

The top half of the cover features a dark brown background with white line art of several rectangular buildings of varying heights. Below this is a solid orange horizontal band.

MIGRANTS, MOBILITY AND CITIZENSHIP IN INDIA

Edited by
Ashwani Kumar and R. B. Bhagat



Migrants, Mobility and Citizenship in India

This book reconceptualizes migration studies in India and brings back the idea of citizenship to the center of the contested relationship between the state and internal migrants in the country. It interrogates the multiple vulnerabilities of disenfranchised internal migrants as evidenced in the mass exodus of migrants during the COVID-19 crisis. Challenging dominant economic and demographic theories of mobility and relying on a wide range of innovative heterodox methodologies, this volume points to the possibility of reimagining migrants as “citizens.”

The volume discusses various facets of internal migration such as the roles of gender, ethnicity, caste, electoral participation of the internal migrants, livelihood diversification, struggle for settlement, and politics of displacement and highlights the case of temporary, seasonal, and circulatory migrants as the most exploited and invisible group among migrants. Presenting secondary and recent field data from across regions, including the northeast, the book explores the processes under which people migrate and suggests ways for ameliorating the conditions of migrants through sustained civic and political action.

This book will be essential for scholars and researchers of migration studies, politics, governance, development studies, public policy, sociology, and gender studies as well as policy makers, government bodies, the civil society, and interested general readers.

Ashwani Kumar is Professor and Senior Policy Researcher in the School of Development Studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India.

R. B. Bhagat is Professor and Head in the Department of Migration and Urban Studies at the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, India.



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“On the whole, compared to international migration, scholarship on internal migration has been quite scant. After Myron Weiner’s seminal *Sons of the Soil*, very little has been written on migration within India. Yet, the need for understanding migrants better is only too obvious, especially after we watched millions of Indian workers walking miles and miles to reach home after the lockdown induced by Covid-19. The essays collected in this volume cover wide-ranging aspects of this inadequately understood, but vital, segment of Indian society. Hugely enlightening!”

Ashutosh Varshney, *Director, Center for Contemporary South Asia; Sol Goldman Professor of International Studies and the Social Sciences; Professor of Political Science, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University, U.S.A*

“The most significant scholarly intervention on India’s ‘invisible’ migrant workers who have long been ignored in policy corridors and our public debates. By locating the debates on internal migration firmly within the discourse of citizenship, this book challenges current scholarly debates and policy prescriptions, to recognize that the ‘migrant’ issue is inextricably linked to the realization of full, substantive citizenship rights. This is the framework that should define India’s policy responses to the ‘migrant crisis’ made visible through the horrors of the Covid-19 induced lockdown. A must-read for scholars, policymakers, and citizens.”

Yamini Aiyar, *President and Chief Executive, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, India*

“Undeniably, migrant workers are the most vulnerable citizens of India. The editors of this meticulously researched and much-needed volume bring back the issue of portability of voting rights for migrants to the heart of citizenship debates in India. An illuminating and invaluable guide to policy-makers!”

Neera Chandhoke, *Political theorist and former Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, India*

“The importance of deepening our understanding of India’s migrant communities has been made all too clear by recent events, including the coronavirus pandemic. This timely volume by a diverse array of established and new voices helps build toward such an understanding. The pieces in this volume make clear the multiple challenges of inclusion that migrant communities face and convey the urgency with which we must meet these challenges.”

Tariq Thachil, *Director, Center for Advanced Study of India (CASI); Associate Professor of Political Science, Madan Lal Sobti; Chair for the Study of Contemporary India, University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A*



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First published 2022
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informal business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-138-59577-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-76546-0 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-76547-7 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by SPi Global, India

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Foreword

A democracy is not only about the conduct of free and fair elections, but its success is also measured by making it more inclusive and participatory and further broadening the idea of democratic citizenship. The Election Commission of India (ECI) in past seven decades has ensured smooth functioning of Indian democracy by conducting free and fair elections. Over the years, the ECI has also proactively contributed to realization of universal adult suffrage enshrined in the Constitution as reflected in the rise in voter turnout. This endeavor has made electoral democracy a remarkable experience in accommodating cultural diversity and democratic endurance in the world.

