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Channels of Internal Migration in India: A Historical Perspective

Nalin Singh Negi** and Sujata Ganguly*

**Research Fellow, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, India. E-mail-negi_nalin@yahoo.co.in

*Research Fellow, International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, India. E-mail-sujataganguly2002@rediffmail.com

Abstract: India has a long history of migration and though internal migration was less in earlier periods, it is noteworthy to study the pattern and direction of internal migration in India. Due to dearth of literature, the study could not focus beyond 1891 and restricted the period of study till 1931. The sole dependence while writing the paper has been on available census reports from which insights could be drawn about the process of internal migration in India. It has been found that Bengal, Assam and Bombay were the main centres of immigration and United Provinces, Mysore, Bihar and Orissa had been centres of emigration. Though the pattern of internal migration remained quite similar between 1891 and 1921, in 1931 some new centres of immigration came up e.g. Delhi, Bikaner etc. Apart from this, a gradual change has started taking place in the pattern of internal migration in India.

Key words: India, History, Channels, Internal migration, Census

Introduction

The study of internal migration assumes special importance in any country in the process of development. By its very nature internal migration, that is the movement of people across smaller units within the country, is related to a process of change occurring within the social system. There are two aspects to the study of internal migration, namely, quantitative and qualitative. The former deals with the numbers and characteristics of the migrants and their role in the population re-distribution over a length of time. The latter is concerned with the structural changes that these movements within the population invariably accompany and their relationships with the overall process of transition of the entire community (Rele 1969). According to Classical theories, migration is a rational decision made by an individual to move from a less advantageous situation, to a more advantageous one after weighing risks and benefits.

There is, however, dearth of information on internal migration in India as there was no check whatsoever on the movement of persons across Provincial and State borders. The only available information includes place-of-birth data from census reports, some descriptive materials and linguistic data. These sources of data are subjected to limitations but are adequate enough to give comprehensive understanding of internal migration in India. The study of internal migration is important to understand the population re-distribution. Social and economic would have been the major causes underlying migration. However, in addition to this, natural rate of increase in population is another contributing factor for internal migration in India.

People in India have long been known for their attachment to the native locale and statistics confirm this further. In 1891, 3.8 percent of the people lived in State or Province where they were not born. It was 3.3, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.6 percent in 1901, 1911, 1921 and 1931 respectively (Davis 1951). A number of factors can be attributed to this phenomenon of low scale of mobility among Indians. The first reason was the predominance of agriculture where most of the farming was done at subsistence level that allowed little surplus to meet the travel expense. The caste system too posed a hindrance because caste had geographical as well as social boundaries. Thus suppression of social mobility led to the suppression of geographical mobility. The third aspect was early marriage and joint family whereby adult status and responsibility in the village tend to be assumed just after puberty. The discouragements that offered to migration were substantial as the inheritance laws called for equal division of property. The fourth reason account for the diversity of language and culture which eventually encounter prejudices. Lack of education was yet another factor that tends to burden man “with superstitious fear of what lie beyond rather than firing him with pictures of golden opportunities”.

The dominant movement of people prior to partition was from west to east which was mainly attributed to industrial and urban development of Bengal and the growth of tea estates in Assam. The second direction of flow of migrants was from south to west due to the attraction of Bombay urban centres and the estate agriculture of the Western Ghats.

The pattern of internal migration between 1891 and 1931 are described below:

Internal migration in 1891: During this time, people rarely crossed village administrative boundary as assimilating with people of different race and language in another village was difficult. Natives of villages did not entertain immigration¹ into their villages. If someone wish to cultivate the ancestral land some miles away from the village but within the jurisdiction of the village was acceptable. Out of 10,000 populations, no less than 9,661 were either natives or migrants from contiguous State. In addition to it, this fact was mainly attributed to the marriage system in India where people of upper castes strictly followed exogamous marriage over endogamous marriage. Permanent migration outside the district and state unit was very rare during this time. However, three and a half percent of population and out of this 3.16 percent came from tracts within India which did not actually touch the district of enumeration. For instances, most of the immigrants into Berar were probably from parts of Deccan. So too, with Baroda and Haidrabad. In Bengal and Bombay, the internal migration of temporary nature mainly composed of migrants from distant areas (Baines 1893).

