CHAPTER VII
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The studies on international migration of people generally focus on its impact in the country of destination of migration. These studies either do not focus on the impact on the country of origin of migration, or at the most focus only on the economic consequences of emigration, leaving out the psychological and social dimensions of this phenomenon. In addition, there are almost no studies focusing on the impacts of emigration on the families left behind in the villages of Punjab. This study is an attempt to fill the gap in the existing literature as it focuses along not only on the economic aspect of emigration, but also on the psychological and social aspects of the impact of emigration on the families left behind in the countries or region of origin of emigration, in this case Punjab.

The present work is based upon the primary data collected from selected villages from a chosen area of Punjab. Overall, eight villages were selected from the four administrative Districts in the Doaba region of Panjab from where a very large number of people have gone to foreign lands. They were Urapur and Rail Majra from Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar District (earlier called Nawanshahr), Miani, and Bajwara from District Hoshiarpur, Bilgan and Sarai Khas from District Jalandher and Hamira, and Nadala from District Kapurthala. The specific objectives of the study were to understand general trend of emigration from the Doaba region in Punjab including issues such as the favoured destinations for migrants from this area and the networks used for emigration, as well as, the various push and pull factors responsible for emigration from this region. The other objective was to prepare the socio-economic and demographic profile of the families selected for the study. The next objective was to gauge the economic, social and psychological impact of emigration on the families left behind. The last objective of the study was to understand if there are significant differences in terms of impact of emigration on the families left behind belonging to different villages, castes, age groups, sex etc.

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was used for the collection of data related to the study. This helped in getting deeper insights into the phenomenon in question. For the quantitative part, 320 households were selected on
the basis of purposive sampling technique while a total of 13 case studies were prepared to study the qualitative aspects of the impact of emigration on the families left behind. Besides studying the impact of emigration on the family as a whole, it was considered important to understand the impact of emigration on the different category of people present in the families left behind. Three Focussed Group Discussions aiming to know the impact on the aged, women and youth were carried out on these different categories of people in order to understand the impact of emigration on the said categories of people in the villages to gauge the impact on the categories mentioned.

The head of the selected households from where one or more members have emigrated were the respondents in our study. The respondents were asked to answer the questions on the basis of a structured interview schedule. The case studies selected for qualitative study were chosen in such a way that the age, gender and caste categories are given adequate representation. The cases of families who claim to have benefitted a lot from the emigration, as well as those who lost on social, economic or psychological ground were selected. During the Focussed Group Discussions, the opinions of the participants were noted down and the discussions were guided by the researcher towards the objectives of the study.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study reaffirms the observation made by Thandi (1999) that there has been lots of emigration from Punjab especially from the Doaba belt. The Sikhs have dominated the number of emigrants among the total Punjabi migration. It is difficult, however, to give an exact figure regarding number of emigrant, due to large scale undocumented emigration from the region. As per the Ministry of Overseas, an estimated 2 to 2.5 million people have gone abroad from Punjab. The people from almost all caste groups and categories from all the villages from Doaba belt of Panjab have migrated to the countries of the Europe, North America and the Gulf.

When we looked at the profile of our respondents, we found that the respondents in our study were mostly women who constituted 56.87% of the total number of persons heading the households studied by us while 43.13% respondents were males. This suggests that males have migrated more in number as compared to
the female and also that more number of women are left to head the families left behind in Punjab where families traditionally have a patriarchal family structure. Eighty percent of the respondents, in this case the heads of household, were aged more than 51. Most of the migrated households belong to Sikh religion. The data show that most of the heads of family in the chosen villages are not highly educated as most of them have studied up to matriculation. Although a large number of respondents were housewives, however, the primary occupation of most of the families in our sample was agriculture.