The ECI's interest in past few years in analyzing problems relating to registration of domestic migrants in the electoral rolls and discussing possible options for facilitating the political inclusion of domestic migrants in elections in India has the potential to further broaden and deepen the base of democratic governance in the country. 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.

The book *Migrants, Mobility and Citizenship in India* edited by Ashwani Kumar and R.B. Bhagat is an exceedingly relevant study at a time when the crucial issue of domestic migrants and unsatisfactory access to citizenship rights including voting rights is very much alive. In an ECI-funded study during my tenure as Chief Election Commissioner of India, Ashwani for the first time brought to the fore the issue of inclusive elections and domestic migrants. The issue contributing to democracy deficit has been carefully examined and evidenced in insightful and illuminating papers from leading social scientists and younger generation of researchers. The book takes the reader through various facets of the migrants' issue and throws light on how we reached the current state and the serious debates needed among policy-makers, academia, and civil society for full restoration of citizenship rights for migrants, especially short-term migrants. It is heartening to note that this book brings back citizenship rights to the core of migration and mobility studies.

Increasingly higher participation in elections is widely acclaimed and rightly so. But the answer to the vexing question why about 300 million

voters did not participate in elections in 2014 and 2019 need to be found sooner than later and may lie in poor domestic and temporary migrants not enabled enough to participate in elections. International experiences and best practices point out that some countries have experimented with absentee voting. Other measures adopted across the world are: early voting, postal ballot, proxy voting, and electronic voting. In the past, ECI has made special provisions during elections for notified categories of voters such as Kashmiri migrants and the Reang voters of Mizoram to enable them to exercise their franchise at locations away from their original residence. It has been learnt that ECI has been working toward the ease of voting through technology-based digital voting and portability of the voter ID that would allow voters including domestic migrants and Non-Resident Indians to exercise their citizenship rights. There are indeed legal, policy, regulatory, and operational challenges in implementing the above concept. I am hopeful that these efforts of ECI will definitely bear fruits and make Indian democracy more deep, inclusive, and substantive – “an ode to a diverse and democratic ethos and an inspiration to the entire world.” I wish all success to the book in benefitting relevant stakeholders.

Dr Nasim Zaidi

Former Chief Election Commissioner of India
Noida, India

Preface and acknowledgments

Migrants are everywhere – in nooks, corners, and holes of the world. Predictably, this mobility of people has also engendered increasing fracas and frictions over symbols of recognition and resources of material advancement in our neighborhoods and public spheres. True, the world has witnessed rapid acceleration and diversification of population movements in recent times. But migration, forced or otherwise, has been at the center of transforming humanity across the world since ages. And it continues to touch every pore of human life fostering multi-faceted encounters with and between peoples and cultures and places and spaces. In a hyper-globalized world of capital and labor mobility, migration has become a riveting tale of not only those who are migrating but also of those living in sites of departure, transit and (non) arrival with or without citizenship rights. Today more people worldwide live outside their countries of birth than ever before. Migration scholars estimate the number of international migrants to be around 272 million, almost 3.5 percent of the global population in 2019. Women constitute almost one-half (48 %) of this growing stock of transnational migrants. And there are 164 million global migrant workers who remit billions of dollars back to their home countries every year. In 2019 migrant remittances to low- and middle-income countries were estimated to be \$554 billion according to the World Bank.

