

Role of dalit diaspora in the mobility of the disadvantaged in Doaba region of Punjab

■ Amanpreet Kaur

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■ **ABSTRACT :** In Sikh majority state Punjab most of the population live in rural areas. Scheduled caste population constitute 31.9 per cent of total population. Jat Sikhs and Dalits constitute a major part of the Punjab's demography. From three regions of Punjab, Majha, Malwa and Doaba, the largest concentration is in the Doaba region. Proportion of SC population is over 40 per cent and in some villages it is as high as 65 per cent. Doaba is famous for two factors –NRI hub and Dalit predominance. Remittances from NRI, SCs contributed to a conspicuous change in the self-image and the aspirations of their families. So the present study is an attempt to assess the impact of Dalit diaspora on their families and dalit community. Study was conducted in Doaba region on 160 respondents. Emigrants and their families were interviewed to know about remittances and expenditure patterns. Information regarding philanthropy was collected from secondary sources. Emigration of Dalits in Doaba region of Punjab is playing an important role in the social mobility. They are in better socio-economic position and advocate the achieved status rather than ascribed. Majority of them are in Gulf countries and their remittances proved fruitful for their families. Eminent and wealthy NRIs contribute to the society and to make their caste more assertive *i.e.* politically, religiously.

■ **KEY WORDS:** Doaba, Dalits, NRIs, Remittances, Philanthropy

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Author for Correspondence:

→ Amanpreet Kaur
Department of Sociology, GHG
Institute of Law for Women,
Sidhwan Khurad, Ludhiana
(Punjab) India
Email : amansoc2016@gmail.
com

The Punjab state of India is agricultural based and Sikh majority state as they constitute 60 per cent of the total population and they mostly reside in rural areas of Punjab. Other castes in the state are, Hindu, Muslims and Scheduled caste/Dalits (Ad-dhrmis and Balmikis). Scheduled castes constitute 31.9 per cent of the total population compared to 16.6 at national level (Census, 2011). Jat Sikhs and Dalits constitute a major part of the Punjab's demography. One of the

distinguishing features of SCs in Punjab is their numerical strength. Punjab is comprised of three socio-cultural zones namely, *Majha*, *Malwa* and *Doaba*. Dalits are unevenly spread over the three regions.

The largest concentration is in the *Doaba* region. *Do-aab* literally means two waters *i.e.* the area between two rivers, Beas and Sutlej. In more than 3000 villages of *Doaba* region, proportion of SC population is over 40 per cent and in some villages it is as high as 65 per cent.

This numerical preponderance of Dalits is a measure of their strength (Jodhka, 2000; Awasthi, 2003; Judge, 2003 and Judge and Bal, 2008). Doaba is famous for two factors –NRI hub and Dalit predominance. Small land holdings in the region became the reason for the people to migrate to other countries to earn livelihood. The first among the migrants to foreign countries were the ex-soldiers to the southeast countries. In 1911 the total number of South Asians in Canada was 2,342. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century the Punjabis had settled in Canada, the USA and Australia. International migration of Punjabis began in the 19th century and accelerated in the early 20th century. The emigration of SCs has a history older than that of Jats. Dr. Baldev Singh Share (son of Giani Ditt Singh of Singh Sabha fame) and Mangoo Ram immigrated to USA in early nineties. Emigration is more prominent in the districts of Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Nawanshahar. One out of every three families had at least one member working abroad (Mahajan and Jodhka, 2012). Ad Dharmis in Doaba region moved to Canada, England, USA but majority of them moved to Gulf countries commonly known as Dubai in the region. Ishwardass, a dalit who was appointed Passport Officer and during his tenure he liberly gave passports to dalits as a result of which a large number of Ad-Dharmis could go to foreign countries. Kessinger (1974), Juergensmeyer (1982) and McLeod (1986) provide information about the international migration of the people and about dalit families. The Ad Dharmis accounted for 10 per cent of the total emigrants to England, and considerable changes have occurred among the Dalits (Judge, 2002 and Juergensmeyer, 2004). Available studies and observation in the study area indicate, even government has started many development programs for the upliftment of the SC population but they failed due to not reachable to the target group and migration of the SCs played a significant role in the socio-economic betterment of them in the Doaba region of Punjab. Remittances from NRI, SCs contributed to a conspicuous change in the self-image and the aspirations of their families. So the present study is an attempt to assess the impact of Dalit diaspora on their families and dalit community.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

The study was based on primary data and conducted in the *Doaba* region of Punjab State. Doaba region

comprises four districts *i.e.* Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar and Kapurthala. It has been purposely selected as it has the highest proportion of Dalit population *i.e.* 40 per cent. At first stage two blocks from each of the four districts were selected randomly from the *Doaba* region to obtain a total of eight blocks. At second stage two villages from each block were further selected randomly and then at the final stage 10 Dalits from each village were selected randomly and interviewed personally with the help of an interview schedule. Thus total sample size was of 160 Dalits from sixteen villages. Percentages were calculated to reach the conclusions. Secondary sources were also consulted for obtaining information regarding remittances from NRI Dalits and philanthropy.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

For present study an attempt was made to assess the magnitude of emigration and impact of emigration. It is the limitation of the study that respondents were the only source to get information about emigration of their family member. In few cases, the respondents could be return migrants. Study obtained that 45 per cent of the respondents were living abroad. Table 1 showed the relationship status of the migrants to the respondents and it found that 9.72 per cent of the respondents themselves were in foreign countries and at the time of data collection they were back into their homes. Data revealed that sons of 51.38 per cent of the respondents were abroad, about one fourth of the respondents told that their fathers were abroad and husbands of 12.5 per cent female respondents were residing in foreign countries.

