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## **Conceptual Issues in Measurement of Internal Migration in India**

**Ram B. Bhagat PhD**  
Reader/Associate Professor  
International Institute for Population Sciences  
Mumbai-400088, India  
E-mail: rbbhagat@vsnl.net

### **Abstract**

*Migration influences the social, political and economic life of the people and no government can ignore developing a good statistical system on internal migration in a country.*

*In India, migrants are not required to register either at the place of origin or at the place of destination. In absence of this, Census and National Sample Surveys (NSS) are two main sources of data on internal migration in the country.*

*This paper examines the two national sources of data on internal migration related to the definitions of migrants, duration of migration, streams and reasons of migration. It brings out that given the importance of internal migration in view of HIV/AIDS and public health impacts, there is a need to account the seasonal migrations/or floating populations in the country. Further, socio-political reasons such as communal riots and ethnic conflict also need to be incorporated explicitly in the reasons of internal migration in India.*

### **Introduction**

Migration along with mortality and fertility is considered to be one of the vital population processes influencing the size, composition and distribution of population. Migration can

either depopulate or overpopulate an area depending upon the level of economic activities and is an important process of urbanization and social change. Historically, it has been a force to the democratization of society. For example, the great nations like US and Australia are the products of the streams of migration. In the Indian context, it paved the way for the lower *caste*<sup>1</sup> groups to free themselves from the oppression and subjugation of traditional caste system if they moved to the urban areas<sup>2</sup>.

Migration is a process of cultural evolution also. Migrants bring new ideas, skills and host of cultural practices related to food, dance and music and other life styles as well. Sometimes, they are easily absorbed in the host culture, but in several times they are thought to be a source of conflict, and the cultural differences are exploited to increase the tension between the migrant and host communities. However, the conflict between the migrant and host communities is rooted in the competition for jobs between these two groups of people. Thus, the politicization of migrants and also of the migration policy is a logical out come.

As the importance of migration affecting the socio-economic and political life is pervasive, no government can ignore this phenomenon. A good statistical account on migration would be helpful in socio-economic planning, allocation of resources as well as political management of a populous country like India. Since late 1980s, HIV/AIDS has emerged a major threat to public health in India. It is estimated that 4 to 5 million <sup>3</sup> people are infected by HIV in the country at present. Single migrants living in urban and metropolitan areas are exposed to the risk of HIV/AIDS in view of the fact that they are likely to visit sex-workers among whom the HIV infection is found to be very high. As such, migrants constitute a risky group and also have the potential to spread the infection in their place of origin. This dimension of the linkage of migration with public health has created renewed interest in the study of the trend, pattern and various characteristics of internal and international migrants in and outside of a country (UNAIDS and IOM, 1998). With a view to monitor the emerging social and health issues and problems, the existing statistical system may not be useful. This paper makes an attempt to examine the

nature of the existing data on internal migration, their limitations, and highlights the future need of the data on internal migration in India.

## **Nature of Migration Data**

According to **IUSSP Multilingual Demographic Dictionary**, migration is a form of spatial mobility, which involves change in the usual place of residence and implies movement across an administrative boundary. The change in the usual place of residence can take place either permanent or semi-permanent or temporary basis. However, there is no standard source of data either for internal or international migration (Bell, 2003; United Nations 2002). A recent survey shows that census is the largest source of information on internal migration at the cross-country level. A study shows that 138 countries collected information on internal migration in their censuses compared to 35 through Registers and 22 from surveys (Bell, 2003).

Migration can be measured in number of ways with two most common forms of data being events and transitions. The former are normally associated with population registers, which record individual moves while the latter generally derived from censuses compare place of residence at two points in time. Population registers in fact count the migrations, while the census counts the migrants (Boden *et al.* 1992 quoted in Bell 2003).

Migrants are not required to be registered in India either at the place of origin or at the place of destination. This is in contrast to the practice in China where migrants are required to register themselves with the local authority (Zhu 2003). In lack of registration of migrants, Census and National Sample Survey (NSS) are the two main sources of migration data in India. Census provides data on migrants based on *place of birth* (POB) and *place of last residence* (POLR). If the *place of birth* or *place of last residence* is different from the *place of enumeration*, a person is defined as a migrant. On the other hand, if the place of birth and place enumeration is the same, the person is a non-migrant. Migrants defined on the basis of POB or POLR are called the lifetime migrants because the time of their move is not known (Visaria 1980:2). It has also been

observed that the migrants from rural areas retain attachment to their native place. They continue to maintain links with their families and villages through regular visits and sending remittances (Singh et al 1980: 28). However, the lifetime migration based on census definition does not provide information on the number of moves made by a migrant.