With limited or no public welfare benefits, the bulk of these migrant workers are mostly *precariat* – *proletariats*, beleaguered ethnic minorities, and refugees in the underbelly of global migrant – industries and the gig economy. Facing newer forms of marginalization like short-term contracts, zero-hours contracts, and declining real wages, this new class of migrant *precariat* is the most exploited off workplaces and disenfranchised lot in the global economy. In some parts of the world, migrant workers have become a “nation” without a country. No wonder, if international migrants were a nation of their own, they would make up the world’s fourth largest country, surpassing the population of Indonesia. Living in the “the same-different camp of a camp,” migrants have indeed become neo-urban homo sapiens of global capitalism. In short, large migrations are humanity’s shared future, an inevitable, and unstoppable march of history at home and abroad.

India is no stranger to this narrative. In fact, India as a nation is indeed a story made and remade by waves of migration and migrants from all over the world. Thus, one is not surprised when the great Urdu poet Firaq Gorakhpuri wrote *Sar Zamin-e-hind par aquaam-e-alam ke firaq/Kafile guzarte gae Hindustan banta gaya* ("In the land of Hind, caravans of the peoples of the world kept coming in and India kept getting formed"). And this caravan continues even today albeit with a twist of bitter-sweet truths of rising tides of millions of internal migrants facing multiple forms of discrimination and exploitation. The moving scenes of hundreds of thousands of jobless migrant laborers walking back home with their pots, pans, and blankets into tattered rucksacks have exposed the "disenfranchised invisibility" of internal migrants. It was heart wrenching to witness how those who build fantasy cities and glitzy malls not only cannot own a home of their own but are also often treated like "second-class citizens" in a nation with 450 million internal migrants, almost 37 percent of the country's population as per the 2011 Census. The unprecedented migrants' crisis in the coronavirus pandemic also took the veil off from the unspoken truth of India's democracy. Hungry migrants walking back home are also "disenfranchised invisible" citizens as many of them cannot cast a ballot in any elections held once they migrate from their native places. So, the lives of migrants are a classic case of double whammy of discrimination and exclusion. In other words, the idea that India is the pristine land of one of the biggest migration stories in the history of civilization has taken a dent beyond repair, at least in the near future.

This motivates the urgency and relevance of the edited volume. For starters, we must share with the readers that the idea of putting together this volume was conceived during the National Seminar on Migration and Citizenship at Tata Institute of Social Sciences Mumbai, India in March 2016. Sponsored by Indian Council of Social Science Research, and curated by Ashwani Kumar, the national seminar brought together some of the leading scholars from the disciplines of political science, sociology, economics, demography, migration, development studies, and civil society activists to debate migration and mobility in their spatial, discursive, analytic, and social contexts.

Inspired by Myron Weiner's seminal work "Sons of the Soil," the national seminar sought to interrogate the relationship between the state and migrants and attempted to revive interest in Prof. Weiner's work on migration and ethnic demography: a branch of political demography that is concerned with unpacking the experiences of spatial mobility and interrogating their relationship with the state. Against the backdrop of migrant's political and electoral exclusion from democratic spaces, the seminar illumined some of the socio-spatial aspects of migrant invisibility and the paradox of disenfranchisement that characterizes the lives of India's internal migrants. In doing so, the seminar set the tone for an academic and policy debate on portability of voting rights for migrant workers, and ways to facilitate access to state-provided welfare services.

Admittedly, it also spawned an animated and engaging conversation between participants of the seminar for a collaborative publication on migration with a focus on citizenship rights. In other words, this edited volume is the outcome of a collective endeavor refined over years with innovative heterodox conceptual and methodological paradigms and approaches beyond the usual developmental or demographic perspectives. Challenging dominant economic and demographic theories of migration and relying on a wide range of methodologies from quantitative statistical analysis of large data sets to qualitative research methods ranging from deep ethnographic accounts to micro-studies from different regions of India, this volume opens up the possibility of reimagining migrants as “citizens” rather than mere populations.