In Bombay, the movement was generally towards west and north where fodder for cattle were to be found, another movement was towards Berar and Khandesh for arable lands. The latter movement mainly comprised of agriculturalists. In Madras, migration was mostly to Burma or Mysore because in Madras the affected land was large and the lands of promises were further off. The Madras-born population in Haidrabad and Secunderabad were absorbed in mines or cantonments apart from marriage transactions. In Panjab, the causes of migration varied between east and west. In the east, marriage system

¹ Terms immigration and emigration have been used to denote internal migration as per census 1891-1931.

dominated the migration whereas in the west which was mainly tribal and settlements were further apart; migrations that were apparent were due to opening of new irrigation works, of a new railway and so on. In Bengal, the course of migration was entirely from west to east. Family or permanent migration was confined to small units. Labourers from Bihar were averse from venturing south than in and around Ganga Delta. The major streams of migration have been illustrated in Figure 1. The width of arrows indicates the volume of migration. These arrows are not measurable on scale as width has been given based on volume of migration as evident from available literatures. The volume of migration from Haidrabad to Bombay and Berar was quite voluminous as compared to the flow from Bombay and Berar to Haidrabad. This stream of migration was female dominated mostly due to marriage. Similarly, other important streams have been depicted. Finally, it could be said that in due course of time, emigration from Provinces to States increased and from States to Provinces decreased.

Internal migration in 1901: In 1901, net immigration in Provinces was 19,37,834 and net emigration was 15,87,039 whereas among States and Agencies, net immigration was 15,93,742 and net emigration was 18,55,388. From these figures it is clear that in Provinces net migration was 3,50,795 (excess of immigration) whereas in States and Agencies net migration was minus 2,61,626 (excess of emigration) (Gait 1913). Provinces namely, Assam, Bombay, Central Provinces and Berar and Central India were the main centres of immigration and United Provinces was the main centre of emigration closely followed by Madras and Bengal, Bihar, Orissa. Bengal, Bihar and Orissa combined together had high immigration as well as emigration but emigration surpassed immigration in those regions. This could be the mixed impact partially of Bihar and Orissa which were mostly emigrating Province and partially of Bengal which was mainly an immigrating Province. If net gain or loss is considered then Provinces received immigrants and States sent emigrants. Among the individual Provinces or States, Assam, Burma, Central Provinces and Berar had excess of immigrants over emigrants whereas Madras, United Provinces and Rajputana had excess of emigrants over immigrants.

Assam mostly received immigrants from Bengal (including Bihar and Orissa) i.e. around 5,03,880. The next Provinces were Central Provinces and Berar and United Provinces. Bombay received immigrants mainly from Baluchistan, United Provinces, Baroda State, Hyderabad State, Rajputana Agency and from French and Portuguese Settlements. The important source of immigrants to Central Provinces and Berar were Bombay, Bengal, United Provinces, Central India Agency, Hyderabad State and Rajputana Agency. Central India received immigrants from United Provinces, Rajputana Agency, Bombay and Central Provinces and Berar.