Most of the emigrants from the selected households had gone to the countries of Gulf; this was followed by European countries, USA and Canada. The maximum numbers of emigrants to the countries of Gulf belonged to the low caste communities such as Chamar, Ramdasia, Balmiki or were Christian converts. However, the Jats, Sainis, Lubhanas and Khatris have gone to the countries of Europe, Canada, Australia and the United States of America. Almost 60% of the respondents said that the members moved out of their families due to push factors in the Punjabi society viz low wages, lack of employment opportunities and corruption in the country which hampered their chances of getting decent employment. Others cited the pull factors in other countries as the reasons for emigration. The pull factors mentioned by them included better economic opportunities in other countries, the craze for being in foreign lands, opportunities for better study abroad and interestingly, the increased probability of finding a suitable match in India after having a Non Resident Indian (NRI) stamp. Both formal and informal channels were used for the migration from the region. It was told by the respondents that only 38.02% of the migrants from their families moved through the legal channels, the others were hesitant however to admit about the illegal nature of emigration from their families.

Next we looked at the economic, psychological and social consequences of the phenomenon of emigration for the families left behind. The economic impact of the emigration of the members of the family was measured in terms of the change in income, occupation, standard of living and the ownership of land or property. It is clear from the data that majority of the people in almost all the villages under study benefited in terms of increase in income due to the emigration of the members from their family. However, a few families have suffered economically too. The second
scenario is true in the case of unsuccessful emigrations. The increase in income occurred in case of families belonging to almost all the caste groups in Punjab, while the ‘no change in income’ cases were found only in the families belonging to Jat caste who had relatively high income even prior to emigration of members from their family and the emigration of their family members did not have much effect on their financial status.

It was found that no major change occurred in occupation of families due to emigration of the family members. Almost 70% of the respondents said that their families are still engaging in their traditional occupations. As many as 53% respondents said that their family members are able to send more than Rs five lacs per annum in the form of remittances. However, the emigrants from Canada and United States of America are able to send more remittances than those from countries of Europe and Gulf. The remittances are regular in case of 67.19% of the cases, and those are usually received in the form of bank drafts, Western union, through relatives and by the internet services such as Paypals. However, in case of 14.21% families abroad could not manage enough money for their own livelihood abroad, so they did not send any remittances. The illegal migrants also could not send much of remittances to their families. In some cases the youth trying to move abroad illegally were cheated by their travel agents and detained in other countries. Understandably such youth are also not able to send any remittances back home.

Looking at the consumption pattern of the remittances, we found that 35% of the family left behind used the remittances in meeting their daily expenditure, 14.06% of them spent the remittances on the purchase of luxurious items such as cars, air conditioners, lap-top, jewellery etc., 11.88% on the education of their children and 10.94% spent money received to repay their loans while the remaining 10.0% used it on repair and construction of their houses.

The standard of living of the families left behind was measured in terms of presence of luxurious items, kind of housing, use of latest technology and the life styles of the respondents. It was found that standard of living was raised in most (60.0%) of the selected families. Many of the families who have members abroad, like to show off by flaunting costly and luxurious cars, jeeps, laptops and spent money on building spacious houses with modern facilities. The village wise and caste wise
variation of standard of living shows that it increased in almost all the villages and castes, except in cases of families where the emigrants did not take care of the families left behind and the families left behind had to sell property/land to repay the loans taken by the emigrants from their family.

Although majority of the respondents said that there has not been any increase or decline in the property owned by their families due to the emigration of one or more members from their family, yet as many as 35% of the respondents said that their families have purchased land or property with the money received in the form of remittances from abroad. In some villages, however, people are selling their lands as there is no one to take care of it, when the whole family migrates to other countries, or when only one or two members of the family are left behind in the village. Some respondents also told that their families sold land to finance the emigration of one or more of their family members.

Emigration has positive, as well as, adverse psychological impact on the members of the family left behind. A scale of psychological well-being based on Bradburn (1969) and Ryff's (1995) scale was administered to the respondents. Questions such as whether they feel sad, anguished, ignored, irritated, tired, disturbed, stressed, lonely etc. were asked and the respondents were classified into those with the state of low, middle or high well-being, depending upon their responses to the psychological well-being scale.

The results showed that 80% of the respondents showed high or moderate psychological well-being. The caste and village wise variation of state of psychological well-being of the respondents also showed that respondents from most of the caste groups and village groups were almost equally in state of high or moderate well-being. The reasons for their state of psychological well-being were discussed. The data showed that most of them were happy and in state of high well-being as they felt that emigration of members from their family has helped them in enhancing their social status. Also, emigration of one member opens the door for emigration of other members from the family and the emigration helps in attracting better matrimonial alliances for their children. Many of them said that they are not affected much in the absence of one or more members from the family due to emigration, as the family and religious faith helps them overcome the possible state of
stress, loneliness, anxiety or insecurity.