No intellectual project of this scope is possible without accumulating substantial debts. As editors of this volume, we are grateful to all participants at the national seminar and contributors to this volume. We thank each and everyone of them and apologize in advance for any inadvertent omissions. We would like to expressly record our thanks to Prof. Priya Deshingkar (University of Sussex, Brighton, U.K), Prof. Eswaran Sridharan (University of Pennsylvania Institute for the Advanced Study of India (UPIASI), New Delhi, India), Prof. Sanjay Kumar (Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi, India), Dr. Indrajit Roy (University of York, York, U.K.), Dr. Sandhya Iyer (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India), Dr. Naresh Kumar (Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar, India), Dr. Srishtee Sethi (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India), Souradeep Banerjee (Temple University, Philadelphia, U.S.A.), Smitana Saikia (FLAME University, Pune, India), Dr. Nandan Kumar (Academy of Management Studies, Lucknow, India), Ravindra Chowdhury (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India), Pravin Shankarrao Khandagale (University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India), and Ananya Chakraborty (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India) for actively supporting the national seminar on migration, and also agreeing to be co-travelers throughout the journey of seeing the manuscript through publication. What binds us all is the symphony in our voices; what sets us apart is the uniquely original treatment of migrants and migration.

We are also indebted to Prof. Partha Mukhopadhyay, (Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, India), Prof S. Chandrasekhar (Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai, India), Rahul Verma (Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, India), and Dr. Aaditya Dar (Indian School of Business, Hyderabad, India) for supporting our research and public outreach. We thank Umi Daniel, (Aid et Action, South Asia), Simpreet Singh (Right to the City activist, Mumbai, India), Priyanka Jain (Ajeevika Bureau, Udai-pur, India), and Sunil Mekale (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India) for sharing activist-academic action research on migrant experiences in the national seminar. We are delighted that our ongoing work has been generously supported by leading editors and journalists in the media such

as Nistula Hebbar (*The Hindu*), Avijit Ghosh (*The Times of India*), Ivinder Gill (*Financial Express*), Arunava Sinha (*Scroll*), Robert Wood (Centre for Stories – Perth), Subhangi Khapre, (*Indian Express*), Kaushik Deka (*India Today*), and Anupama Katakam, (*Frontline*) in the media. These ties have helped us build bridges between the social sciences, humanities, arts, and civil society working to advance the interests of migrant workers during this global pandemic.

We would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge the support of Dr. Shashank Sekhar Sinha (Publishing Director, Routledge) for believing in us and our manuscript. It has been a great pleasure to work with Rimina Mohapatra from Routledge. Her keen eye for detail has been extremely helpful and rewarding. We also thank anonymous reviewers whose detailed comments enriched the final manuscript. And we are indebted to Dev Narayan Chaudhury (IIT-Mumbai) for his help with preparing the index and graphics.

We thank Prof. Shalini Bharat (Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India), Prof. Surinder Jaswal (Deputy Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India), Prof. Ritambhara Hebbar (Dean, School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India), Prof. Siva Raju, Prof. Abdul Shaban, Prof. Arvind Tiwari, Prof. Amita Bhide, Prof. Dharmendra Pratap Singh, Prof. Manish Jha, Dr. Permula Gopinath, other colleagues at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India, and the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai, for their support and encouraging us to build a vibrant network of scholars, practitioners, and activists working on research and public advocacy of migrant rights.

We are immensely grateful to Dr. Nasim Zaidi, former Chief Election Commissioner of India for writing foreword to the book and inspiring us to commit to a long-term engagement with citizenship rights of migrant workers in India's democracy. We also thank Mr. Umesh Sinha (Deputy Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India) and Ms. Padma Angmo (Deputy Secretary, Election Commission of India) for entrusting the TISS research team to undertake seminal policy research on internal migrants and inclusive elections in India.

