Review of *India Moving: A History of Migration* by Chinmay Tumbe. Penguin Viking. 2018.

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Chinmay Tumbe, a professor at the Indian Institute of Management (Ahmedabad), opens *India Moving* with a reflection on the country's mind-boggling diversity. "Why is India such a diverse country?" he asks on page 1. "Is it because of successive waves of migration…or group isolation preserved over a long time and forced into unification only in recent times?"

In this book, a broad descriptive account of Indian migration, immigration, and emigration since ancient times, Tumbe explores the former explanation, namely Indian diversity as a result of continuous movement. The topic is vitally important in the era of globalization, rural-urban migration, persistent unemployment, climate change, and nativist politics. It is relevant to our immediate present, during which the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns have simultaneously hindered movement and sent millions of migrant laborers back to their homes. How has migration shaped India, and what might the future look like? Drawing upon historical sources, official reports, news sources, and research across political science, economics, anthropology, and sociology, Tumbe addresses these questions by illustrating the patterns, scale, causes, and effects of movement within, out of, and across India.

After discussing patterns of ancient migration in the opening chapter, Tumbe illustrates what he calls the "Great Indian Migration," or present-day patterns of labor migration in India. This phenomenon bears little resemblance to the Great Migration in the United States, but is composed instead of persistent streams of circular and permanent rural to urban migration originating in certain districts and affecting, Tumbe estimates, at least 200 million workers. The chapter is packed with descriptions of waves of seasonal and permanent labor movement originating in Ratnagiri, Udupi, Saran, Ganjam, and elsewhere. Tumbe shows that spatial mobility in India is extremely high, and argues that current official estimates of the phenomenon have a severe downward bias.[1]

Tumbe offers many explanations for why certain districts might be particularly prone to outmigration, including repeated natural disasters and the construction of railways. He argues that dense areas are particularly likely to generate outmigration because such areas may be unable to support their populations. Of course, if this is the case, one wonders how such areas became so dense in the first place, and what keeps them from becoming centers for capital, labor, and trade. The most compelling explanation he offers is that once migration from one district to a particular city begins, strong norms of outmigration are established in the source district, and earlier waves of migration provide a helpful social network for new arrivals in the city. Banerjee and Duflo (2019) cite many studies to support their argument that migration is extremely costly for the

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[1] Around minute 7:00 of this presentation, Tariq Thachil discusses exactly why this may be.

rural poor, but Tumbe highlights reasons to believe that persistent streams of migration may lower such costs.

Migration provides opportunities not only to labor but to capital as well. In the third chapter, Tumbe discusses the histories of several of India's prominent merchant families, and how labor movement and trade have allowed them to build empires over time. The most important takeaway from this chapter is that these capital owners were generally members of the upper caste and kept the gains within their families. Indeed, Ajit, Donker, and Saxena (2012) find that in 2010, over 90% of India's 1000largest companies were Forward Caste members and 45% were, in fact, Brahmins.

But surely the spatial mobility benefits others at the bottom of the caste/class hierarchy too? Migration can be an important way for disadvantaged groups to find economic opportunity and escape caste hierarchies that are particularly rigid in rural areas.  Yet Asher, Novosad, and Rafkin (2018) find that even while Indian standards of living may have increased across the board in the past half century, this trend has largely been *order preserving* in that same caste groups have the best standards of living in the present as did in the past. Despite the opportunities it provides, migration may play a role in preserving existing hierarchies for a few reasons. One is that capital-based migration offers greater returns than labor-based migration, and those who already have initial endowments. Even the returns to labor-based migration may be regressive, as those who have the most to gain may also face the greatest barriers to migration, particularly a lack of the social networks so sorely needed for new migrants in the city. Indeed, in the final chapter, Tumbe notes that the 2011 Census found that rates of migration among scheduled caste and tribe members were well below the national average. These patterns underscore the importance of more research on a) how migration affects caste hierarchy in both urban and rural areas, and b) how caste hierarchy affects one's propensity to migrate, and c) potential policy solutions to facilitate migration among lower castes.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, Tumbe moves beyond internal migration. He spends considerable time discussing the "Indian Diaspora," or the phenomenon of Indians scattered around the globe. He describes numerous waves of Indian emigration over time, to places including Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, countries in South East Asia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, England, North America, and even Russia. Over time, he notes the composition of emigrants has gone from being fairly representative of the Indian population to representing mainly the country's elite, highlighting another regressive aspect of movement in India.

