

Outflow of Human Capital from Punjab: Imperatives and Implications – A Case Study of Sangrur District Punjab State

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Abstract - The objective of this research paper is to analyze the reasons and factors responsible for the mass migration of the youth from Punjab in general and Sangrur District in particular and its implications of the large-scale migration of youth from the villages of Sangrur District to foreign countries. Although, a majority of the youth has migrated to Canada, but some of the youth also have moved to Australia, UK, Germany and other European countries. The young boys and girls have left their native places in search of fulfilling their dreams and in lure of the dollars which has become a status symbol for the families back home. Although, they move overseas for higher education but the main purpose behind their migration is their permanent settlement abroad. Punjab has become one of the major contributors towards the economy of these countries because of the influx of Punjabi students enrolled in their colleges/universities. On an average the annual fees in Canadian Colleges is in the range of 15 to 20 lakh and each year, lakhs of students are migrating to Canada. On the contrary, the enrolment in Punjab colleges is declining very fast and many colleges in Punjab and Sangrur District are facing a heavy crunch for the admission of the students. The youth who is migrating is very enthusiastic and energetic and has the potential to contribute effectively towards the upliftment of their native villages, districts, and states, participating significantly in the economic development. It is a cause of concern for any country and state whose human capital is compelled to leave because of a feeling that their own country does not offer enough professional opportunities. Even after acquiring high academic qualifications, they have no motivation to stay back. The present paper has been written in the context of Sangrur District of Punjab state, from where thousands of youths migrate every year for better jobs and permanent settlement overseas. The study remains confined to migration to Canada and Australia.

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INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that during the last seven decades of development and planning, higher education has witnessed significant changes. A quick perusal of development in higher education indicates that despite various inadequacies and limitations, institutes of higher learning in India have helped in producing stock of scientific and technical manpower, which is the third largest in the world. The higher education system of India is, arguably, the largest and the oldest in the world. However, despite a wide range of accomplishments, the irony of the situation is that there are still miles to go for the Indian higher education system as it fails to create enough employment opportunities for the youth of the country.

History and Background of Sangrur District

This district has its boundaries common with district Ludhiana, Patiala, Barnala, Mansa, Fatehgarh Sahib and Jind (Haryana). Ludhiana is on its north, Jind on South, Patiala on East, Barnala on West and Mansa on

Southwest. The district headquarter of Sangrur is the city of the same name. Sangrur is 78 kms from Ludhiana, 35 kms from Barnala and 54 kms from Patiala. The city is at a distance of 117 K.M. from the state capital Chandigarh. Sangrur is one of the educationally backward districts of Punjab. Sangrur is the second largest district of Punjab area wise. In terms of population, Sangrur is ranked at 5th position out of the 22 districts of Punjab.

BRAIN DRAIN – THE NUMBERS INVOLVED

Although India has a long tradition of institutions of higher learning exemplified by the universities of *Nalanda* and *Takshashila*, but of late, it has witnessed discernable deterioration in the standards of higher education. The situation has become worse as the successive governments have provided inadequate funding. Consequently, not enough opportunities have been available for the youth, leading to a perennial out flow of the youth from the country. The state of Punjab is one of the leading

states from where the large-scale brain drain has taken place in the last decade.

On an average, one-lakh youngsters from the state migrate to foreign countries every year. Christopher Kerr, Director of Operations for Immigration Refugees and Citizenship, Canada, said in a statement that, during the past two years, there has been 400% increase in the trend amongst youth to migrate to Canada. Brain drain, undoubtedly, is a serious cause of concern for any developing country like India. No other state in the country has a more pronounced effect of the phenomenon than Punjab. No wonder, everyone in Punjab knows someone or has some relatives who live and work abroad, particularly Canada. Most of the youth that migrates, comes from middle income families which feel that they have been let down by the system in the country, and are thus looking for professional opportunities elsewhere.

A large percentage of the youth that migrates are students since acquiring a student visa and going to Canada is the quickest route to reach their dreamland. But marriages with Canadian residents, family or friends sponsorship are also common. Another surprising fact is that it is not only the youth from the middle or the lower middle-class that are migrating from the state, even the youngsters from comparatively richer section of the society are striving to settle abroad. As per the findings of several researches carried out to understand the issue, the state lost around 5,000 High Net-worth Individuals (HNIs) through migration in 2018 alone. If we study the economic indicators, the Canadian GDP is about 68% of the total size of Indian GDP; however, the Canadian population is only 2.6% of the size of Indian population, which marks a significant difference in the standard of living and available opportunities between the two countries. The situation is almost the same for Australia which is even more sparsely populated than Canada. Although, some students in Canada and Australia feel that they have wasted their skills acquired through higher studies in India, but the consoling fact is that they have been able to obtain financial security that they could not find in India.

Heavy Rush of application of Students

The author of this paper got the opportunity of meeting various 'Sarpanches' and other prominent persons of the villages of Sangrur District and they narrated numerous about the migration of the youth from the villages which reflected very alarming facts. One of the progressive farmers of 'Duggan' village stated that majority of the youth has moved from our village and others are trying. Every youth is an aspirant for moving to Canada and preparing for IELTS. Only those youth who could not get the requisite score or those who do not have a lot of resources, or any agriculture land are left in these villages. Otherwise, already the majority of the youth have left. The evidence is clear. Today at the Canadian embassy there is heavy rush of clearance of visa and despite the high rate of visa refusal gullible

and desperate youth are becoming the victims of unscrupulous migration agents.

