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**Ram B. Bhagat 2026 Migration, Mobility, and Voting Rights: Emerging Challenges in India, WP 01/2026, IHD WORKING PAPER SERIES, Institute for Human Development, New Delhi, ISBN: 978-81-88315-96-3, Pages 21. [www.ihdindia.org](http://www.ihdindia.org)**

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Whether people are by nature sedentary or mobile is a debatable issue but the fact remains that a large number of people migrate from one place to another, either in response to strong push factors or strong pull factors which are many: socio-economic, environmental, political and psychological. Many of them migrate multiple times or return back. Further, as stated by Prof. Bhagat, “not only do people change places, but places are also transformed.” Migration influences migrants themselves, their families, and eventually entire societies. Ironically while the basic definition of demography is that it is a quantitative study of five demographic processes - fertility, mortality, nuptiality, migration and social mobility - demographic research has largely concentrated on fertility, mortality and nuptiality. Other processes are rather ignored. Prof. Ram B. Bhagat, an ex-IIPS professor, now with Institute for Human Development, has written many papers and books on migration which raise serious theoretical issues and are not simply discussion of statistical patterns of migration. This working paper is in the same direction.

The aim of the paper is to bring to light the political vulnerability of migrants. In different contexts, studies have already

shown that migrants constitute a particularly vulnerable group. But it is for the first time that Prof. Bhagat has shown the political vulnerabilities of migrants in India - external migrants (including NRIs) as well as internal migrants - that prevents them from exercising their political rights including the right to vote. For doing this he first defines various categories of migrants, such as seasonal migrants, permanent migrants, interstate migrants, intrastate migrants, intercity migrants, commuters, those who move alone or with family, etc. and then shows what kind of problems migrants face in getting citizenship rights. He also shows how their political and socio-economic rights are intertwined with broader political processes and ideologies of nationhood. For him: “formal citizenship rights are actually the political rights, such as the right to vote and elect a government, the substantive citizenship rights are actual lived conditions of the people, which depend upon the fulfilment of economic and social rights, such as the right to food, livelihood, health, and education, etc.” The distinction between formal and substantive rights is only analytical; in practice both the rights affect each other. If some people are debarred of political rights their substantive rights are also affected.

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He also argues that the standard definitions of migrants connected with usual place of residence (NSSO definition) often fail to recognise and incorporate some “short term mobilities such as seasonal, temporary, and circulatory movements of people not involving change in the usual place of residence, but provide important linkages and interaction between the places of origin and places of destination.” Linking his arguments with current political controversies, he avers that “voter registration requires documentary proof of age, residency, and citizenship, many may be denied registration at their place of origin due to a lack of documentation, and many may be unable to reregister at their place of destination upon migration if they lack proof of residence.” It is also important to note that the voting rights intersect with “age, sex, disability, educational level, employment status, and other factors, shaping their participation in elections and their right to vote, an essential aspect of democracy.”

Prof. Bhagat concludes that migrant and mobile populations should be treated separately and innovative ways need to be evolved for them to exercise rights, as

different categories of migrants pose different challenges to protecting voting rights. While the migrants need to be included and protected at the destination, the mobile populations are a major concern for places of origin. A migrant may face barriers such as identity and address proofs, a hostile environment, and access to facilities in the process of enrolment as a new voter in the place of destination or in the transfer of registration of vote from the previous place of residence to the current place of residence in accordance with ordinary residence change.

The paper includes one appendix on Types of Voters, Place, and Method of Voting, Lok Sabha Election, 2024 which is an eye opener.

I have always enjoyed reading theoretical works of Prof. Bhagat. I recommend that all those interested in migration must read this working paper. There is enough material for students, researchers on migration, demographers, political theorists and activists, and journalists. As is true with his other works, this working paper meets a strong need for connecting population processes with socio-economic and political issues.