Indian census provides information on place of birth for each person right from 1881 census. The name of district was recorded if the person was born in the district other than the district of enumeration. Similarly, name of the province was recorded if the person was born in the province other than province of enumeration. Until 1951 census, district was the lowest administrative unit of defining the place of birth. Based on this information it was possible to identify inter-district and inter-state migration, but was not possible to identify intra-district migration. However, since 1961 census it was possible to measure intra-district migration as village or town was considered the unit of defining the place of birth (Srivastava 1972:156). It was possible for the first time to study the rural–urban origin of migrants defined in relation to place of birth and four streams of migration namely a) rural to urban, b) urban to urban c) urban to rural and d) rural to rural (Bose 1976; Skeldon 1986). The duration of residence was also ascertained in 1961 census.

Place of last residence was added in since 1971 census and the reasons of migration related to place of last residence were also asked since 1981 census. Complete questions on migration in the latest Indian census are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Census Questions on Migrants/ Non-Migrants**

<b>A. Birth Place</b>	<b>B. Last Residence</b>
i) Place of Birth	i) Place of Last Residence
ii) Rural/Urban	ii) Rural/Urban
iii) District	iii) District
iv) State/Country	iv) State/Country
<b>C. Reasons of Migration (Last residence)</b>	
<b>D. Duration of Residence at the Village or Town of Enumeration</b>	

It is possible to identify three types and four streams of internal migration as follows:

**A. Intra-district Migration**

- i) Rural to urban
- ii) Urban to rural
- iii) Rural to rural
- iv) Urban to urban

**B. Inter-District Migration**

- i) Rural to urban
- ii) Urban to rural
- iii) Rural to rural
- iv) Urban to urban

**C. Inter-State Migration**

- i) Rural to urban
- ii) Urban to rural
- iii) Rural to rural
- iv) Urban to urban

Movement of population within the boundary of a district is defined as intra-district migration, whereas the movement outside the district but within the state is known as inter-district migration, and the movement beyond the state and union territory (UT) <sup>4</sup> but within the country is termed as inter-state migration.

In recent years, there is a revolution being experienced in the field of transportation. A long distance commuting is possible without migrating to place of work. Increased commutation is likely to reduce migration from the nearby areas. In 2001 Census a question on travel to the place of work was included and distance from the residence to place of work was ascertained along with mode of transport used to reach the place of work (Census of India 2001). However, the commutation and migration are two different forms of spatial mobility as commutation does not require change of residence.

### **Migrants Defined by Place of Birth**

If a person born in the village or town where he/she is being enumerated, the person is not a migrant. However, in case of persons born outside the *place of enumeration*, the enumerators were advised to ascertain if their place of birth was a village or town at present. If village it was considered rural and if town it was urban. But, it is possible that at the time of migration the status of the place of birth might be different particularly in those cases of migration, which took place for example ten years and before. But, this has been ignored in the census.

A person born in other state of India or in any foreign country was recorded accordingly. When a person was born on the high seas, it was recorded 'born at sea' and no administrative or territorial status was assigned. However, in the case of persons born in train, boat or bus or aircraft etc within the country, the administrative and territorial status was determined for them and recorded in relation to the place where the birth has actually occurred.

It is easy to determine the migrant/non-migrant status of a person if place of birth is known, but if a person migrates from his or her place of birth and returns at the time of census enumeration, his or her place of birth and place of enumeration will be the same. As a result the person will not be classified as migrant. The census question on place of birth is, therefore, not able to capture the *return migrants*.

### **Migrants Defined by Place of Last Residence**

Place of last residence is most commonly used measure to determine the migrant status of a person. In some countries, last residence at some prior date is also introduced. For example, Census of Mozambique collected data on where people were living 'at the end of the war in 1992' (Bell 2003).

Census enumerators have been asked to determine the place of last residence of each person during the census. If the place of last residence was different from the place of her enumeration, the actual place of last residence i.e. name of the village or town was asked to record. It has been clarified by census that the place of birth of a person can also be counted as place of last residence, if a person is enumerated at a place other than his or her place of birth and if he or she had no other place of residence before coming to the place of enumeration.

Indian census does not specify any duration of stay, which is necessary to qualify for reckoning the place of last residence. The census instruction says that the circumstances of each case would have to be taken before deciding a person's last residence. For example, a Government officer who is transferred for a short period must be moving from his or her place of previous posting, which would become his/her place of last residence irrespective of his or her stay in the new job. However, temporary movement like women moving into hospital for delivery, a person moving into a hospital for treatment etc., at a place other than their usual residence will not be considered as the place of last residence. But, in case of a child born in hospital into which the mother has moved temporarily for delivery, the place where the hospital is will be treated as the place of last residence for the child, but not for the mother (Census of India 1991). As such, the child will be defined as migrant based on place of last residence, whereas the mother is not.

