

Migration and Development Narratives from an Indian Perspective |

Irudaya Rajan Sebastian | Centre for Development Studies, Kerala, India

Dominant narratives on international migration from India have changed dramatically in the post-independence era – from emigration seen as ‘brain drain’ and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) being labelled as not-required Indians in the early years until the 1970s; to emigration being viewed as a developmental tool to secure employment, lift millions out of poverty, and the accompanying remittances as a major source of finance for state-building; to emigrants being championed today as new development actors who actively participate in and influence social, economic and political events in their homeland and return-migration understood as being ‘brain gain/regain’. This great change in narrative is evident not only from public discourse and speeches by political and cultural leaders, but also in the increasing attention institutions at the state and national levels pay to international migration and its actors today.

There is a conscious effort by many states and the Centre to organize and promote emigration of Indians. The draft Emigration Bill of 2019, albeit imperfect, is an attempt by the legislature to bring more emigrants under its purview and address issues that concern them. Under the Skill India Mission, National Skill Development Centres (NSDC) across the country impart skills training to those looking for jobs overseas. International migrants are also being attracted by state and central governments to transfer skills and make investments, as visible in grand programs such as the Loka Kerala Sabha and the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas.