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## Discourses on Migration in International Relations

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### Abstract

The post COVID-19 world has witnessed a paradigm shift in the way international relations are conducted. The problems and pain which the world observed due to heavy loss of life induced a geopolitical and geoeconomic realignment. The pandemic on the one hand necessitated greater global synergy for cooperation in health-related issues and on the other hand extrapolated the role of great powers in sustaining their influence in the global system. One specific issue which became a debating point in international relations was the issue of human migration. As the countries sealed their borders restricting human transborder movement in hope of limiting the spread of pandemic, the set migratory practices and pattern was deeply disturbed. Migration thus became an important issue in contemporary international relations where the countries were weighing their options in formulating their migration policies and balancing their relations so as to avert potential source of conflict.

**Keywords-** migration, border, international relations

### Introduction

It is difficult to comprehend the beginning of migrations as humans have shown considerable desire for migration. Historically it is witnessed that the humans have migrated across highlands and seas for reasons ranging from issues of security to availability of food. Nobody exactly knows when migration began but migration has been a continuous process since ages. In this process human beings have evolved and advanced in knowledge and technology, shaping and reshaping culture and tradition, inventing new languages, and adapting to new natural landscape. Migration has therefore been wilful or forced, depending on circumstances. After the humans phased out the period of hunters and food gatherers, they started to create empires and civilization. The empires and civilization did not last forever. Empires were destroyed and rebuilt. Historically it is observed that “the early empires of the Hittites, the Phoenicians and the Greeks, for example, reshaped the culture of much of Europe, parts of North Africa, the Near East and Central Asia between the third and the first millennia BCE” (Heywood 2015: 172). Likewise, the South Asia, the Latin America, Africa or China has witnessed the assimilation and transformation from time to time due to human migration. Perhaps, no part of the world can claim to have not witnessed migration or its impact. The present world in which we live in is highly affected by the issue of migration. At the same time globalization has given impetus to human migration.

### Framework of Migration

Till the eighteenth-century human migration had not become an issue of analysis or serious debate. The academicians hardly gave any importance to the issue of human migration. Adam Smith in his 1776 classic book, titled *The Wealth of Nations*, said that, “it appears evidently from experience that a man is of all sorts of luggage the most difficult to be transported” (Greenwood and Gary L. Hunt 2012: 4). As there had been advancement in agriculture, industrial technology, and industrial production, the migration done by human beings have only increased. However, the serious study on migration was undertaken only in the end of the nineteenth century.

E. G. Ravenstein in 1885 in his paper, *The Laws of Migration*, gave his seven laws of migration (Ibid: 6-7). According to Ravenstein's laws: (i) "the majority of the migrants move short distance and the universal shifting of population, produces 'currents of migration' setting in the direction of the great centres of commerce and industry which absorb the migrants" (ii) migrants from villages flock to towns and the villages are replenished by people from more remote areas, (iii) "the process of dispersion is the inverse of that of absorption and exhibits similar features (iv) each main current of migration produces a compensating counter-current (v) migrants proceeding long distances generally go by preference to one of the great centres of commerce or industry (vi) the natives of towns are less migratory than those of the rural parts of the country, and, (vii) females are more migratory than males" (Ibid.). These laws have formed the bedrock of migration studies since its propagation.

Globalization has thrown up severe challenges to the traditional understanding of migration as the migration itself has become more complex, sophisticated and highly politicised. "Migration is inherently a spatial phenomenon" (Greenwood 2005: 725). Migration in a general sense mean a 'change in an individual's usual place of residence from one migration-defining area to another over a given period of time (called the migration interval), which may be a month, a year, a 5-year period, a life time, or some other interval' (Ibid.). Elaborating further the International Organization for Migration (IOM) says that migration is "the movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification" (IOM 2016). Thus, the people moving from one place to different destination for any reason is a form of migration.

Different types of people move from one place to different destination and each have their own cause. So, some migrate in search of employment, other for higher education and yet some migrate to escape violence. Therefore, it can be said that there are two kinds of migration taking place, first is voluntary and the second is forced. Voluntary migration happens in issues like economic opportunity, education, medical treatment and marriage. On the other hand, force migration happens due to violence emerging out of political or social conflicts. Forced migration produces refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP).

Refugees in international relations are those people "who owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (Ibid.). Further the Cartagena Declaration of 1984 states that "refugees also include persons who flee their country because their lives, security or freedom have been threatened by generalised violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violations of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order" (Ibid.). The United Nations define IDP as those "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or humanmade disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border" (Ibid.).

The rapid process of globalization due to triumph of neoliberal economics has also augmented the process of migration. As the migration has progressed it has thrown up new challenges. The increased productivity in agricultural has displaced people from land and at the same time the change in environment has compelled many people to search for new forms of livelihood and places to reside (Castles 2012: 273). Even people have migrated to cities, however there are no enough housing and the social conditions remain precarious (Ibid.). Further in the weak states the hardship of livelihood threatens human security due to occurrence of violence and abuse of human rights (ibid.). Therefore, the issue of migration has become very wide and complicated.