Special thanks are due to Prof. Ashutosh Varshney (Brown University, Providence, U.S.A.), Prof. Yamini Aiyar (Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, India) Prof. Neera Chandhoke (formerly at University of Delhi), and Prof. Tariq Thachil (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, U.S.A.) for their continuous support of our research and sharing with us their pioneering scholarly insights on migrants and citizenship in democracies. We are deeply grateful to Sudhir Patwardhan for sharing his painting titled 'Leaving the City' for the cover of the South Asia edition of the book.

Last but not least, we are particularly grateful to Shashwat Dhar (Vanderbilt University, Nashville, U.S.A.) for his untiring and efficient handling of the book project in his role as the volume's Managing Editor. From reading early drafts to corresponding with contributing authors and soothing our deadline blues, he was vital to seeing this volume through to publication.

We owe him our unconditional gratitude. Finally, we would like to extend a special thanks to our friends and families for their affections and support in these troubled times of a global pandemic. Working on this volume has been a soul-searching experience of up-country homecoming “in the dawn, armed with a burning patience” in the words of poet Arthur Rimbaud. As migrants ourselves, we would like to believe in this prophesy of Rimbaud and in our journey across genres, generations, and geographies.

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1 Internal migration and citizenship in India

An emerging perspective

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It is remarkable to know how and when the concept of *human beings* evolved into the concept of *citizens*, and how and when the concept of *people* evolved into the concept of *populations*. Noted philosopher Akeel Bilgrami grappled with some of these questions in one of his more recent works (Bilgrami, 2018). Perhaps, the modern idea of citizenship emerged with the appearance of nation-states in human history during the eighteenth century when subjects turned into citizens and people into populations. The instrument of census taking was reengineered during this time which enumerated people into an inanimate category of population. The idea of the nation-state as an ethno-political entity bounded by a defined territory intrinsically stands in conflict with idea of migration and mobility. However, the people moving across national borders and those moving within a nation face different types of challenges and often enter into different relationships with the state. Elite migrants share a very different relationship with the state compared to those who hail from historically marginalized, low-income communities. In addition, there are large numbers of stateless refugees whose citizenship rights lie in a state of perpetual uncertainty. As such the relationship between nation, migration, and citizenship is neither linear nor well-defined. In the age of globalization, whereas transnational citizens hold multiple passports¹ and enjoy the benefits of both the nations of origin and destination, the same privilege and rights are denied to many internal migrants who have lived and worked for decades within national borders. Paradoxically, while it seems that our familiar way of looking at citizenship and rights is anachronistic, the disarticulation of citizenship with the nation and nationalism is strongly opposed (Gutiérrez & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2008). Thus, we find that citizenship Acts have been used to defend national borders and national identity through immigration controls in many countries. On the other hand, the basic idea of citizenship is not even debated with respect to internal migrants who lose their equal status, face discrimination, and are often denied their civic rights and entitlements.

A distinction between formal and substantive citizenship is very pertinent to understand the relationship between migration and citizenship. While formal citizenship entails being a member of the nation-state, substantive citizenship connotes an array of civil, political, social, cultural, and

economic rights people possess and exercise (Holston & Appadurai, 1996). With respect to poor migrants who have membership of the state but are deprived of access to many of these rights, the non-fulfillment of substantive citizenship renders their formal citizenship (e.g., right to vote) meaningless. In other cases, many migrants even lose their formal citizenship as they are unable to vote either due to non-inclusion of their names in the electoral rolls at the place of destination or unable to be physically present at the place of origin at the time of voting. However, it is indeed a puzzle as to why some migrants have succeeded in entering accumulative pathways while others have been consigned to perpetual penury. Scholars have argued that the fulfillment of substantive citizenship rights is not contingent on the formal citizenship (Holston & Appadurai, 1996). In many instances, some of the more successful migrants do manage to get their substantive citizenship rights fulfilled without having access to formal citizenship.

