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Migration and Cultural Challenges through Gender Lense: Punjabi Transnationalism in Doaba Region (Punjab)

Atinder Pal Kaur



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Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism

K-1/114, First Floor, C R Park, New Delhi-110019,

Email: contact@grfdt.org, Contact: +91-9818602718

Website- www.grfdt.org,

Facebook- www.facebook.com/diaspora.transnationalism

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Abstract

In the contemporary world the process of globalization, migration and transnationalism have increased rapidly which creates challenges for the existence of traditional society. Migration of family members continuously brings changes in the home land countries and significant changes at family front. Family members in the migrant society are continuously in the process of cultural change and transnationalism. After male migration, women stay behind and become responsible for all household chores. Migration of their counterparts helps them to live in a socio-cultural context completely transformed by migration that also inhabits a transnational social field. For this, data has been collected through open-ended interview schedules, case studies, and participant observation method, from Doaba region of Punjab. Interviews were done with women, who are living without their husbands/male member of the family and are in the process of change. It was found that there was a shift from conservative societies in to more open societies in the Doaba region of Punjab. Women feel themselves more autonomous, free and self-independent with respect to family decision. After their husband's migration women become active in the household sphere and also bring challenges to traditional family roles.

Key Words: Migration, women left behind, decision making, cultural change, transnationalism

Author(s)

Dr Atinder Pal Kaur worked as Sociologist in FWTRC (Ministry of family and health welfare) Mumbai. She has completed her PhD from the Department of Sociology, Panjab University Chandigarh. She has completed her M.A in sociology from Department of Sociology, Panjab University Chandigarh. She Graduate with Sociology and Political Science Honours from Department of Social Science, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. She has already published papers in the field of Migration, Gender and development. She presented paper on Migration and Gender Equality in International Institute of Social Sciences 2017 in the Hague, The Netherlands. She has done Project with UNFPA for six months, designation as Research Officer; she attended two workshops on Research Methodology, one with UNFPA. She also attended a Summer Program in Tata Institute of Social Sciences in 2013, Mumbai. Her research interest includes International and Internal Migration studies, Gender and Development, Cultural and Transnational Diaspora studies. Email: atinderbains@gmail.com.

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Introduction:

In the contemporary world the processes of globalization, migration, emigration and transnationalism have increased rapidly, which creates challenges for the existence of traditional society. Migration has wide implications that not only affect those who migrate but also those who are left behind and hence there is growth of transnational household or families. The members of transnational household remained in continuous process of change that make changes in their life-style and other structures of household. Migration in these households has become a survival strategy and it also helps to fulfill urge of man to improve his economic status and social life. In particular, remittances have increasingly been recognized as a potential development resource (Kapur, 2003) for family welfare. The decision of migration is not an individual decision rather a collective decision of the members of the family to maximize income profit (Lucas and Stark, 1985). It has been noted that decision of migration is influenced by “push & pull” factors, which help migrant families to take the final decision regarding migration. Migration basically takes place while keeping in view the welfare of the families left behind. The exact nature of the impact of migration on the development of recipient migrant communities has remained a subject of debate for the last few decades. Massey et.al, 1993 asserted that “culture of migration” often becomes a norm, a ritual and a stepping-stone for upward socio-economic mobility. Gender dimension in the study of migration arena has received relatively little attention. Studies showed that females among the “patriarchal societies” especially among the migrant families form a part of household strategies such as family reunification, and family formation (Hass and Rooij, 2010). Women have a limited role in major decisions making in agricultural cultiva-

tion, purchase of property, but more emphasis is given on household chores, rearing and caring of children. Very few studies cite example of gender based equality rather; most of them talk about household decisions that were taken unanimously to the advantage of whole family. Studies have been focusing upon both positive and negative impacts of migration on women who are left behind. From contrasting studies undertaken in Bangladesh, Mexico, (Hadi, 2001; DeSayder, 1993) Morocco (Sadiqi and Ennoji, 2004) Armenia and Guatemala (Menjivar and Agadjania, 2007), it can be pointed out that, greater decision making, management duties and autonomy in women has been noticed in household matters in labor migrant’s families. The autonomy and decision making that was bestowed to women in the absence of men from family may also get diluted by other members of the family, where other family members influence the decision making (Abadon-Unat, 1997; De Haan, 1997; Desai and Benerji, 2008). However studies have also shown that women autonomy increases when their husbands migrate. Gulati, 1993 found that the absence of husband for long periods of time actually helps women regain their health, as the inter-birth interval is widened and hence they have room to take better care of their children. Zachariah and Rajan, 2015 observed that prolonged male migration consequently enhances movement of women outside home and it gives them exposure to public sphere. Such male migration helps to inculcate self-confidence among women and hence, make them enjoy more freedom and independence in public and private spheres. Where male migration increases women’s autonomy, decision making and freedom in relation to family sphere, several negative impacts of male migration have also been documented among women who are left behind. In the absence of men, women, apart from performing their own duties also shoulder the responsibilities which were earlier