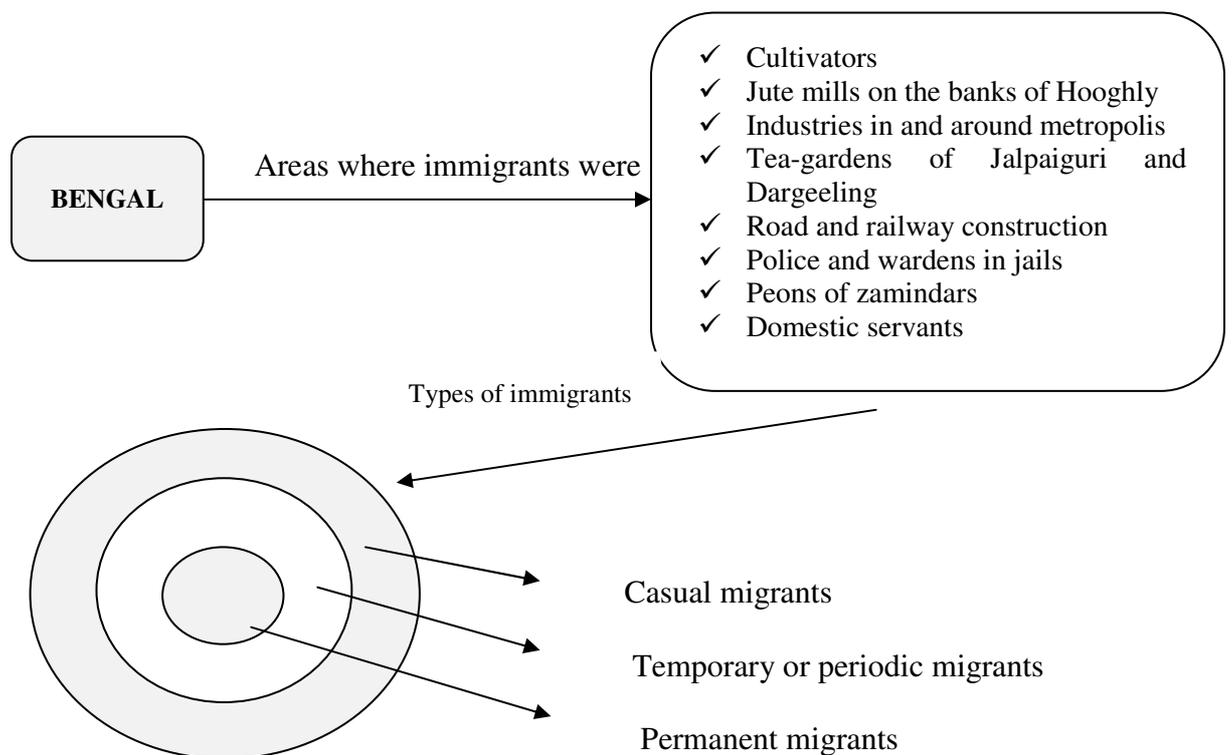
United Provinces apart from sending emigrants to Bombay, Central Provinces and Berar and Central India, it also sent emigrants to Punjab and Rajputana. The most important regions where most of the people from Madras emigrated were Baroda, Mysore and Burma. Bengal had emigration mostly to Burma, Assam and United Provinces.

Internal migration in 1911: Of the 26.5 million natives of India who were enumerated in a district other than that in which they were born, 16.5 million or 62 percent were born in a district adjoining that in which they were enumerated (Gait 1913). The great majority of them were those who had moved only a few miles from their original home, and happened

to cross the district boundary (casual migration²). The main reasons behind this phenomenon were social and economic. Social reason account for reluctance of the native of India to leave their ancestral home and economic hindrance was to be found on the fact that people relied on agriculture on subsistence basis and hence there were no incentives for a man to leave home and take land elsewhere. However, the main stream of migration was mostly external or inter-provincial rather than intra-provincial which was quite negligible. The external migration again divided into two types- one between adjoining Provinces and States and another to a distant area. The important places of emigration were Bihar and Orissa, Madras, the United Provinces and Rajputana whereas places of immigration were Bengal, Assam and Burma.

The pattern of immigration to Bengal has been depicted in Figure 2. There were many sectors where immigrants were absorbed and they were mainly of casual type with some of them being temporary or periodic migrants and very few of them being permanent migrants. In Assam, the arable land was plenty so natives preferred to work in their own farms rather than working as hired labourer. The main places of attraction were tea-gardens. In Burma, rice mills and oil wells were the prominent magnetic centres of immigration. The immigrations to Burma were mostly from Madras and from Chittagong. These migrations were of seasonal or periodic character but many would eventually settle down there as labourers, cultivators or cartmen. Higher percentages of immigrants were enumerated in towns compared to rural areas.

