



Migration Brokerage in South Asia: Contexts, Assemblages and (Dis)contents

(International Conference, University of Hyderabad, India, 17-18 January 2025)

Movement of people across national borders for work has been explained in terms of social networks in which migration appears as a self-perpetuating phenomenon. As a result, the figure of migration broker and the practice of migration brokerage have received somewhat limited attention in migration studies.

And yet, international migration for employment and education today is mediated significantly by a wide variety of intermediates – facilitators, brokers – and there is evidence of social networks morphing into grids of private brokerage. The so-called “middle space” of migration is populated by a wide variety of go-between players—formal and informal recruiting agents, facilitating institutions and organizations, social and kinship networks, village heads, religious leaders/institutions, state officials, language training institutes, skill developers, immigration lawyers, educational consultants, documentation centres, touts, and (return)migrants themselves—who work across the sending, receiving and transit locations of migration (Lindquist, Xiang and Yeoh 2012; McKeown 2012). As recent research has demonstrated, though demonized, brokers are central to the contemporary migration industry in that they play a central role in facilitating transnational migration in the face of increasing formalization of migration governance and tightening of documentary regimes (Lindquist 2010; Rahman 2011; Rajan, Varghese and Jayakumar 2011; McKeown 2012; Osella 2014; Baas 2020; Varghese 2020). At the same time, cultures of brokerage are necessarily inchoate and contingent on the working of wider historically and spatially instituted migration assemblages emerging at the interstices of complex configurations of relations between states, capital, labour markets, civil society and more.

South Asia is known not only for its long and robust histories of emigrations but also for a strong network of facilitating and mediating migration brokers - the culture of *dalalship* is seen as something intrinsic to its everyday life. Much more than intermediating the demand-supply dynamics of labour, the brokers play diverse and complex mediations, be it the transcolonial labour flows or the contemporary migrations from the subcontinent (Carter 1995; Peebles 2001;

Roy 2008; Bates and Carter 2017; Datta 2021). The subcontinental cultures of brokerage and their manifestations have specific histories and trajectories, their heterogeneity dependent on differences of regions, class, caste, gender, skillsets and more.

The conference intends brings together ongoing researches of brokerage in emigrations from South Asia – historical and contemporary - with its networks, operations and infrastructures in the sending, transit and destination locations. We invite presentations on new and original research on diverse aspects of migration brokerage in South Asia, pertaining to, but not limited to, the following areas/themes:

- Institutional frameworks and regulatory infrastructures within which private brokers functions and mediate the process of emigration from South Asia.
- Dynamics of private brokerage – role, services, support systems and modus of working - in international migration from South Asia.
- Diverse cultures of migration brokerage in terms of space and time in/from colonial and postcolonial South Asia.
- Intersection of distinct migration cultures and private brokerage in South Asia.
- Response and negotiation of private brokers to changing state policies, and migration governance towards increased formalization with the help of new technologies in the sending, transit and destination countries.
- The role of state, civil society, market, capital, economic conditions, etc. in shaping migration brokerage.
- Benefits and downsides of brokerage in international migration.
- Migration brokerage, through the lens of gender, caste, race and class.
- Migrants' response and decision-making concerning choice of brokers, economies of trust and mutuality dependence.
- Brokerage and the production and re-production of overseas labour markets and its practices.
- Brokerage as a socially embedded and morally ambiguous practice – social involvement in generating connections, trust, licitness and mitigation.
- Cultural representation of migration brokerage – popular culture, literature and cinema.

Submission of Abstracts:

Abstract of papers with a short bio-note of the authors may be sent to vjvss@uohyd.ac.in before 25 November 2024. Authors are expected to revise their papers for an edited volume out of the conference.

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