In view of the fact that government policies and programmes emphasize institutional deliveries, the incidence of such migrants associated with hospital deliveries is likely to increase in future. At present nearly 34 per cent deliveries are occurring out side home as reported by the first phase of Reproductive and Child Health Survey (RCH Survey) conducted by the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai in 1998-99. The population policy announced by Government of India in the 2000 envisages 80 per cent of institutional deliveries by the year 2010 (Govt of India 2000). This may likely to increase the number of migrants if census definition of place of last residence is followed.

Several instructions provided in determining place of last residence seems to be anomalous need revision in order to make data on migrants more meaningful for the formulation and evaluation of various policy and programmes of the government.

In contrast to the census, the National Sample Survey Organisation, a wing of Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India has been carrying out all-India household surveys once in five year in order to know the employment and unemployment situation in the country. This survey includes a question on migration. The latest and the sixth such survey was conducted in July 1999-June 2000 provided information on internal migration in the country. Being sample survey, the data have obvious limitations and are not helpful knowing the district level pattern in the internal migration within each state.

However, it is interesting to note the differences in defining migrants between the Census and NSS. The concept of *Usual Place of Residence* is adopted by NSS to define migrants. A usual place of residence is defined as a place (village/town) where the person had stayed continuously for a period of *six months or more*.

According to NSS, a migrant is defined if he or she had stayed continuously for at least six months or more in a place (village/town) other than the village/town where he or she was enumerated. The village/town where the person had stayed continuously for at least six months or more prior to moving to the place of enumeration was referred to as the last usual place of residence of that migrated person (National Sample Survey Organization 2001). In this definition births occurred in hospital will not be counted as migrants as baby is unlikely to stay six months and more in the hospital.

### **Duration of Residence**

Duration of residence refers to continuous stay in the village or town where the person is enumerated. This will apply to even a person who is born at the place of enumeration



provided he or she had left the village or town and lived else where for some time and has come back to village or town at the time of enumeration. The continuous stay also includes short duration visit away from the village or town for purposes such as tour or any temporary visit. Such visits will not be counted as break in the period of continuous residence. The duration of residence was categorized in terms of all duration, less than 1 year, 1-4 years, 5-9 years, 10-19 years and 20 years and more. From this categorization, it is possible to identify the inter-censal migrants based on 0-9 years of duration. The information on duration of residence was available for migrants defined both from the POB and POLR criteria.

### **Migrants Based on Place of Birth and Place of Last Residence: A Comparison**

Because of the marked differences in the definition of migrants, the census and NSS data are not comparable. However, it is worthwhile to mention how the two criteria of POB and POLR employed by census give different or similar estimates of internal migration in India. The latest data are available from 1991 census only. In India, it takes longtime for the census to publish data on migration. The 1991 census data on migration was published in 1997 after 6 years of census taking. Given this delay for 2001 census, we expect the data on migration to be released by census some time in 2007. However, the available data compiled from 1991 census can be compared to know the strength and the limitation of the two sets of data on internal migration in India.

It may be observed from Table 2 that the two criteria give a difference of nearly 3.2 million migrants. POLR criterion gives higher estimates of internal migrants than POB and is true for earlier census also (Census of India 1989). It is likely that POB criterion may not be able to capture those migrants who have migrated any time before the census but has returned at the time enumeration, whereas POLR is able to count them as migrants. The difference between the two estimates could be treated as an extent of *return migration*.

**Table 2: Number of Migrants by Place of Birth (POB) and Place of Last Residence (POLR), India, 1991**

Types of Migration	POB (in 000)	POLR (in 000)	POB-POLR (in 000)
<b>A. Internal</b>	222618	225887	-3269
i). Intra-district	136214	140357	-4143
ii). Inter-District	59105	58841	+264
iii). Inter-State	27299	26689	+610
<b>B. International</b>	6941	5927	+1014
<b>C. Unclassifiable</b>	281	297	-16

Major difference in the estimates of migrants defined on the basis of POB and POLR is found in respect with intra-district migrants. The short distance migrants are likely to have higher propensity to return than long distance migrants. On the other hand, POB criterion gives rather higher estimates for the inter-district as well as inter-state migrants. These medium and long distance migrants seem to be more attached to their birthplace and are likely to under report the short stay moves in between the place of birth and the place of enumeration. It may be observed further that POLR provides nearly one million less international migrants than POB criterion. The estimates on international migration based on POLR is likely to be vitiated by the Indian emigrant living outside and returning to India before the census. For example those Indians who have gone for work or study to US, Europe or anywhere and have returned to the country will be counted as International migrants based on POLR criterion. However, this is not reflected in the actual census estimates presented in Table 2 and there is reason to believe that the international migrants defined by POLR is underreported.