However, we increasingly live in an era of migration and mobility. The movement of goods, services, capital, technology, culture, ideas, and most importantly, people are the significant components of the economic and mobility transition shaped by globalization and neo-liberal policies. Internationally, there were some 272 million migrants in 2019 (UN, 2019). On the other hand, internal migrant flows were almost four times greater than flows of migrants moving internationally (UNDP, 2009). Thus, migration is too important to be ignored by social scientists. Within the social sciences, the study of migration is much debated for its impact on economic development and less on how migrants engage with the state, and how they negotiate the economic, cultural, legal, and political fallout of dislocation. In the international context, illegal migration has been viewed as a major challenge to the existence of the nation-state. Notably, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) does not recognize right to immigrate, while recognizing the right to emigrate and return to one's home country as a human right. On the other hand, while many nations allow the right to migrate within national borders as a fundamental right, the rise of nativist politics in many countries including India threatens to undermine the constitutional protections accorded to migrant communities. In multi-ethnic democracies, greater internal migration has often been accompanied by *sons of the soil* violence against certain immigrant groups. Several studies testify to the link between growing levels of sub-national migration and a rise in the incidence of anti-migrant violence (Bhavnani & Lacina, 2018; Fearon & Laitin, 2011; Weiner, 1978). It is precisely due to the perceived threat posed by sub-national migration that middle- and low-income countries have increasingly adopted policies aimed at restricting population movements within their borders. The proportion of Less Developed Countries (LDCs) that regulate internal migratory flows from rural to urban areas has almost trebled between 1974 and 2011, going up from 24 percent to 70 percent during this period (Bhavnani & Lacina, 2018).

India represents an ideal setting within which to situate a study of the relationship between internal migration, state, and citizenship rights. According

to the Census of India 2011 and National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) 2007–08, three out of ten Indians can be classified as internal migrants, or people who have moved across district or state/province boundaries. In 2011, some 450 million persons were migrants based on place of last residence, accounting for about 37 percent of India's population. Some of the major reasons commonly cited for migration have been work/employment, business, 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 historically marginalized groups like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes with an extremely low asset base and poor educational attainment and skill sets. It is this floating segment of the migrant population, mostly comprising people working seasonally in brickkilns, construction, plantations, mines, and factories that is most vulnerable to exploitation by labor contractors and faces relatively greater hurdles in participating in elections and politics, and in accessing public goods. The studies show that the annual rate of seasonal and temporary migration is seven times higher than the rate of permanent and semi-permanent migration in India (Keshri & Bhagat, 2013). In both the categories of migration, there are also huge variations by age, gender, educational level, occupational status, skills, earnings as well as linguistic and cultural background of internal migrants. As a result, they experience varying levels of vulnerability and exclusion. Migrants with poor skills and education, driven by distress are hugely vulnerable and suffer from deprivations and exploitation in the places they migrate to (UNESCO, 2013).

Given the growing importance of migrants in reinventing spatial relations between the state and society and redefining citizenship rights, the book seeks to engage with the new generation of migration scholarship in India, contesting the “powerless and impoverished image” of migrants and underscoring the benign consequences of migration in the form of returns from “accumulative migration” which accrue over time as migrants acquire knowledge, confidence, and skills (Mendola, 2008). Thus, migration including seasonal/circular migration/short-term migration has increasingly been recognized as a part of the normal livelihood strategy of poor people and does not always occur only during times of emergency or distress.

Incidentally, spatial dislocation also exacerbates existing socio-economic exclusions, in the form of the denial of social, cultural, and political rights of migrant groups. This is most pronounced among seasonal, short-term, circular migrants. Empirical studies and official statistics have largely overlooked or underestimated the scale of short-term migration (Bhagat, 2011). Some of the more contemporary work on migration and nativism has also brought to fore the salience of institutional design in mediating the relationship between migration and citizenship. High levels of political decentralization have been shown to bolster incentives for sub-national elites to pander to nativist groups (Bhavnani & Lacina, 2018). Many Indian states have instituted a gamut of protectionist policies to restrict the entry