

GLOBAL DREAMS, LOCAL REALITIES: SOCIO-CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF STUDENT MIGRATION FROM PUNJAB TO ABROAD FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The societal development and education of an individual are cross-linked to each other. The progress of society is always in the hands of the youth of the country, the youth who is taught in higher educational institutes of the country. But in the current scenario, emerging youth and teenagers are opting to study out of the country, be it on the pretext of seeking better opportunities when it comes to jobs, living standards or educational opportunities. The nations are adopting the culture of other countries, which immigrants from different parts of the world are sharing. These are all the shreds of evidence of acculturation in society. On the contrary, India is facing the central issue of brain drain due to this movement of students or youth to other countries. Furthermore, the country and courses that students choose are determined by their parent's financial resources and the possibilities presented to them by their agents. In most circumstances, the student's interest or calibre is not a focus (Matharu, 2023). Global education is quite trending in India and the number of students moving abroad for higher education has increased exponentially in recent years. According to Redseer strategic consultant research, there are currently 7,70,000 Indian pupils residing abroad and the number of Indian students studying abroad will be around 1.8 million by 2024 (Hindustan Times, 2023). Is this large number of people moving abroad just mob mobility or a matter of concern?

The objective of the study is to explore the factors influencing students of Punjab to move abroad for higher education and the consequences of their immigration on the society of Punjab. The research aims to identify the key elements and analyse the socio-cultural conditions of the students that drive the students of Punjab to move abroad for higher education. The focus of the research is to examine the repercussions of brain drain on Punjabi society, such as the loss of talent, skills, and potential contributions to local development and the consequences of immigration will be explored. The findings of the study using the results of the interviews highlight that the factors influencing students to move abroad are better career opportunities, guaranteed jobs, better living standards, easy admissions, the value of degrees, quality of education and societal pressure. This research sheds light on the impact of this massive immigration on society. The higher educational institutes located in the backward areas are being shut down due to decreasing enrolments. Above all the knowledge is being transferred to other countries, and it is a hurdle for the local as well as social development of the society.

The research findings guide higher educational institutes to keep in mind the socio-cultural and academic factors while making policies. This research will help to make recommendations to various stakeholders, such as educational institutions, policymakers, and families, on how to solve the obstacles while maximising the benefits of this emerging trend among the students of Punjab.

Keywords: education, massive immigration, acculturation, brain drain.

INTRODUCTION

The societal development and education of an individual are cross-linked to each other. The progress of society is always in the hands of the youth of the country, the youth who is taught in higher educational institutes of the country. In India, traditionally education be it secondary or higher was governed by the existing institutes of the country. But in the current scenario, emerging youth and teenagers are opting to study out of the country, be it on the pretext of seeking better opportunities when it comes to jobs, living standards or educational opportunities. Altogether this massive immigration and change in choices is an alarming situation for the country and has raised concerns about the consequences on the individuals, their families and society.

The nations are adopting the culture of other countries, which immigrants from different parts of the world are sharing. The packings of Indian foods are being sold in the supermarkets of Western countries. Also, the language Punjabi is all set to be introduced to the school curriculum of Western Australia. Indian religions such as Hinduism and Sikhism are growing at a faster pace in foreign countries. These are all the shreds of evidence of acculturation in society. India, on the contrary, is facing the central issue of brain drain, due to this movement of students or youth to other countries. People of our country prefer to work abroad and settle in countries like Canada, the USA, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and others.