performed by their husbands (Khalad, 1995; Grawert, 1992). Lesotho women, who remained behind, were found to be under high stress and strain due to increased financial hardships, difficulty in disciplining children, as well as loneliness and isolation (Nguyen et al, 2007; Zachariah, Mathew & Rajan, 2001). Though women get much freedom and power of decision making in household sphere, still they face gender inequality due to over-burdening with household and societal tasks where decision making is not permissible by other household members and elder male members (Menjivar and Agadjanian, 2007). In such cases women still face discrimination due to strict patriarchal norms, which are changing gradually but still show dominance in the societal sphere. After studying long theoretical work, one thing is noticeable that male migration has both negative and positive effects on women who remain behind. It has also been seen that with the passage of time, such changes come to migrants' families and in societal sphere that just can't be neglected. Levitt (2001) argued that, the individual who never migrated, but who is completely dependent on the economic remittances received each month and who lives in a socio-cultural context completely transformed by migration, also inhabits transnational social fields. It is a creation of distinct form of social capital between migrants living abroad and those who remain at native country. These transfers of socio-cultural meanings and practices occur either during the increased number of visits by immigrants to their home countries or visits made by non-migrants to friends and families living in the receiving countries through the dramatically increased forms of communication such as emails, online chat sessions, telephone calls, CD/VDO and traditional letters. So present study is concentrated (a) to understand how migration develops a cultural transnationalism among the Punjabi society (b) to understand how migration helps the individuals to create a global culture at the local level (c) to understand, how changes are coming in the family system specially in the context of women's autonomy and decision making power (d) to understand how changes are coming in the cultural sphere, adoption of western culture, living standard, new technology and changes in family life style.

Methodology: - For the purpose of this study, the data was collected using interviews and case studies in the Doaba region of Punjab. Villages were selected ran-

domly where half of the population was staying without their male members present in their houses. Here semi-structured interviews were conducted with the help of purposive sampling in which interviews were conducted with those who solved the purpose of the study. The study was conducted with left behind family members, 2 elder male and 8 female members of the houses, i.e. married women who are living without their husband that is the main purpose of the study. Also non participant observation was used to understand cultural transnationalism.

Punjabi Family system and New Gender Roles

International migration among the male members brings social, economic and political changes in the native countries. These changes have been seen in the family system, where male members of the family are staying in the developed countries, referred in Punjabi as "Bharwalla Mullak" which means a foreign country and their wives and children are staying in the native villages that are called as "Pind". The international migration brings changes in the family structure and origin of new gender role among family system. That is more favorable towards elder female / married women who are staying behind. Male migration creates change in the family structure and transfers patriarchal power toward women and also increase their participation in the decision making process. Some of the experiences of respondents are shared in the following narration:-

- My daughter is pursuing B.Sc and my son is in engineering diploma. Most of my husband's income is usually spent on my children. Whenever there is a discussion on the issue of education ... I usually tell my husband to provide better education for my children if need arises to stop construction work of our house, then I will do... there is no second thought on this issue... my husband always agree with my decision. Even though he is the bread-winner or head of the house hold of the family but all the final decisions are taken by me... that brings the feeling of self-confidence.(Punjabi,46 years , old woman)
- Presently, I am working in our village aganwadi, now I have my own earnings. Earlier I was a house wife. My husband has been staying in Italy for the past 10 years. Usually he tells me about 'Bhar de mulak bare' (western societies) ways of living.He tells me about women working there outside and who are

quite economically independent. One day he asked me 'why don't you try to look for some job according to your caliber. It will give you opportunity to earn your own expenses and you will become more independent'. Then, I took the decision to work outside. Now I am doing job, I have my own earning that makes me self-sufficient. Secondly it has been a relief from uncounted burden of family expenses. (Punjabi 48, years-old-woman)