REASONS FOR MIGRATION – INDIVIDUAL ANALYSIS

The authors of this paper made an attempt to find out the reasons behind the mass exodus of the youth from the State and Sangrur District. To obtain reliable results, the authors interviewed fifty students – twenty-five boys and twenty-five girls and their parents from various villages of Sangrur District. The interviewees were asked the reasons behind leaving the country and settling in abroad. Almost all the students as well as their parents conceded that it is the lack of opportunities in the state of Punjab or anywhere else in the country that is forcing the youth to leave the country. When asked if they would like to stay back if there are similar opportunities in India, they replied that it is not only the lack of economic opportunities which forces them to leave the state, it is also the lack of quality, efficiency, and progressiveness in the prevalent Indian system as compared to the system overseas that forces the youth to migrate.

They also narrated the reasons of freedom of leading independent lives with no interference from their families. Majority of the students also stated that they did not want to lead the life of scarcity and poverty as their parents. Therefore, by earning dollars, they want to ameliorate the status of their families economically and socially.

The students migrating are primarily between 18 to 25 years of age and majority of them are only Grade-XII pass. A little percentage of boys and girls hold undergraduate degrees in various streams. Some of them even have work experience in their respective fields of study. The recent trend also exhibits that even the students who have passed their Grade-XII, have started migrating as they feel that going early would help them settling early in their lives. Although, the kind of work that they find in these countries seldom matches their aspirations as they end up working in logistics, driving trucks, working in stores and factories, or in other less glamorous professions such as taxi driving, furniture, or car salesmanship; but the effectiveness of the system overseas helps them to overcome their aspirations. As a result, they remain contented, making both ends meet by working five days in a week at an entry-level job.

Another parent added that the reason that they are sending their children abroad is the prevalence of equality in the social system of the first world countries. Dignity of lab

our is missing in our country, but all types of professions are equally respected overseas, which becomes the reason that working even in the entry

level jobs, that are regarded petty in our country, does not feel hurtful to the youngsters.

WARDS OF EDUCATED PARENTS ARE LEAVING COUNTRY

The author of this paper is resident of a Central Government Educational Technical Institute, 'Sant Longowal Institute of Engineering and Technology' and spoke to various parents who are highly educated and well-informed. The reasons they have stated for sending their children abroad are similar - lack of opportunities in our state and country as a whole, independent lifestyle and avenues of progress in lives.

Therefore, it is not only the common man whose wards are leaving the country, but the wards of the most educated professors and teachers are also leaving the country for better opportunities. Some of the students stated that they can and have the confidence of pursuing their passions overseas; something that they cannot do in India as the society only recognizes professional success and there is no space for someone who is mediocre or average. The authors, during their personal visits to these countries, happened to meet several youngsters from Punjab; and they were pleasantly surprised and happy that even the students who were marginal achievers back home in India, had built a much wealthier and satisfactory life for themselves overseas. They shared that it is the focus on skill development in the education system that helps these countries to create more professional opportunities. These facts have been eye-openers for the state and the country as they highlight the shortcomings of our own system.

Some students also shared that healthcare is a major factor that creates a sense of security among the people who are deprived of quality healthcare service in India. In these countries, all the necessary healthcare expenditure is borne by the government. Another reason for immigration, as mentioned by most girl students and their parents to the authors, was their child's feeling of safety and security in these countries. They claimed that the fact that they can return late from work without feeling vulnerable and unsafe which in turn, encourages them to pursue their education and jobs in these countries.

The authors also opened this dialogue with principals of several colleges in the Malwa region and found that the enrolment in the schools has drastically come down as a result of migration. Even the private and technical institutions are facing the same issue, as the students prefer to migrate instead of enrolling in educational institutions in the state. They feel that instead of spending any money on education here, it would be better if they invested in their education abroad.

A very common question was asked to all the students: *Do you feel happy while staying overseas?* and everyone's answer was that they are extremely happy despite the excruciating hard work they have to

do. They were asked another question: *Would you like to come back to India to serve the motherland; and again, they answered that now they have embraced the Canadian and/or Australian values, and there is no reason for them to return. They even have their families migrated to live with them and now these countries are as good as their homes. No doubt, the large exodus of human capital which can become the backbone of the country has created an extremely sorry state of affairs*

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As discussed above, the influx of migration is a serious cause for concern. The government immediately needs to think about the reforms, and perhaps, strive towards creating job opportunities for the youth, not only in certain specialized fields but in diverse areas where the youth with different kinds of capabilities and talent can be employed. It is really disheartening to see that the marginal farmers and people engaged in marginal labour work are sending their children overseas by selling their lands or taking loans at exorbitant rates of interest. The impact of these developments will be clearly visible in the years to come. Therefore, the onus is on the state and the central government to create a favorable environment in the state and the country to retain the youth of our country.

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