Furthermore, the country and courses that students choose are determined by their parent's financial resources and the possibilities presented to them by their agents. In most circumstances, the student's interest or calibre is not a focus (Matharu, 2023). Global education is quite trending in India and the number of students moving abroad for higher education has increased exponentially in recent years. The data of the Bureau of Immigration states that the number of Indian students who have left India for higher education in the year 2023 is 1,33,135 so far, compared to 4,44,553 in 2021 and 2,59,655 in 2020, said Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan in Rajya Sabha. According to the information he received from the BoI, the top favoured countries for education in 2021 were the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. According to education ministry data provided to Parliament, the number of Indian students studying abroad in 2022 reached a six-year high of 750,365. According to Redseer strategic consultant research, there are currently 7,70,000 Indian pupils who are residing abroad. According to their estimate, the number of Indian students studying abroad will be around 1.8 million by 2024 (Hindustan Times, 2023). Is this large number of people moving abroad just mob mobility or a matter of concern?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholars (Pimpa, 2003) concluded that a person's family has a big influence on whether or not they choose to pursue their education abroad. Another factor to take into account while choosing whether or not to attend a certain school or college abroad is the student's financial situation (Shanka, 2005). The goal of Muhammad and Waleed Khan Afridi's research from 2021 was to identify the internal, external, and personal factors that affect a choice to migrate. The results show that all internal variables, including academic push factors from the student's home country and academic pull factors from other countries, impact the migration intentions of business students. Over the past several decades, the number of students has expanded at an astounding rate; in some places, the number of students has nearly equalled the number of job seekers in terms of importance. Deepika Aggarwal and Janki Aggarwal (2021) researched to investigate the socio-demographic aspects and contributing factors for foreign migration among young people in the Nawanshahr and Garhshankar areas.

Singh (2022) conducted research with a group of 120 students who were interested in relocating to another country and were from the Majha district of Punjab, India, who were the subjects of the study. Based on the demographic characteristics of the students themselves, the research aimed to examine some of the factors that influence their decisions to study abroad. The analysis was carried out independently using the "t-test." The information indicated that male students were more interested than female students in studying abroad. Children from rural areas are much more interested in visiting foreign countries than their urban counterparts. Furthermore, students who choose

to study abroad are more likely to be married or to come from traditional households.

RATIONALE

The emergence of the problem is the massive immigration of students abroad for study purposes. The question arises: what is the reason for this mob mentality? Are people just following the trend? Or there are some hidden reasons behind this mobility. Does our education system need to be improvised to stop this? What are the factors that determine this massive immigration?

The Khalsa Vox reports that out of the 226,450 visas granted by Canada last year under the Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), a sizable fraction—roughly 1.36 lakh students—came from Punjab. These students are enrolled in a variety of programs that last between two and three years on average. According to data from student visa processing agencies, approximately 3.4 lakh Punjabi students are enrolled in different Canadian educational institutions (The Economic Times, 2023). A large amount of money is invested by the students to study abroad which they can do in their home country too. Parents are worried about the large financial outlays they make for their children's education in Canada in light of the escalating tensions between India and Canada. According to analysis, Punjab loses an astounding Rs 68,000 crore annually as a result of this investment, said Khalsa Vox. According to Kamal Bhumla, the chairman of the Association of Consultants for Overseas Studies, 1.36 lakh Punjabi students travelled to Canada last year, and each one of them paid an average annual fee of \$17,000 Canadian (The Economic Times, 2023). This immigration has both positive and negative impacts on the society. This research sheds light on the impact of this massive immigration on society and the main reasons behind this.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study is to explore the factors influencing students of Punjab to move abroad for higher education and the consequences of their immigration on the society of Punjab. The research aims to identify the key elements and analyse the socio-cultural conditions of the students that drive the students of Punjab to move abroad for higher education. By studying the economic, cultural, academic, social or personal reasons this study seeks to provide a better understanding of the emerging trend. The focus of the research is to examine the repercussions of brain drain on Punjabi society, such as the loss of talent, skills, and potential contributions to local development and the consequences of immigration will be explored.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the reasons behind the massive immigration of students abroad?
2. What are the perceptions of the students who are planning to study in foreign countries?
3. What are the consequences of the massive immigration abroad?

METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative in nature and the research design is of the Exploratory type. The population of the study is the students of Sangrur district of Punjab state who are preparing to go abroad after their secondary education in India. The sample of the study is selected from the population by using the Purposive method of Sampling. A representative sample of 25 students is selected because they (who are preparing for the IELTS Exam and those who have cleared the exam but waiting for the Visa) are planning to go abroad for further studies. A tool is constructed containing 10 items, to conduct the in-depth interviews. The students shared their experiences and challenges.