- Due to the absence of my husband, I usually try to fulfill all the duties that have been bestowed on me. These duties mostly arise specially at the time of festivals and marriage functions. Most of the time, I try to give them best "Shagun" (money or any other things) during the festival of Rakhi and Dewali that is called "Rakhi shagun" and "Dewali shgaun", so that my "Nanads" (sister-in-law) would not feel that their "Babhi"(Brother's wife) is discriminating with them because of the absence of their "Vir" (Brother). (Punjabi-52-year-old-woman)

- During the death of my "Dadi Sas" (Grand-mother-in-law). I did "Bogh Ceremony" (religious rituals), and "Wada Langer" (huge food ceremony)... in the 'wada langer' all types food items that were liked by my grand-mother-in-law were cooked and distributed among all the relatives and other people. Even I had to give "shagun" and "clothes" to all the relatives. In the absence of my husband, I took all the responsibilities and tried to "Barah" (marriage of the death people) of my "Dadi Sas" in proper manner. So, that nobody would complain ... in the absence of husband that she didn't fulfill her responsibilities. (Punjabi-47-year-old-woman)

- My husband and son both are working in Italy; they are sending me 25000/- on monthly basis in my account for all types of household expenditure. I am staying in joint family, with my "Bahu" (daughter-in-law) and "Pota" and Potti" (grand children). All the household decisions are taken by me because there is no "Banda" (male member) in the "Ghar" (house) . I usually withdraw 10,000 to 15000 for monthly expenditure. It is my responsibilities to manage monthly expenditures and try to fulfill all members demand in the family. For the utilization of money in a best way or in a proper manner, I usually divide monthly "Kharcha" (expenditure) and then spend. Such as some amount for gas cylinder, 2500/ for grocery, 3000 for electricity bill,

separate amount for my "Pota" and "Potti" (grand children) fees. 1000/- for scooter petrol, 1500 for monthly expenses. After all the necessary expenditures, I have 2000/- to 3000/- rupees extra , that is kept for green vegetables, it is a new change in my life as earlier I was only house wife, now all family decisions and even "Bahar de Kam"(public domain) are done by me. Now my identity has totally changed. I am "Banda" or "Adami" (Man) of the family. Rather, I have dual role. (Punjabi-47-year-old-woman).

- From the day of my marriage, when I came in to this house, from that day till now all the responsibilities are on my shoulders. Though I am staying with my father-in-law but he is too old and is not able to take responsibilities. All the decisions related to household are taken by me. Some time I feel it is uncounted burden on my shoulders but I am very thankful to god, who gave me such a good husband. Whenever I feel disturbed, he always motivates me. He tells me now you are the head of the household, I can only provide you money on time but you have to take care of all things and why do you feel that you are not capable to take decisions of the household... here also women are running their houses. Women who are working with me some are single mothers and in some cases, their husbands are staying somewhere else due to their job. In those circumstances women are the decision makers and are quite capable to fulfill all responsibilities related to their husbands and children. Just because of my husband, I get confidence that, I can take all responsibilities and so, I am doing it confidently. (Punjabi50-year-old-woman).

Analysis: - It is impossible to discuss Punjabi society without family institution and patriarchal structure. Punjabi society is male dominated society where women are always symbolized with the honor or izzat of the family. This izzat remain under protection till the time of marriage and marriage is characterized as be-all and end-all of their lives. But rapid changes among the Punjabi society and family structure have been seen in the present era. One of the major reasons behind this change is migration from Punjab in large numbers. The Punjabi migration brings changes in the Punjabi family structure and tries to create global world at village level that is called glocalization or transnationalism among the Punjabi society. Six narratives have been taken from different age group women to understand these

changes among the family structure. The first narration reveals that after her husband's long absence from home, she became the head of the household and started taking all the major decisions of the family. Even her husband didn't object to her decisions. The second narration reveals that she was economically independent. It was possible because of her husband's support and motivation that made her to look for a job. She becomes independent not only in private sphere but in public sphere also. This became possible only with her husband's support. That shows change has been coming in the traditional mind set. The third narration reveals an interesting development that she took her husband's place and start participating in all the festivals and ceremonies, wherever her husband's presence was required. She tried to satisfy them with best gifts and shaguns, so that her sisters-in-law would not feel that they were discriminated due to the absences of their brother. Another interesting development was seen in the fourth narration where the women did all the ritual in the death ceremony of her grand- mother –in-law. In Punjabi society almost all rituals are performed by the male member of the family. In this case woman become active member in this domain and took all her responsibilities more sincerely. This created a feeling of self-confidence and pride in her. In the fifth narratives the woman took active participation as far as the finances of the household was concerned. She was managing all the household responsibilities and all the economic matters were taken care by her. She became head of the household where she called herself "male" of the family. There was a shift of power structure from husband to wife. The sixth narrative reveals that the woman had more power and autonomy related to family and economic decisions. Here the sphere was not limited to only four walls of the household, rather she was managing both public and private sphere properly. Her husband never showed dominant behavior, rather he always agreed with her decision. Moreover he was the one who helped her to become active in both public and private sphere in same manner as women in the western world.