**Table 3: Number of Migrants by Streams of Migration Classified by Place of Birth (POB) and Place of Last Residence (POLR), India, 1991**

<b>Streams of Migration</b>	<b>POB (in 000)</b>	<b>POLR (in 000)</b>	<b>POB-POLR (in 000)</b>
Rural to Rural	142887	145045	-2158
Rural to Urban	40819	39909	+910
Urban to Rural	13143	13479	-336
Urban to Urban	24828	26419	-1591

Data on migrants by streams of migration presented in Table 3 corroborate the observations based on Table 2. Rural to rural migration in India is basically a short duration migration occurring related to the marriage of females who leave their parents' house and join their husbands' household. However, they often visit their parental households. As Indian census counting is based on the de facto status of a person, it is quite likely that some of these women will be enumerated at their place of birth. It seems to be true for the urban to rural and urban to urban streams of migrants also who move to their place of origin after retirement or due to other reasons. It is therefore clear that POB criterion underestimates the internal migrants, however it could still be better to measure the international migrants.

Based on census data of either POB or POLR, it is not possible to distinguish between permanent, semi-permanent and temporary migrants. In order to differentiate between them, it is necessary to know how long they were away from their place of origin or place of usual residence and also the links they maintain with their native households. Temporary migrants generally stay away from their place of origin or usual residence for less than a year. Given the nature of data available in the census or even in NSS,

temporary migrants, seasonal migrants and circulatory migrants are not easily estimated in the study of internal migration in India (Srivastava and Sasikumar 2003).

Number of internal migrants could be inflated or deflated depending upon the creation of new districts or states in the country during the inter-censal period. Political leaders keep on creating new districts in order to make the administrative services closer to the people. States are also created in India after amending the constitution in order to fulfill the local and regional aspirations of governance and self-rule by the people. The federal structure of the country permits this. Recently three new states namely Uttaranchal, Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh were created in 2000- a few months before the latest census held in February 2001. Several new districts are also often created due to administrative and political reasons. The administrative boundaries however do not necessarily coincide with ecological boundaries and as such could artificially inflate inter district and inter-state migration as many of the intra-district and inter-district migrants will be defined as inter-district and inter-state migrants after the creation of new districts and states.

### **Reasons of Migration**

As mentioned earlier, the Census of India since 1981 has collected information on the reasons of migration related to the place of last residence. The most important reason for migration in India is the marriage, accounting for more than half of the migrants. This is explained by the social custom of women migrating to the husband's place on marriage. Employment and business requirements account for little more than one-tenth of migrants while education as a reason of migration accounts for about two per cent of all the migrants. A migrant is assigned the reason of employment if he or she has moved in search of a job or hoping to get a job or he or she has actually got the job. This includes the migration of government servants on account of transfer from one place to another. In National Sample Survey (NSS), however each of these reasons have been treated as a separate category.

If a migrant moves on account of joining a business or setting up or running a business, he or she is said to have migrated on account of business. Census clarifies that business is different from job or employment for which wages/salary is paid in cash or kind. Business means an economic activity, which involves risk-taking either on own account or in partnership with others. There is no commensurate category in NSS.

Education is included as a reason of migration in both census and NSS. Any person who has moved to join a school or college falls under this category. However, census makes a distinction between those who moved voluntarily for education and those who moved along with earning member of the family. In the latter case, family moved be the reason assigned to the migrants. In NSS, the reason was the migration of parent or the earning member.

It has been advised to the enumerators that in case of persons who has come into India from any other country as a result of partition or has been repatriated, the reason for migration will be noted as 'others'.

Droughts and floods do occur in India or some parts of the country every year. Many people are ousted due to this reason. This has been recognized as one of the reasons of migration in the censuses of 1981 and 1991. But it is surprising to see this reason dropped from the main categories of reasons in 2001 ( see Table 4). Census has also not given due importance to man made disasters like riots and social disturbances as reasons of migrations. It can be always argued that the category 'others' or 'any other reason' can take care of these responses, but many times people may not be able reply correctly given very high level of illiteracy (35 per cent in 2001) in the country. Although, some of these reasons could be covered under social and political category in the NSS, however it is not explicit. It is also worth mentioning that communal riots do often occur in several Indian cities and a large number of people get ousted. Terrorism is also displacing a large number of people from the border areas. An explicit recognition of these reasons of migration is needed to be included in the data on internal migration in India. From the point of view of the risk of HIV/AIDS, it will be important to know whether the migrants

are moving alone or with their family. The reason ‘family moved’ does not give us idea in case of the movement of single migrants.