RESULTS

The students being interviewed highlighted the main reasons which pushed them to overseas for their studies. The major reason was that students feel that foreign countries offer them better living standards and career opportunities. One of the IELTS aspirants stated “I have seen my elder brother trying to get a job for 10 years but in vain. Hence I decided to go to Canada, as I will get a part-time job which I can do along with my studies. Then after the completion of my diploma, I will get a full-time job. At least my future will be secure in the land of Canada.”

The other reason which came forward was the quality of education which has both sides of a coin. There were mixed views about this issue. Some assured that foreign countries provide a better quality of education than India while others brought out something unbelievable. One of the students stated “ I always dreamt of studying in the USA and working in big companies in the USA. I feel that there are no rules and regulations in India. The teachers are not trained here, and everyone passes the examination in the colleges of India. I want to do hard work where it is valued.” The other student claimed, “ Mam, the main purpose of going abroad is not to study, it's just to do a job and earn a handful of money to live a better life. I am very poor in studies but thanks to IELTS institutes they taught me and made me clear the exam. I am not worried about studying in the universities of Canada as I will take the help of agencies who provide experts to complete assignments and complete the online examination. It's just a matter of one or two years.”

The pressure of society and to make a fancy biodata for the wedding was the most popular reason for moving abroad amongst both boys and girls. It has become a tradition amongst boys in Punjab to marry a girl who has cleared the IELTS Examination and then apply for a Spouse Visa to reach the land of Canada, Australia or New Zealand. It can be clearly justified by the statement of one of the students, “ I am a girl and my father is unable to pay 20lakhs to send me to Canada, that's why my family decided for me to clear the exam. They will marry me to a boy from a rich family who is willing to go abroad and pay for my tickets and college fees.”

These all were the factors which pushed the youth of the country to move abroad for so-called further studies. The researcher even got a chance to interview an aspirant who has returned to his homeland and he shed light on the ground reality of life in the country of Canada. He stated “ The life in Canada is not what you see on the social media. It is very depressing to live there alone and everything is so expensive. I used to go to 2 shifts and sleep on alternate days but still couldn't manage to pay my semester fee. Life there is just shifts of work and paying the EMIs. Everything I owned there was on EMIs, my mobile phone and car.” On being asked the reason for returning he said, “ I realised that I will waste my life paying EMIs and working as a labourer in this country. It was so depressing there, I had no friends and family there. It was the biggest of my life. The education there was good but I attended online classes so missed the chance to explore the campus of the university.”

The findings of the study using the results of the interviews highlight that the factors influencing students to move abroad are better career opportunities, guaranteed jobs, better living standards, easy admissions, the value of

degrees, quality of education and societal pressure. The higher educational institutes located in the backward areas are being shut down due to a decreasing number of enrolments. Above all the knowledge is being transferred to other countries, in other words, the country is investing to provide manpower to other countries. It is a hurdle for the local as well as social development of the society.

Additionally, Punjabi culture is vanishing day by day and people have started adapting to the culture of Western countries. Furthermore, the parents of the students feel lonely and do not get any support from their kids. They are worried all the time as they feel that foreign countries are not safe at all. The practice of early marriages and fake marriages is so common for moving abroad. A large number of IELTS institutes are established in the state, and even the schools have started using the provision of IELTS coaching while promoting admissions.

CONCLUSION

The research findings have concluded that the massive immigration is for so-called “further studies but the main purpose of the students moving abroad is to get jobs and better living standards. But the ground reality of the foreign country is different and they do not provide better living standards. The research findings provide guidance to higher educational institutes to keep in mind the socio-cultural and academic factors while making policies. This research will help to make recommendations to various stakeholders, such as educational institutions, policymakers, and families, on how to solve the obstacles while maximising the benefits of this emerging trend among the students of Punjab. This will help higher educational institutes to improve the quality of education within the underserved areas of Punjab to attract and retain the talent of the youth.

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