Table 1 : Magnitude of Dalit Emigration or relation with Emigrants (n=72)

Relation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Self	7	9.72
Husband	9	12.5
Father	19	26.38
Son	37	51.38

At the beginning England was the major destination for Punjabis but with time they spread all over the world. In case of Dalits it was found that Dubai remained the main destination for them and but they are dynamic and widely distributed in the world.

Table 2 provides data on the destination of the emigrants and this is very much clear from the data that

Dubai (70.83%) remained the major destination country followed by England (8.33%), Canada (6.94%), Italy (5.55%), Germany (4.16%) and USA (2.77%). It was found during the study that SCs were too sending their wards to study abroad as it was revealed by one respondent. Emigrants to the English speaking and European countries were permanently settled there whereas the emigrants to the Middle East countries have tendency of returning back to the native place as these countries did not provide permanent residency to the immigrants. Majority of the immigrants were in gulf countries (commonly popular as Dubai) as it is easy to be there and required less money and paper work, so SCs of the rural areas preferred this country.

Table 2: Destination of Dalit Emigrants (n=72)

Destination	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Dubai	51	70.83
England	6	8.33
Canada	5	6.94
Italy	4	5.55
Germany	3	4.16
USA	2	2.77
Australia	1	1.38

Punjabi diaspora shows a tendency to send money back to their families for their well-being and to meet day to day needs. An attempt was made to know how they send money viz., monthly or yearly. It is clear from the Table 3 that majority (97.22%) of the immigrants sent money when demanded by the families or when they need it. Eighty per cent of the immigrants sent money monthly on regular basis. It was obtained that 23.61 per cent of the respondents send money 2-3 times in a year. It is clear that almost all of the immigrants sent money to their families regularly and also when they need.

Table 3: Remittances send back to families in Punjab

Time lap	Multiple responses	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Monthly	58	80.55
2-3 times a year	17	23.61
On demand	70	97.22

This is very much clear from the above discussed table that immigrants in different countries sent money back and further question was probes that how these

remittances were used. Data regarding the expenditure patterns is given in Table 4. It indicated that majority of the respondents (86.11%) used the money to pay back the loan. In the study area majority of the respondents were not from economically sound families and their relatives were in Dubai. So they took loan to go there and their major portion of the remittances spent on repayment of that loan. House construction (59.72%) and repair of the house (36.11%) are other areas where they spent money. A significant percentage (91.66%) of the respondents told that they bought 2 (scooty, motorcycle) or 4 (cars) wheelers. It was opined by 41.66 per cent of the respondents that they spent money on better education of their children, they were sending their wards to English medium schools and for college education. Almost an equal percentage (40.27%) of the respondents revealed about the expenses on marriage of their children and relatives. One fourth of the respondents invested the money in small business like shops etc. A significant finding came out that 23.61 per cent of the respondents bought some land with the money sent by their NRI relatives, in the form of commercial and agricultural land.

Table 4: Expenditure pattern by the families of NRIs

Area \ Pattern	Multiple responses	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Debt repay (waving)	62	86.11
House construction	43	59.72
House repair	26	36.11
Education	30	41.66
Marriage	29	40.27
Buy 2\4 wheelers	66	91.66
Small business	18	25.00
Buy land	17	23.61

Above discussed Table 1 to 4 indicated the effect of Dalit diaspora on their families itself but in Doaba region they play an important role in philanthropy and investments in education, health and religion also. *Dera Sachkhand Ballan* in Jalandhar district is a centre for such activities. An equally famous Ravidas *Dera* is in village Chak Hakim, near Phagwada. These two *deras* creates cultural orientations and social copiousness among the Dalits (Ram, 2004). *Dera Sachkhand Ballan* has library in its premises and also sponsors vernacular weekly *Begumpura Shaheer* and distribute free literature on Ravidas abd Dalit issues. *Golden Kalashs* atop the

temple dome at Ravidas Janam Asthan Mnadir at Seer Goverdhanpur, Varanasi was the initiative of *Dera Sachkhand Ballan* with the remitaances of NRI Dalits. Education of poor students sponsored by *Dera*. There is Sant Sarwan Dass Model School at Hadiabaad in Phgawara, where poor children are provided free education. The *Dera* is running the 200 bed charitable hospital at Kathar, on the Jalandhar-Hoshiarpur Road where poor patients get free medical facility. Other hospitals in the region are Sant Pritam Dass charitable hospital in Raapur village near Jalandhar, Rangi Ram hospital in Village Jaja in Hoshiarpur district, and Sant Karam Singh hospital in village Kalra in Jalndhar district. Such activities for public welfare are mainly sponsored by wealthy Dalit NRIs of the region. Such kind of Dalit consciousness generated over a period of time in Doaba sub-region of Punjab results in caste tensions like Talhan and Boota Mandi incidents. The issue remains not with caste only, it becomes the issue of power and dominance.

Conclusion:

Emigration of Dalits in Doaba region of Punjab is playing an important role in the social mobility. International migration of Punjabi Dalits is their distinctive feature in comparison to their counter parts in the country. They have settled everywhere in the world and form a significant part of Punjabi community abroad. They are in better socio-economic position and advocate the achieved status rather than ascribed. Majority of them are in Gulf countries and their remittances proved fruitful for their families. Eminent and wealthy NRIs contribute to the society and to make their caste more assertive *i.e.* politically, religiously, as they are demanding separate religion and holy book. Government policies and schemes for the disadvantaged failed due to some reason to target the aim, that have been achieved by the them through

emigration and diaspora contribution. Monetary contribution helped in building institutions that enable them to achieve equality in the society.

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