Cultural Transnationalism and Punjabi Families left behind

- This big house belongs to NRI's family, their all sons are settled in Italy and they are sending money from there, that's why such a big house was constructed

in the middle of the village. Even they have paid high amount of money for the land. Earlier they built two storied building, now it is three story building, because their mother said it is difficult to stay in a one story with a joint family. They have money so they can... we can't because we don't have. (Punjabi 40 year old woman)

- Now we are staying in a very good house, it is just because of my son. He went "Bahar" (abroad) Italy 10 years ago. He sent us remittances and map of this house. He said, "Bapuji (father) you just start construction of the house, I will send you all money. It is better and even more spacious and has cross air ventilation. I feel proud of my son, when I go outside of my house everybody praises my son. An aero plane was constructed on top of the house to indicate that this house belongs to NRI's family.(Punjabi -60- year –old- man)

- Whenever I am in the mood of talking to my husband, I used to call him on his cell phone. My husband sent laptop last summer, now it has become easier to chat with him online through laptop. My children know how to operate and I am in learning stage, they connect the internet for me and I am able to do video chat with my husband. Now I never feel that my husband is far away from me because I can easily see him on the internet.(Punjabi-47 year-old-woman)

- It has become easier for me to go outside at the time of need because I have my own scooter. Now, I have started to learn car driving from a trainer. It is my husband's wish, he often tells me that in "Bahar" (abroad) women have their own cars, when they use to go somewhere; they drive themselves and even do not depend on anyone else. Even though I usually do my work myself and use scooter to go outside. But during emergency or if everybody wants to go outside then it is a problem. Driving a car creates a feeling of self-confidence and independence. I feel wonderful when I drive my car and everybody from the village has eyes on me.(Punjabi 43 year old woman)

- My grandchildren are studying in an "Angreji School" (convent school). It is my son's wish because he is sending money from "Bahar" (abroad). So now we are able to wear nice clothes , most of them sent by him such as jackets and others , even he has strictly asked us that if there is any medical problem then go to "shear" (city) doctor and use "Angreji dava" (English medicine). It is good for health. He urges us not to go to local Hakim (village doctor). He is staying out of the country, he knows very well, we are uneducated; we

don't know anything about these things. Even he wants his children to be "Angreji babu" (55 year old Punjabi -man).

- I don't know how to speak in Angreji (English). My son said "Bebe" (mother) when I will call you, I will say hello, and you should reply to me in the same manner. It was difficult earlier (with smiling face) but now I am used to it. Whenever he calls, he always tells me about "Bahar di Duniya" (western society) and their life style. The girls wear jeans and shirts there... he also sent jean and jackets for his sisters and daughter. Everybody ask me in the village about clothes then I proudly tell them that my son has sent "Bahar Ton" (from abroad). He even gifted me and his wife one mobile phone, and laptop for his children. Earlier, it was difficult to use mobile phone but now I am used to it. I can click pictures on my phone. It makes me happy when all neighbors call me "Baharvally" (NRI's). (60 year-old-Punjabi-woman)

Analysis:- Six narratives have been used to explain the change that has occurred in Punjabi culture at regional level or at village level. In the first narrative an old Punjabi woman was complaining with her sad face that her neighbor's constructed such a huge house in the middle of the village just because of flow of money (remittances) from outside of the Punjab (from abroad). They flaunt about their status, in front of their neighborhoods that they are NRI's. Moreover the structures of these houses were western style. This shows their inclination towards the western society. In the second narration an old man reveals that just because of his son they were able to stay in a good house; the map of their house was sent by their son from abroad. An aero plan was also constructed at the top of the house to show their separate identity that they belong to NRI's. In the third narration the woman reveals how she started using new gadgets such as cell phones and laptop that were sent by her husband. Use of laptop for online chat with her husband is seen as an up-gradation in technology. The sense of belongingness and adoption to new technology is going on together. Even they are more curious to adopt new technology that make them different from others and show that their living standard is higher than others because they are modern due to use of technology. In the fourth narration the woman narrates that she is independent, her husband has biggest contribution behind this. She learned to drive scooter and after