Table 4: **Reasons of Migration: A Comparison of Censuses and National Sample Survey (NSS)**

<b>Reasons of Migration</b>			
<b>Census 1981</b>	<b>Census 1991</b>	<b>Census 2001</b>	<b>NSS</b>
1. Employment	1. Employment	1. Work/Employment	1. In search of employment
2. Education	2. Business	2. Business	2. In search of better employment
3. Family Moved	3. Education	3. Education	3. To take up employment/better employment
4. Marriage	4. Family Moved	4. Marriage	4. Transfer of service/contract
5. Others	5. Marriage	5. Moved with birth	5. Proximity to place of work
	6. Natural Calamities like Drought, Floods Etc.	6. Moved with household	6. Studies
	7. Others	7. Any other reason	7. Acquisition of own house/flat
			8. Housing problem
			9. Social/Political problem
			10. Health
			11. Marriage
			12. Migration of parent/earning member
			13. Others

**Source: Census of India 1991 & 2001; National Sample Survey Organisation (2001).**

In India, thousands of people are getting displaced due to construction of highways, large irrigation projects and industrial establishments. While census is aware about this issue, but directed its enumerations to include this in ‘other’ category. As an innovation, in 2001 census the reason like ‘moved after birth’ was included keeping in view the cultural

practices of woman generally giving her first birth at her parental house rather than her husband's place. Because of this reason, the baby born at his/her maternal house is a migrant in his/her paternal house because the place of last residence was different from the place of enumeration. This is also applicable to births occurring in hospitals and nursing houses.

### **A Future Perspective**

Over the years the Census and National Sample Survey Organization have expanded the scope of data on internal migration in the country. Both collect data more or less on same line, although the definition of migrant is not identical. The NSS gives some additional information like migrants classified per capita monthly expenditure at the place of destination along with nature of economic activity before and after migration. It has also tried to capture the seasonal or temporary migration by introducing a question for those who have stayed away more than 60 days away from their present usual residence for reasons of employment. Although data provided by NSS are collected as an offshoot of the survey on employment and unemployment, it still gives several additional information on the labour migration in the country. But, NSS being sample survey cannot be alternative to the census, which provides information on the size of internal migration up to the district level and also the information on the characteristics of migrants such as their age structure, educational level and working status. However, it must be noted that both sources provide information only on lifetime migration as the timing and number of moves are not known. Some of the very important reasons of migration such as riots, terrorism, persistent ethnic conflict threatening the security of persons at the place of origin are ignored. On the other hand, the unimportant reasons such as 'moved with birth' is included in the latest census of 2001. Further, migrants as a risk group from the public health point of view in general and from the point of view of HIV/AIDS in particular have not been recognized either in Census or NSS. It is not possible to know the number of migrants living away from their family, their occupation and lifestyle at the place of destination. Also, there is a need to look into the internal migration from the point of view of ethnic conflict, violation of human right in view

of forced migration either through development processes or through the state and public agencies in future.

### **Notes:**

1. Caste is an endogamous group where status of an individual is determined by his or her birth in the group. The numerous castes were broadly divided into four hierarchical categories namely *Brahmin* (priestly class), *Kshatriya* (warrior class), *Vaishyas* (trading class) and *Shudras* (labouring class) with Brahmins at the top and Shudras at the bottom. Traditionally, the Shudras are supposed to do the manual work for each of the higher caste groups. They are treated as inferior and with prejudice.

2. Ram (1986) argues that the migration can free the individual from caste prejudices, but when they migrate in group they are more visible. As a result, the prejudice may continue in the place of destination. On the other hand, Gupta (2004) opines that caste structure could be demolished only when majority of rural population could live in metropolitan cities and do not know who his neighbour is.

3. The latest reporting has put the HIV cases at 5.1 million, marginally behind South Africa. However, the experts feel that the number of cases will be higher in India given the stigma attached to the disease and the poor health care services in the rural areas. See **Times of India**, National Daily, Mumbai Edition, July 22, 2004, p. 2.

4. India is divided into 28 states and 7 union territories. The union territories are directly governed by the Government of India, while people's elected representatives govern states. Each state and union territory is divided into number of districts and each district comprises number of villages and towns. Villages have local governments called *Panchayats*, while *municipalities* and the like govern towns.

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