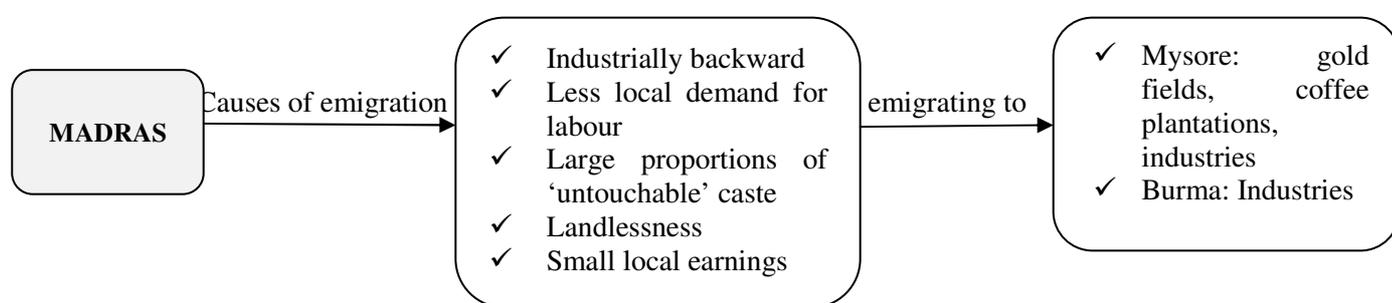
Figure 2: Pattern of immigration in Bengal, Census 1911



² Types of migration has been explained in Appendix

Bihar and Orissa suffered a net loss of 1.5 million due to migration. The western districts of Bihar were densely populated as a result of which it served as a reservoir of labour supply to Bengal and Assam. Chota Nagpur plateau with far less fertile soil had equal pressure on the soil though it was sparsely populated so bulk of population moved towards tea-gardens. Emigrants from Orissa mainly worked as domestic servants, door-keepers or *palki-bearers* in Bengal. United Provinces was another region where apart from emigration to adjoining areas, the direction of movements were towards Bengal (mainly from eastern districts), towards Assam and towards Bombay. The pattern of emigration from Madras has been shown in Figure 3. Unable to meet the basic sustenance, people from Madras emigrated to Mysore and Burma. Emigration from Rajputana was marginal but the net loss from migration (more than 5percent) was far greater than that sustained by any part of India. Marwari traders had penetrated to all parts of India.

Figure 3: Pattern of emigration from Madras, Census 1911



The pattern of migration in Bombay was quite diverse from those mentioned above. Bombay was more industrialised than Bengal and the soil was less productive. As a result of this, the demands for labourers were met by natives and from adjoining districts. The intra-provincial migration during this period was also noteworthy as has been explained in Table 1.

Table 1: Intra-provincial migration, census 1911

Place of immigration	Pull factors	Place of emigration
Punjab	Canal	Surrounding districts
Eastern districts of Bihar and Orissa	Cheap cultivable land	Northern districts of Bihar and Orissa
Upper Burma	Canals	Lower Burma
Bombay	Industries	Deccan, Konkan, Gujarat

Internal migration in 1921: As between the natural divisions there was a balance of about 14 thousand in favour of the Western Division, the Eastern Division giving to the Western 34 thousand as against 90 thousand which it received from that division. Much of these migrations were casual and the very large balance was due to the larger number of the districts that form the Eastern Division. The Western Division had however not only that balance as compared with the Eastern Division but owing to the paucity of its population and the large demand for labour on its coffee and areca gardens had a larger proportion of immigrants from all parts of India than the Eastern Division. It may be said on the whole that there was a movement of a thousand or more persons generally only

between contiguous districts except in the case of Bangalore and Mysore which sent to other districts too and Kadur and Chitaldrug which could not send even to all contiguous districts (Thyaoarajaiyar 1923).

The net immigration to Provinces was 79,90,799 and net emigration was 78,66,878 i.e. a net balance of 1,23,921. Similarly with regards to States or Agencies, the net immigration was 37,70,037 and net emigration was 38,93,958 i.e. a net migration of minus 1,23,921 (Marten 1923). Around 30 million people were born outside the districts of enumeration. Of these 20 million were born in contiguous districts to the districts of enumeration (Marten 1924). The important Provinces or States of immigration were Bengal, Bombay and Assam followed by Central India, Mysore and Punjab States. The centres of emigration were Bihar and Orissa, United Provinces, Madras and Punjab Provinces apart from Rajputana Agency and Bombay States. The major sending Provinces or States to these centres of immigration has been described in Table 2.