Citing several scholars, Jef Huysmans and Vicki Squire say that while migration was 'previously considered to be a social and economic phenomenon belonging to the fields of socio-economic history, historical sociology and anthropology, migration is now pivoted in debates surrounding global politics' (Huysmans and Vicki Squire 2010: 169). The globalization 'has created cultural condition and technical conditions for mobility' (Castles 2012: 273). The 'electronic communication provides knowledge of migration routes and work opportunities and also at the same time long distance travel has become cheaper and more accessible' (Ibid.).

Once the 'migratory flows are established, they generate 'migration networks', in which the previous migrants help members of their families or communities with information on work, accommodation and official rules' (Ibid.). The 'facilitating of migration has become a major international business, including travel agents, bankers, lawyers and recruiters' (Ibid.). This 'migration industry' has also 'given rise to an illegal side of smuggling and trafficking, which the governments try to restrict' (Ibid; 273-274). While the 'governments remain focused on control of national models of migration, the migrants follow the transnational logic of globalized labour markets' (Ibid. 274). The migrants want to reach their destination by any means thereby severely impacting the bilateral relations and international cooperation.

Despite migration becoming a cross border issue there is however lack of any agreeable international policy or understanding. Different country tackles the migration issues differently. Migration is therefore characterized by a low level of institutionalized international cooperation (Kalm 2010: 23). Countries have shown lack of interests in the issue of migration. The migration issue complicated when different country proposes different solution to migration issue.

Migration has given rise to diaspora. A diaspora is the group of people who have retained their cultural and social tradition in their adopted country. Diaspora has started to play an important role in the bilateral ties between the adopted country and the country of origin by influencing their policies. The migrants have often resisted 'assimilation', sometimes giving rise to social tension. Assimilation is adopting the social and cultural values of the migrated country. In the globalized world countries have developed enough tolerance and compassion that the respect of one another's culture and tradition has matured.

In the global migration debate, two terms, brain drain and remittances have been highly debatable. Brain drain is the loss of knowledge and skill from the poor country to the rich country while remittance is the transfer of money by migrants from the host country to the country of their origin. It is seen that in the contemporary times, brain drain has been replaced by 'brain circulation' which is circulation of knowledge and skill, and remittances are believed to improve the global economy.

## Migration Trends

With the increase in pace of globalization migration has increased too. One of the United Nations' report on migration says that 'the number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow rapidly over the past fifteen years reaching 244 million in 2015, up from 222 million in 2010, 191million in 2005 and 173 million in 2000' (United Nations 2016: 5). The report also says that 'the high-income countries host more than two third of all international migrants'. In '2015, 71 per cent of all international migrants worldwide which is equal to 173 million international migrants lived in high-income countries' (Ibid.). Out 'of these, 124 million migrants lived in high income Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, while 49 million migrants were living in other high income non-OECD countries' (Ibid.). 'Only 29 percent or 71 million of the world's migrants lived in middle or low income counties (Ibid.). Of this 61 million resided in middle income countries and 9 million in the low income countries' (Ibid.). This data shows that people in large numbers go to develop nations in hope of getting better opportunities in life.

Further the UN report also reveals that 'nearly two thirds of all international migrants live in Europe or Asia'. The report also mentions that 'in 2015 about 76 million international migrants were residing in Europe, compared to 75 million in Asia' (Ibid: 6). The 'North America hosted third largest number of international migrants (54 million), followed by Africa (21 million), Latin America and the Caribbean (9 million), and Oceania (8 million)' (Ibid: 6). Interestingly the 'largest number of migrants reside in United States which is 47 million or 19 per cent of world's total followed by Germany and Russia which host about 12 million migrants each' (Ibid: 8). In the 'fourth place comes Saudi Arabia which hosts 10 million migrants, followed by United Kingdom (9 million) and United Arab Emirates (8 million)' (Ibid: 8). The countries which have high number of migrants are also job providers.

The migration has become so extensive that it has given rise to the 'culture of emigration' which is practice by young adults as an opportunity to work in foreign destination for a certain time span (Castles 2012: 278). Some countries like Philippines 'have a policy of being the 'suppliers of workers for the world' and the majority of the workers are women who work as domestic helpers, teachers, nurses and entertainers in Japan, the Middle East, Europe and North America' (Ibid.). Even in India in some places in Kerala, migration to

Gulf helps in sustaining the local economy (Ibid.). This is possible due to huge remittances which the migrants send back to the country of their origin.

According a 2015 report of the World Bank, the 'remittances to developing countries reached \$436 billion in 2014 which was a 4.4 percent increase from the previous year' (World Bank 2015: 3). In 2014, countries like 'India (\$70 billion), China (\$64 billion), Philippines (\$28 billion), and Mexico (\$25 billion) were the highest recipient of remittances' (Ibid: 5). The remittances are very crucial for some countries as it share a large proportion of their Gross Domestic Products (GDP). It was observed that in 2013 'the remittances had a crucial percentage in GDP of the courtiers like Tajikistan (49 per cent), Kyrgyz Republic (32 per cent), Nepal (29 per cent), Moldova (25 per cent), and Tonga (24 per cent)' (Ibid.). The remittances have become crucial part of developing countries economy.

