

Report

Perspectives on Human Mobility: Normative and Political

Speaker: Achin Chakraborty

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Achin Chakravarty began his lecture with the vulnerable condition of the migrants. He said that there are different perspectives to illuminate the complexity of the question. This may be generally called human mobility. The idea of “human mobility” is therefore overshadowed by a commonplace moral concern that overwhelms the numerous accounts of vulnerabilities of migrants. In this lecture the speaker gave an outline of a normative framework that was articulated in UNDP’s Human Development Report 2009. According to Chakraborty the perspective here is of freedom. It has been taken in the sense of either opportunity or capability. Therefore when an individual chooses to move, her capability set is supposed to expand. The speaker indicated the majority of the migrants who migrated from their home or the nearest city to far places to earn more and to make their livelihood better could be seen as compromising with their condition. According to Achin Chakraborty, the importance of the vulnerability narrative is that the migrants are ready to compromise their freedom and ready to expose themselves in risky situations. Following this perspective it is hard to see why the direction of policy in the origin country/ sub-national entities should be towards ‘holding back’ the prospective out-migrants. Chakraborty analyzed through the perspective of political economy which challenged the “positive analytic approach” in migration studies. Referring to the Human Development Report, Chakraborty tried to find out the cause of the response by the government towards the situation. He brought the theories of development economics along with the different political approaches to study the mobility of the migrants, especially the migrant laborers. He argued that a judicious combination of arguments drawn from these apparently diverging perspectives may help us understand the policy issues better.

There are several questions and responses to Achin Chakraborty’s lecture. Chandan Srivastava from Bihar asked the justification of the development narratives. Mhalaya Chatterjee asked about the responses taken by some state governments and preparation of a register. Chakraborty replied that there must be some conflicts of interest between different departments of the government which prevented the government from preparing a register. He hoped that the it will be resolved soon.