Table 2: Direction of migration, Census 1921

Receiving Provinces or States	Sending Provinces or States
<i>Provinces</i>	
Bengal	Bihar and Orissa, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Central Provinces and Berar, Rajputana
Bombay	United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Baluchistan, Punjab, Bombay States, Hyderabad, Rajputana
Assam	Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, Central Provinces and Berar, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Madras, Bihar and Orissa States, Rajputana, Central India, Central Provinces and States
<i>States</i>	
Central India	United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Bombay, Gwalior, Rajputana
Punjab	Punjab Province, Rajputana
Mysore	Madras

The migration was mostly male-dominated, the reasons of which have been well described in aforementioned paragraphs. The sex ratio among migrants of Provinces and States depict that there were regions where sex ratio was in favour of females. This implies that those may be either receiving areas where marriage transactions were dominant or sending areas where males emigrated in search of employment leaving behind females whereby the feminine sex ratio was observed. Among the Provinces where such phenomenon was observed was Ajmer-Merwara. The sex ratio of females per 1000 males was 1200 among those whose birth place was Rajputana and were enumerated in Ajmer-Merwara. Infact in Ajmer-Merwara as a whole, the sex ratio for States or Agencies was 1116. Immigrants to Bihar and Orissa Provinces had high sex ratio. It was 1027 from Provinces and 1433 from States. Particularly, sex ratio was high among immigrants from Bengal, Madras, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa States and Central Provinces. Central Provinces and Berar had more or less balanced sex ratio among immigrants from Provinces and 1051 females per 1000 males from States. Immigrants from Bihar and Orissa and Madras (Provinces) and from Baroda, Bihar and Orissa, Central India, Central Provinces States and Hyderabad (States) had high sex ratio. Marriage could be one of the

principle causes underlying this phenomenon. Madras has always been portrayed as sending region. Accordingly, it can be observed that sex ratio was in favour of females in Madras. In Punjab and United Provinces, immigrants from States or Agencies had high sex ratio. In Punjab particularly, immigrants from Delhi, Punjab States and Rajputana had high sex ratio whereas in United Provinces, immigrants from Ajmer-Marwara, Bihar and Orissa, Central Provinces and Berar, Delhi, Central India, Gwalior and Rajputana had feminine sex ratio. Assam had high sex ratio mainly among immigrants from Assam States. Immigrants to Bihar and Orissa States from Provinces and States had 1242 and 1022 females per 1000 males respectively. Bombay and Madras States too had high female to male ratio.

Internal migration in 1931: The figures of migration generally speak not of very great importance as affecting the population of the different parts of India, as the fact that the principal occupation of all of India was agriculture militates against any marked movement of population from one part to another. Out-migration was quite high in Bihar and Orissa which was around 17,58,130 persons i.e. persons born in the Province but enumerated in other parts of India. In Madras and the United Provinces, the figures were 11,35,231 and 15,57,451 respectively (Hutton 1933). A new direction of migration started to pre-dominate during this time i.e. towards Delhi due to its new growth as capital city. Assam and Coorg showed high immigration balance due to tea and coffee plantations respectively. A brief description of direction of flow of migrants has been given in Table 3.

The immigration to Assam which was mainly of permanent type witnessed a change. Emigration from Madras to Assam continued but there was a decline of emigrants from Bihar and Orissa during the decade of 1920s. It was only in late 1920s that temporary migration started when labourers were recruited for short period of time. The demand for immigrant labourers declined more so due to increased supply of labours locally. Moreover, the Bengali immigrants from East Bengal who were generally musalmans (Muslims) were heading towards Assam. As a result of this, Muslim population in Assam increased by 111 percent since 1881. This was the major movement that had taken place during this time and Bengali immigrants invaded most part of Assam. As quoted by Mr. Lloyd in 1921 (cited in Hutton 1933), "It is sad but by no means improbable that in another thirty years Sibsagar district will be the only part of Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home".