One of a renowned scholar on migration, Devesh Kapur in his 2004 book *Remittances: The New Development Mantra*, says that the "remittances have become a new 'development mantra' as the money sent by migrants promote local, regional and national development" (Castles 2012: 279). Devesh Kapur also believes that "migrants also transfer skills and attitudes to their home countries which are known as 'social remittances'" (Ibid.). Further he also says that "the 'brain drain' has been replaced by 'brain circulation', which benefits the sending and receiving countries and the circular labour migration has stimulated growth" (Ibid.). Therefore, migration is beneficial for global development especially in the developing countries.

It has also been found that the migrants have also played role in the deciding factor of international aid and development of migration policy. The "migrant communities often play a role in influencing the foreign policy choices of their host government, including their allocation of development assistance" (Bermeo and David Leblang 2015: 627). International aid is used to develop economically weak nations so that migration can be discouraged. The "donor countries use aid as part of their broader immigration strategy, seeking to foster development abroad and decrease the push factors for migration" (Ibid: 651). The developed countries have also tried to restrict migration by tightening border security, asking or language proficiency and restricting the number of visas. The measures to control migration had not been effective and has often created humanitarian crisis.

### Concerning Issues

The world witnessed a severe migration problem in 2015 when people from the Middle East region moved to several parts of Europe in search of security and livelihood. People in large numbers migrated to Europe to escape from conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (BBC 2016). Therefore, it was observed that in 2015 more than one million refugees moved to the European countries, which was an increase from 280,000 in 2014 (Ibid.). It is found that the 'poverty, human rights abuses and deteriorating security in countries like Eritrea, Pakistan, Morocco, Iran and Somalia has also prompted people to migrate to countries like Germany, Sweden or the UK in hope of new life' (Ibid.). This also shows that the world is unable to solve problems of conflicts and wars. However, to stop the influx of migrants, fleeing from conflicts areas of Syria or Iraq to European countries, a deal was signed between Turkey and the European countries in March 2016. According to 'the deal Turkey agreed to take back all migrants, including Syrian refugees, who arrived on Greek islands from March 20, 2016' (Pop and Viktoria Dendrinou 2016). In return the European countries 'agreed to Turkey's demand to double the bloc's assistance for Syrian refugees in Turkey to \$6.79 billion by the end of 2018' (Ibid.). It is also seen that this kind of deal has not been very effective in stopping the flow of migrants to Europe.

If the flow of migrants continues in large numbers to Europe it may give rise to anti migrant sentiments. Following the Brexit vote in June 2016, in which England decided to withdraw from the European Union, the migrants have begun to feel uncomfortable (Freytas-Tamura 2016). It is an indication that after certain limit the migrants are not accepted in any country. Therefore, the issue of migration becomes important in international relations and largely renews global debate on the issue of migration.

While the migration issue was debated in Europe, the outbreak of COVID-19 in the late 2019 induced unprecedented restriction on migration which the world had not seen in history. Countries put severe restrictions in the international movement by cancelling flights and other mode of transportation. Borders were sealed and heavily guarded. New forms of technology based on artificial intelligence was used to monitor any breach of travel restrictions. The problem was exacerbated by banning people's movement in domestic arena too. A Pew Research Centre report mentions that by "March 31, 2020, 142 countries had complete (64 countries) or partial (78 countries) border closures put in place due to the COVID-19 outbreak"

(Connor 2020). The pandemic related problems also posed a tension related to the issue of sovereignty. While the states regarded their authority on people in terms of sovereignty, people on the other hand believed that their rights were eroded. As the states were eager to exercise their sovereignty and restricted travel, the states also initiated a slew of diplomatic activity in either facilitating the returning of citizens from foreign land or cooperate in vaccine diplomacy. The COVID-19 thus initiated a realignment in power politics and opened new avenues of bilateral and international cooperation. Dealing with migration issues however remained a contentious issue to be solved.

## Conclusion

Globalization has made migration inevitable. With the flow of capital and technology, there has been the flow of people to manage the business and run the machines. Therefore, migration of people with high skill and of the labour force has been steady and necessary. Migration becomes a problem when there is an economic slowdown or when migration results in high demographic change. Migration due to conflicts and wars have produced huge humanitarian crisis. Adding to this, the environment degradation and climate change has also produced humanitarian crisis. The World Migration Report 2022 reveals that “in 2020, almost 281 million people lived in a country other than their country of birth, or about 128 million more than 30 years earlier, in 1990 (153 million), and over three times the estimated number in 1970 (84 million) (International Organization for Migration 2021: 23). Such a huge translocation of individuals indicates that the issues related to migration needs greater attention. It is therefore necessary that the countries of the world should come together and agree upon some policy on global migration. The cooperation of nations is necessary to solve humanitarian crisis. It should also be taken care that the flow of capital, technology and knowledge should benefit the developing nations in the post COVID-19 world.

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