

Migration and remittances in India: Historical, regional, social and economic dimensions

Abstract

This thesis documents, analyzes and explains the remarkable persistence of remittance based migrations in India across the 20th century. Drawing on unique Census data and archival records, we first document the regional histories of migration in India, at the district level, across the 20th century, and show that for many parts of India, mobility has been persistently high in magnitude and has been male-dominated, remittance-based and circular in nature for well over a hundred years. These regions are among the poorest *and* richest regions of India, indicating a complex relationship between migration and development of source regions. Further, we empirically demonstrate that districts with high rates of outmigration towards the end of the 19th century continue to have high rates of out migration today, after controlling for various observable factors, and argue that this is a result of strong migration cultures and social networks. These arguments are supported by a field study conducted largely on the railway platform of Surat city, by comparing the migration strategies of migrant workers drawn from different parts of India. We find evidence of strong networks and a culture of migration that is influenced to a large extent by gender norms and other source region factors.