second, it unpacks the complexities of Indian emigration by breaking down the heterogeneous classes of migrants from India. Third, it exposes how India's migration history since the 1800s has shaped the nation's migration policies and underscores why any attempt at understanding the current challenges and irregularities in Indian migration regulations today must also understand its historical implications. Finally, it introduces a new analytical framework that she calls "The Migration Development Regime", MDR, to understand how states shape global migration and how migrants respond.

The central theme of the book discusses how class has and continues to shape Indian emigration – thereby entrenching class inequities within (and outside) India. The book's deeply nuanced analysis and conclusions draw on the rigorous data collected by the author. An archival analysis of parliamentary debates from the early 1900s and government records, including from the Ministry of External Affairs and the Reserve Bank of India, lay a rich foundation for the book. The author also conducted interviews with more than 600 transnational Indian migrant organizations

and 200 Indian government officials, private migrant recruiters and poor and elite migrants, which further bolster the book's evidence.

The author has been mindful in bringing forth the central points of the book by offering a stellar review of the existing literature on global migration and a thorough historical overview of emigration from India. She points out that the Indian state has a stronghold regarding who gets to leave the country and who does not and how these decisions are not merely in response to the labour demands of the receiving countries. Rather, she argues, the politics of class in India heavily feature in the emigration patterns from India, and this can be observed to be a result of both the historical influence and current developmental and political requirements of India. The author argues that the Indian state's systematic decisions on emigration perpetuate and exacerbate the nation's existing class inequalities. Agarwala's MDR framework usefully helps us understand how individual emigrants from varying classes are treated differently by the sending country. But the MDR framework also forces us to examine how migrants of different classes have differentially organized to resist state practices. This discussion on the class politics of migration (from above and below) is extremely relevant given the heterogeneity and diversity of class and the increasing outflow of migrants from India.

The organizational narrative of the book plays an integral role in tying together the various points that come out of the author's analysis. The introduction captures the current landscape of Indian emigration wherein instances of honouring elite migrants have seen a significant increase as compared to poor migrants. The questions raised by the author about such practices are accurate when one compares the economic contributions of both groups, wherein the former's Foreign Direct Investments and Portfolio investments are considerably small against the large share of remittances sent by poor migrants. These observations are linked to the historical underpinnings of emigration from India that was entrenched in the class divide through colonial rules that got carried over to democratic India and are still practised by the government after seventy-five-plus years of independence.

Agarwala then introduces three MDRs that India has launched, according to her historical evaluation of India's emigration policies from 1834 to 2022. She calls these the Coolie MDR (1834-1947), the Nationalist MDR (1947-1977) and the CEO MDR (1977-2022). In some cases, MDRs reflect the dominant ideology of their time, as in the case of the Coolie regime where emigration was based on labour demands from receiving countries and emigration policies were liberalized. In other cases, MDRs challenge the dominant ideology, as seen in the Nationalist regime, where voices of different class sections of emigrants grew in importance and fought against state restrictions on emigration. The author elaborates how the current CEO MDR upholds the class divide among its emigrants much like the previous two regimes did, through discriminatory practices towards poor emigrants in the name of what she calls "paternalist protection", instead of empowering them through rights-based protections. But unlike the previous two regimes, the CEO MDR pushes forward the importance given to India's elite emigrants. The reason for this also answers the questions initially raised by the author, wherein the Government of India is exercising its power as a large sending country by tapping into migrants for "ideological remittances", especially its elite migrants. The author argues that these regimes show how the sending state has over the years used migration as a vector to gain economic legitimacy and now is being used for political legitimacy by shaping ideologies and reinforcing them by obtaining domestic consent from the larger migrant community at the cost of deepening the class inequalities in India. In short, the MDR analytical framework usefully identifies the multiple pressures faced by sending states from below (from sub-national governments and different classes of migrants with different needs) and from above (from global demands in a larger migration landscape).

The book then turns to tracing how poor and elite migrants have organized to resist or partner with the Indian state, or both, at different times. These chapters draw on unique interviews with hundreds of migrants, migrant organizations, and even recruiters. The author exposes the strategies poor migrants use to attain state attention, and why and how they have consented to India's class-based emigration regime. The author also exposes the areas in which elite migrants are forming partnerships with domestic elites in India.

Finally, this book has impressively managed to cross the transnational and subnational levels of analysis. At its core, the book traces Indian emigration to the Middle East and the US from the 1800s across different classes. This sample is an accurate example to portray the class bias in Indian emigration policies, that makes the passports of educated and highly skilled migrants going to the US much more powerful than those of the poor migrants leaving for the Middle East. However, the book also represents an interesting case of sub-national variations within India. The migration models of Kerala, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh are used by the author to further highlight these variations. The addition of the case of Punjab could have helped in deepening these takes on the variations observed.

This book successfully maneuvers the difficult task of categorizing the complex class politics in India into different development regimes to convey its essential findings on how class shapes Indian emigration. I believe that the inferences made by the author through her study of Indian emigration have made for a compelling read for anyone already involved in migration and labour studies, as well as for anyone trying to understand the migration landscape of India and the underlying conflicts of sending countries with heterogeneous class groups. It is an impressive feat and a must-read for anyone interested in the past and future of global migration.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

S IRUDAYA RAJAN is chair of the International Institute of Migration and Development (IIMAD), Kerala, India, and chair of the KNOMAD (the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development) thematic working group on internal migration and urbanization, World Bank. Dr Rajan is the founding editor in chief of Migration and Development (Sage) and the editor of two Routledge series: India Migration Report and South Asia Migration Report [Email: [rajan@iimad.org](mailto:rajan@iimad.org)] [ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0990-5159>]