that she learned to drive car. Her husband pressurized her to learn driving car, he said that in abroad women have their own cars and they are independent to go anywhere. In the same pattern her husband wants her to be independent. When she drives car in the village everybody have eyes on her that brings joy and confidence in her. In the fifth narration the man narrates that his grand children are studying in a convent school that was strongly recommended by his son. For health purpose they were consulting town doctors and started taking allopathic medicine. They are more aware about education and health problems and following his son's advice sincerely in all the matters. Even they started wearing western clothes most of which were sent by his son from abroad. It is a change and advancement in the area of education, health, living standard and also adoption of western lifestyle. In the sixth narration the woman narrates that she started to speak little bit of English due to the influence of his son. Their life style has also changed. Her son sends western clothes for her daughters and grandchildren. It is inclined to modern life-style. Changes have been seen among the elder woman's life. She starts using new cell phone that is also sent by her son. Even she feels proud when in the village everybody calls them NRI's. This has become a status symbol for Punjabis.

Conclusion

According to Levitt (1999) transnational villages emerge and endure partially because of social remittances. Social remittances are the idea, behavior and social capital that flow from receiving to sending communities. They are the tool with which ordinary individual creates global culture at the local level. Punjabi societies are becoming closer to transnational societies due to male migration and growth of Punjabi migration in the developed countries. This migration is not only helping in transfer of economic remittances to Punjab, but also slowly and steadily helping in transfer of social remittances, such as ideas, behavior or culture to their homeland country. Punjabi society is a male dominated society where woman's mobility is restricted to four walls of the household only and her participation in the family matters is nominal. She was regarded as a mute spectator who can listen but can't speak in major decisions of the family. But migration to developed countries and experience of global world, brought in

changes to the homeland countries especially in the sphere of the family and give women more freedom, autonomy and decision making power. However Boyle, et al. 1998 emphasize that women don't intentionally support the institution of patriarchy, but by migration based on the needs of their husbands, they are unintentionally permitting it. It can be said that change in patriarchal structure is coming due to the necessity of the family. Somehow due to necessity or any other reason the structure of patriarchy starts losing its ground and shift of power from male to female becomes part of the NRI families. It is a new kind of structural change, a change that helps in origin of new gender roles, where women areas are not only restricted to domestic household chores but it expands more in decision making roles in relation to children's education, health, religious and ritual matters of the family. Hadi (2001) concludes that the infusion of remittances and secular values from overseas has the potential to undermine the traditional domains of men and significantly modify gender roles. The position of Bangladeshi woman is influenced by their control of resources. An interesting fact comes in front that the taboos in Punjab society in relation to women's role at the time of rituals and religious ceremony have greatly reduced. Modernization in thought process created changes in relation to their position during the time of religious, ritual ceremonies where men's presence is necessary but this area is covered by women now. Structural changes are more to be noticed that absence of the male members at the house creates a vacuum among the family system and to fulfill that vacuum women come in front and become active members of the family structure. The absence of male members at home creates a need for someone who can hold power and govern the family system authoritatively. This brings a shift in the power structure at house, from male members towards female. In the absence of husband or other adult male member, women enjoy increased freedom and autonomy in managing their household (khafagy1982, gulati1983, clfer1985, shah and arnold1985). Changes have been seen in the traditional value system and adoption of modern value system, because of exchange of ideas, thoughts from across the border especially in Punjabi society. Women become active member in the public sphere and her area is now not just limited to private sphere. What can be called as change in feminine character to masculine character, such as job oriented mind, rational thinking,

economic decision making in relation to family. The prolonged absence of men encourages women to take major roles in managing the household and allows women to grow independently, help develop new interests and the discovery of their hidden potential (Go et, al. 1983; Gardner 1995, Hadi 1999). It is a shift towards new kind of responsibilities on her shoulders that brought changes in her orientation towards life. Even Rajan 2003, emphasize that emigration of their husbands can also 'give the gulf wives an opportunity to develop their talents, expertise, status and independency to fill their potential'. Traditional Punjabi societies are moving towards modern ways of life or can be called open societies due to changes in the economic structure. Punjabi migration brings flow of money to help their families who are staying in homeland countries. The new trend among these societies have been seen that with the flow of remittances, they were able to construct huge houses and especially with modern infrastructure and western life-style. These houses are mostly in the shape of huts. Moreover to symbolize that this house belong to NRIs, an aero plane or football was constructed on the top of the house. Similar study has been done by Taylor et, al. (2007) who also concludes that most of these houses have water tanks at the very top in the shape of an aero plane, eagle or football to indicate that the owner is an NRI. The outsides and insides of these houses are decorated in the most luxurious, western style. The meaning of land is changing after the migration, as owned land is no longer primarily used for traditional agriculture as Jats are known for, but are also often used to build very large, palatial family houses-a phenomenon which (Erdal 2012 demonstrates) is also present within west (Pakistan) Punjab. The landscape of rural Punjab is now punctuated in some areas of Doaba, dominated by huge bricks often marble built, non-resident Indian's houses (Taylor and Singh 2013). The Punjabi societies are moving toward acculturation where they are adopting another culture and try to maintain both Punjabi and western culture together. Berry 2003, also emphasize that as a result of exposure to two or more cultures, an individual experience behavioral shifts that affects the way the individual acts in areas as diverse as speech patterns, eating habits, clothing style, or even self-identity. Similar trends have been shown in study that NRI's families start wearing western clothes, most of which are sent by their family members from abroad, even adoption of