The pattern of migration also observed a change in Bihar and Orissa. The net gain by immigration surpassed the net loss by emigration during the decade. This was due to urban and industrial developments and also due to the fact that Bihar and Orissa fared well during the time of industrial depression and was not affected as much as other provinces. The permanent type of emigration then changed into periodic and temporary emigration.

In contrast to the situation in Bihar and Orissa; United Provinces experienced a net balance of 1,58,000 with emigration exceeding immigration. The emigrants were uniformly distributed all over North and East India namely, Bengal, Bombay, Central Provinces, Punjab and Rajputana. Bikaner State had a net gain of 61 percent as there had been an extension of irrigation. Immigration to Bikaner was considered to be of permanent type.

Madras was an important province when net loss due to migration was taken into consideration. However, the decade saw a rise in international emigration in Madras. A new direction of flow of internal migrants gained weight i.e. migration to Cochin and Travancore which already had densest population and high natural rate of increase. In Cochin, immigration was of casual type while in Travancore, Tamil labourers were mainly the immigrants.

Central Provinces was characterised by daily migration. Infact, daily migration had increased considerably mainly in industrial settlements. Buses running to nearby villages for labour by Assam tea garden were one such example. Another example was of Nagpur where clerks lived 25 or 30 miles away at Ramtek and traversed daily to Nagpur. The decade of 1921-1931 also had a reverse direction of migration between British and State territory. Earlier the direction of migration was from States to British territory but in 1920s, the direction reversed. The British India used to be at favourable position in terms of migration with respect to French and Portuguese settlements. From Portuguese settlements, emigration was towards British territories especially Bombay. The migration between British territories and French settlements were mainly politically bound. North Arcot district of Madras had persons born in French India. This was due to the fact that, as a result of defeat in elections in Pondicherry, the defeated party found it more comfortable to withdraw to British territory.

Conclusions

The aforementioned discussion clearly illustrates the home-loving characteristics of Indian people. The basic reasons underlying this were economic and social causes i.e. immobility of agricultural population rooted to the ground, fenced by caste, language and social customs and filled with innate dread of change of any kind. The migration mainly considered movements between contiguous districts or states. The growth of large industrial cities of Bombay Presidency was mainly due to migration from neighbouring areas. Similarly, the increasing population of the canal colonies of the Punjab included thousands of agriculturists from the neighbouring districts; settlers from Santhal Parganas migrated to Bengal etc.

Temporary movements of businessman, labourers and pilgrims were continually occurring throughout the years and sometimes even covered long distances. However, they were not possible to gauge unless and until they became regular to be considered under periodic migration. Efforts were taken to conduct census during the time when there were no festivals or fairs but that could not be done always. For example, during census 1911, outbreak of plague affected the distribution of population. During census 1921, the numbers enumerated in Ajmer city included a large concourse of people including people from distant places to attend *Urs* festival that was going on at that time. Similarly, there were gatherings in Puri and some other shrines in the United Provinces and Madras.

Appendix

Type of migration

Casual migration- Minor movements between neighbouring villages and gain importance if the villages are situated across the district boundary.

Temporary migration- It includes migration of coolies to meet the demand for labour on canals, railways etc. or journeys on business or in connection with pilgrimages, marriage ceremonies and the like.

Periodic migration- Seasonal demands of labour generally for the harvest.

Semi-permanent migration- Inhabitants earning their living in another place but maintain connection with their own homes and ultimately return there.

Permanent migration- This type of migration is in the nature of colonization. It usually takes place when owing to irrigation or improved communications or changed political conditions, new lands become available for occupation.