He then discusses internal movement not through internal migration, but through internal displacement occurring through events such as the Partition of Burma, the Partition of India and Pakistan (along both the Eastern and Western Fronts), the Partition of Bangladesh, conflicts in Tibet, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, and through large development projects.

Finally, Tumbe adds reflections on the possible effects of all of this movement. First, he discusses remittances; the income generated by laborers has the potential to greatly

benefit the economies of the areas to which it is sent. Of course, as Tumbe points out, this will not always be the case: Kerala and Bihar both have very large remittance markets but "stand poles apart" on the ladder of development. Governance and whether remittances are mainly international (as opposed to domestic) may moderate the effect of remittances on local economies, he argues. He also discusses brain drain, women's empowerment in villages when men leave to work in cities, nativist political movements, and the effects on caste mobility discussed above.  Naturally, each of these potential effects merits careful empirical research.

Tumbe concludes with some predictions for the future of migration in India. He argues that 1) India will see greater migration towards the South as higher wages and an aging population in these states attracts more workers, 2) more migration driven by climate change, particularly from Bangladesh, and 3) greater immigration from other countries beyond South Asia.

The book constantly uses linguistic and caste diversity as a visible indicator of migration. This left me with the nagging question: if migration is so common and pervasive throughout India, why do caste-based, religious, and linguistic identities remain so salient? Stepan, Linz, and Yadav (2010) have described India as a "state-nation" of several different locally-based identities, but why have these many cross-cutting cleavages not softened over time? One potential explanation is that divisions remain useful for politicians, either to mobilize voters (Wilkinson 2005) or to allocate scarce resources (Chandra 2004), and that political strategies have therefore maintained the salience of such divisions over time. It could also be that a large percentage of migration in India is circular migration, meaning that migrants do not stay in a location long enough to assimilate. Another explanation is the enduring practice of endogamy.

It is further possible that there are places where such identities have actually become less salient over time. Indeed, recent research has found that the salience of migrant identity can be very context dependent. Thachil (2017), for example, finds that internal divisions among migrants can decrease when they face elites. Gaikwad and Nellis (2017) similarly find that economic threats and a desire to achieve "safety in numbers" among minority ethnic groups moderate how native Mumbaikars perceive migrants.  These findings suggest that certain cleavages may actually soften over time and across space.

This book is very different from the types normally reviewed here. It provides a broad overview of all types of movement throughout India. As I have tried to convey, the descriptions, anecdotes, and off-the-cuff assertions about cause and effect raise a number of important questions that demand further careful empirical investigation. For those who care to go down this path, Tumbe, has created a bibliography of migration in India, which contains *thousands* of books, articles, and reports on the topic alongside a description of all of the existing relevant survey data.

More generally, the book highlights the fact that migration fundamentally shapes all aspects of economic, political, and social life in India and South Asia. Troublingly, by Tumbe's telling, many of the benefits of migration seem to accrue to higher caste

members. Spatial mobility in India may be high, but it doesn't necessarily generate economic mobility.

But there is more to learn. While rural-urban migration affects urban politics in the region, Tumbe reminds us that it also has a large, and relatively less-studied, impact on rural villages. Furthermore, we need a clear understanding of migration's effects and the migrant experience not only in large metropolitan regions, but in Tier-II and Tier-III cities as well. Finally, and most importantly, the book underscores the fact that even before we can make and test specific theoretical arguments about migration and immigration, there is an urgent need for a data-driven understanding of the patterns, and scale of internal migration, emigration, and immigration in South Asia.

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