foreign technology or modern technology gadgets were also sent from abroad. The mode of acculturation is not only seen among Punjabi migrant families rather also on local Punjabi people because of frequent visits of Punjabi people from abroad and their regular contact on phones, e-mails, chat, video conferencing that helps to bring transnational western culture among Punjabi societies. The changes have also been recorded in the area of language, education, living standard, health, and life-style. People try to speak in English when they receive call from their NRI family members from abroad. Even new trends related to education that every child of the migrated families are studying in convent schools, adoption of western language, manners etc. Even they want their children to be similar to English people rather than Punjabi's. Families are turning to transnational western culture and inculcating the same culture to their coming generation due to influence of their Punjabi migration. Another area that is more influenced by Punjabi migration is life –style, most of the young generation in Punjabi families starts wearing western clothes, such as jeans, t-shirts, boots and jackets, most of the collections are sent by their relatives from abroad. Even hair-style of boys and their dressing sense is influenced by western culture. More awareness is there related to Health issues and families try to get best health facilities (Hefti1997, Taylor 1999). It is only possible by two things one is money, remittances and another is transnational knowledge that is continuously transferred by their family members from abroad. A positive change has been observed among Punjabi women's life-style, because of migration, i.e. family structure starts losing its rigidity. Mobility of woman is not now restricted among NRI families. They are modernized in relation to new technology, gadgets and driving cars also which makes them confident, independent and culturally more open. Similar study has been done by Gulati (1993) among the Keralian women that show how migration of their husbands to the gulf countries brought changes in their life-style. Most of them become independent and aware about their children's education and health. Construction of new houses and technological advancement or introduction of new gadgets has become part and parcel of their life. These all changes have been studied at micro level and try to understand changes at the macro level. More effort have been done to get information about latent function among the family system that continues to change due to the influence of Punjabi migra-

tion. The limitation of the study is whether these changes came, due to men working outside have become more liberal in their thoughts, after seeing the world outside and more independent women in advance countries or they just gave authority to their wife because they could not be present all the time for family matters due to their migration to other countries. This is an area the future researchers can explore but whatever may be the reasons, these changes in family structure have given their women more liberty and freedom to take their own decisions which boost their self esteem and confidence. It also gives them opportunities to do all manly work. It gives them opportunity to get noticed and have respect from the society around.

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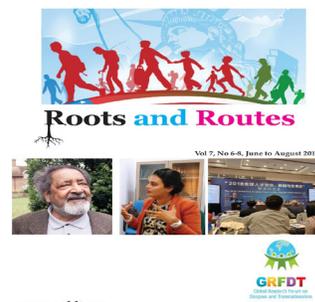
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Editors- Arsala Nizami and Monika Bisht

Managing Editor: Dr. Sadananda Sahoo

Email: editor@grfdt.com

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Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT) is a consortium of researchers and policy makers drawn from national and international universities, institutes and organizations. GRFDT is presently based in India and is shaping as the largest such group focusing specifically on the issues related to diaspora and transnationalism.

The GRFDT works as an academic and policy think tank by engaging national and international experts from academics, practitioners and policy makers in a broad range of areas such as migration policies, transnational linkages of development, human rights, culture, gender to mention a few. In the changing global environment of academic research and policy making, the role of GRFDT will be of immense help to the various stakeholders. Many developing countries cannot afford to miss the opportunity to harness the knowledge revolution of the present era. The engagement of diaspora with various platform need to be reassessed in the present context to engage them in the best possible manner for the development human societies by providing policy in-put at the national and global context.