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Figure 1: Direction and magnitude of migration, Census 1891

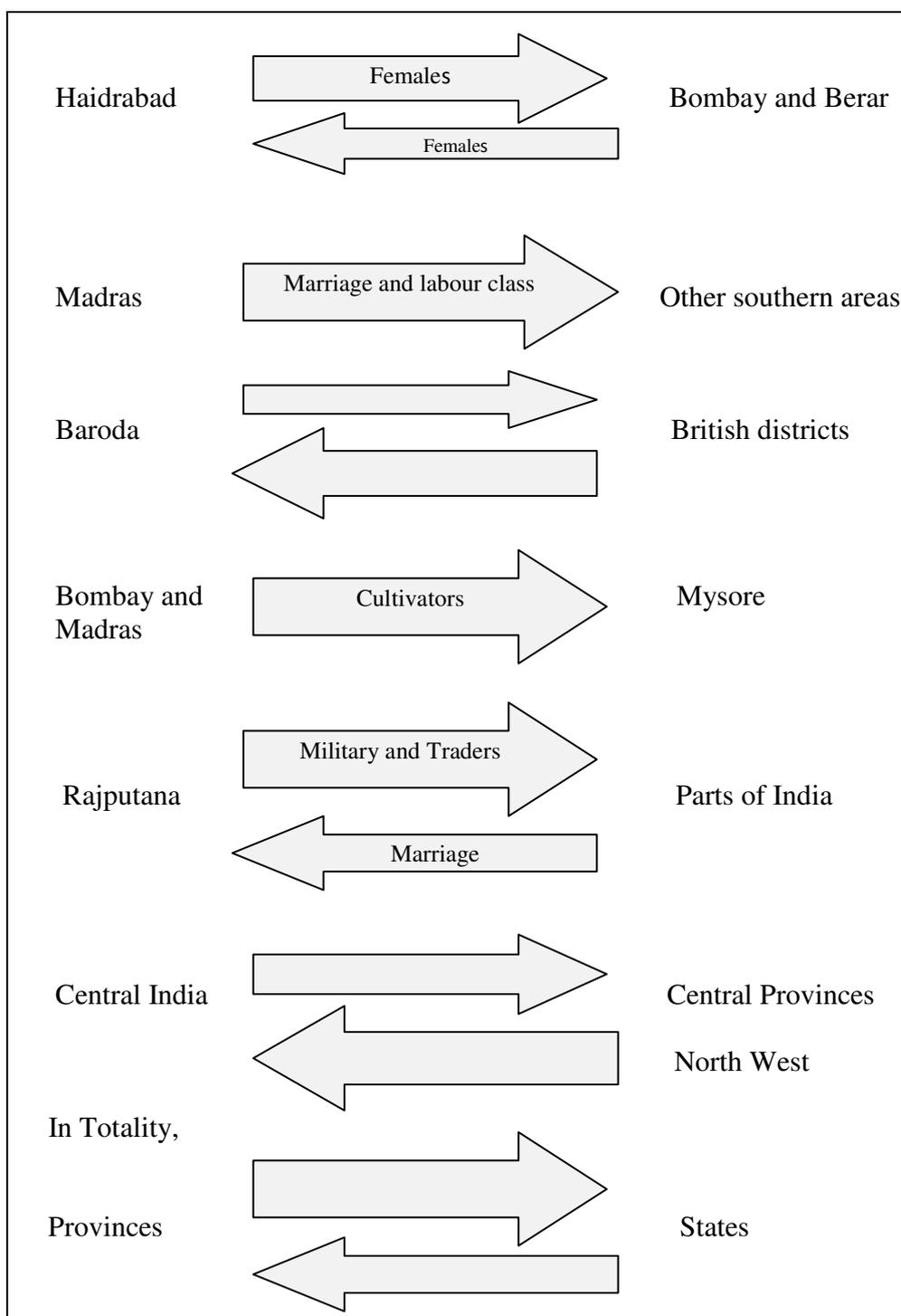


Table 3: Direction of migration, Census 1931

Receiving Provinces or States	Sending Provinces or States	Percentage of emigration from sending regions
Burma	Madras	38
	Bengal	20
	United Provinces	11
Assam	Bengal	41
	Bihar and Orissa	34
	Central Provinces	6
	United Provinces	5
	Madras	4
	Rajputana	2
Bengal	Bihar	65
Assam		27
Bihar and Orissa		10
Bengal	United Provinces	22
Bombay		9
Punjab		15
Burma	Madras	26
Mysore		26
Travancore		9
Hyderabad		12
Bombay	Hyderabad	NA
	Baroda State	NA
	Portuguese India	NA

Note: NA=Not Available