

Book Review

Migration & Indigenous Population

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Kikon, D. & Karlsson, B.G.(2019). *Leaving the land: indigenous migration and affective labour in India*. New Delhi:Cambridge University Press.

Leaving the Land Indigenous Migration and Affective Labour in India is a multi-sited ethnography project work funded by the Swedish foundation for humanities and social sciences. It is a collaborative research work of Dolly Kikon and B.G Karlsson. This book is mainly concerned with the issue of the outmigration of indigenous youth from northeast to south India. Northeast has a rich culture and diverse ethnic groups, and also compared its beauty to Kashmir on the basis of geographical features. But unfortunately, since independence, the region has been trapped in armed conflict, political disturbance, and militarization. Thus the region is performing low in many developmental indicators, including a lack of job opportunities, healthcare facilities, infrastructure, education, etc. compelling young people to migrant to the other part of India. The authors provide a vivid scenario of the situation and working culture of the indigenous migrants from the northeast India in the service sectors across other places of India. The process of youth migration from the northeast to mainland India is not a smooth passage as compared to others. Because of their non-Indian look, they have to face day-to-day challenges in the form of identity crises, discrimination, racism, sexual violence, and harassment.

The book is divided into six chapters, including introduction and conclusion. The authors have done justice with the title “Leaving the Land” and explained that they leave their land but the land doesn’t leave them, they experience it through the food, culture, ethnic group, and social and religious practices. Indigenous migrants from the northeast move to the metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Tiruvannatpuram, Bangalore, and Delhi for better job opportunities, to fulfill their dreams, to explore the world, and to financially support their families. They work in five-star hotels,

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restaurants, salons, spas, bars, and other hospitality industry, the position, and salary they get is decided by their proficiency in English language, physical appearance, good skin, personal hygiene, and soft skill. For this, they join a grooming class at Dimapur named The people channel (TPC) and learn how to walk, talk, dress, apply makeup, and how to present themselves to the neoliberal world. The authors have also described how the hospitality industry imposes various forms of control and power by refashioning their bodies. Thus, the workers in the hospitality industry have an extra burden to invest money and time to maintain their physical appearance to sustain in the neoliberal and customized world.

It is not easy to leave their native place with a decent identity although it is difficult to return home with an empty hand and face the family and society. Through this book, authors tried to describe departure and return patterns through various real-life stories by conducting interviews and highlighting the struggle between dreams and reality of the society. For carrying different looks youths from northeast are treated as outsiders and are vulnerable to incidences of eve-teasing, gang rape, murder, and other forms of violence at the workplace, in public transport, public places, and locality. To live the character of the migrants, author spent days with them to narrate their stories and moved to their native place to conduct interviews with their parents. The authors conclude that migration is not an individual choice it has a collective effect both on migrants and their families, and society too. Families of migrants suffer in different ways as they have to work hard to send money to their children who are opting for their studies in other cities in the country. The parents remain anxious and worried about the safety and security of their wards working in the service sector. The authors bring out through their narration how parents remain anxious about their children who experience hardships and discrimination in everyday life. The narratives bring out how migrants have different reasons to migrate and work in different sectors; while some find themselves in better positions with a secured income, others struggle to spend their lives in scarcity.

As described in a migrant's story in the book, leaving the land involves a long process of migrating from a rural community located in an interior location to an urban area in search of opportunities for jobs, education and healthcare. It has often been a difficult position for the migrant's family to accept back their loved ones to return home. The reasons for an unwelcome retreat to home lie in the uncertain environment of political turmoil, armed conflict, and ethnic violence which has shrunk opportunities for education and employment. The authors have carefully brought out the stress of conflict situations and how conflicts induce outmigration. A recount of the history of armed conflict and political disturbance in the northeast by one of the migrant family members how some insurgent groups targeted the young population and influenced them to join. The refusal to join such calls often brought in torture and adverse treatments. The conflict between the state and the insurgent group gave rise to unequal distribution of resources into the hand of powerful politicians and organizations. The migrants from conflict torn areas therefore search for alternative places and do not want to return home.

While leaving one's hearth and home is one set of challenge, finding a foot in the new place involves yet another struggle. The authors try to bring out how food and culture play an important role in the context of building new relationships and joining new groups belonging to the same community far from their native place. This forming of new connections help the indigenous migrants to stay connected with their native lands and homes, they have left for trying out a new way of life. They build new social and political connections among the indigenous population from the northeast to overcome the anxieties of being alienated from families and homes. There are several organizations, groups, and unions working in south India to help the migrant people belonging to the northeast, Northeast India Welfare Association Chennai (**NEIWAC**) is one, and has been working since 2014 for the welfare of the northeast community. The association has a strong connection with the political parties and other government stakeholders. The members of the association have stood against discrimination and speak for the rights of the people of Northeast, organize cultural and religious events to tie the community in a single bond. Authors collected information about the work of the association from the social media site approx. 10,000 Northeast people are connected through this association and work in many ways, sharing jobs opportunity, raising funds for emergency situations in case of accident and death, etc. Such diaspora of networks play an important role in the life of indigenous migrants.

The authors in their work have tried to elaborate on the vulnerabilities of the migrants and their families through various stories, and also describe their struggle and challenges facing holding their non-Indian look. The book examined the recent patterns of indigenous migrations and their contribution to the service sector in the form of affective labour and is an important contribution in understanding the outmigration and its pattern from northeast to other cities of India and the diaspora of the migrant community and its vivid interlinked networked space away from home.

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