The 20% of the respondents who demonstrated low state of psychological well-being were also asked the reasons for the same. The reasons given by them were increase in workload, family quarrels and feeling of loneliness. The financial and psychological insecurity were also cited as reason for their state of well-being. A few of them were worried about the safety of their family members abroad due to the illegal migration of the members from their family.

During the Focussed Group Discussions it became evident that although all categories of people in the family experience stress due to emigration of the family members, it is the wife left behind after the emigration of her husband abroad who feels the stress most of the times. The women felt insecurity as quite a few were unsure of their husbands' behavior abroad. They were also worried about the whereabouts of their husbands. The aged also feel insecure whether their young ones will ever turn return or not. The children, especially the adolescent, admitted that they were getting sufficient money but missed the physical presence of their parent as most were forced to live a life with a single parent. The youth also admitted to find no inspiration to settle in India. However, the uncertainties of foreign visas make them unsure of their futures. The families of those persons who sent their members illegally and those who could not settle in the first instance had to suffer a lot of stress.

The respondents with low well-being score told that they used various coping mechanisms for overcoming their low psychological well-being state. These primarily included spending time with family and children, talking to friends and relatives, watching television and cinema. Many of them felt reassured by talking to the members of their family abroad.

The social impacts were measured in terms of the impact on the institution of family, marriages, education, deviance, impact on the demographic composition of the family and the health of the family members left behind. A large number of families said that their family type has not changed due to emigration, although a sizeable number, i.e., 34.06% of the respondents said that their families have changed from joint to nuclear after the emigration of one or more members from their family. However, the family continues to perform its traditional function of social support, socialization and social control. The relatives and family members are the most
frequent visitors in the family left behind. They provide every help to the families left behind. According to the majority (78%) of respondents, the emigrants prefer to keep their children in the families left behind and do not wish to leave them in the hostels or creches. Most of them said that family continues to be the most important agency for exercising control over the members. However, many heads admitted that their children nevertheless have turned deviant due to availability of extra money from abroad and the absence of male authority figure. In fact, more than 20% of the youth themselves admitted to have used drugs during informal discussions in the Focused Group Discussions.

The role of members of the family has changed somewhat with the members adjusting to compensate for the role of the member of the family abroad. For example, in many cases, the father-in-law goes to the market to purchase daily utilities, the work traditionally done by the sons of the family. The women in some families have to work in the fields. The heads of the family in case of female headed family have had to assume responsibilities other than domestic work.

As mentioned earlier, most of the families left behind were now headed by women. Despite the problems and stress that comes with this change, the status of women seems to have risen in such families as she is now involved in major decision making of the family. However, according to 56.88% of the respondents, the control of the head over the family has decreased while 60.43% of them admitted the presence of deviant behavior of members in the family left behind. This included truancy from school and drug addiction. They also admitted to the conflicts in the family being mainly over the issues relating to the spending of the money received from abroad. The issues relating to sponsorship of members by the Non Resident Indians are also the sources of conflicts in such families.

Changes in the institution of marriage were mentioned. The people spend a lot of money on the marriages of their children to show their NRI connection. Interestingly, marriages remain stable despite emigration of spouses in most of cases. Incidentally, in many cases, the women knew that their husbands had to get married to some citizen of the country where they had emigrated to get the right of citizenship there. It seems as if the wives have adjusted to the requirements of the time. However, some cases of the young girls waiting for their Non Resident Indian
husbands could be noted. These women were caught in their parents’ desire to marry their daughters to the foreign based Punjabis, who later exploited the situated, married more than one girl at a time during their visits to the villages and then never came back from the other countries leaving the women cheated and endlessly waiting for their NRI husbands. During discussions it was clear that the divorce rate has not gone up though one can find a sizeable number of deserted women in the families left behind.

There does not seem be any major increase in education of the family left behind. However, it was seen in many cases that the enrolment of children of the emigrants has risen in schools and colleges as they feel that it helps them in migration to other countries. A large number of children from such families were found to have enrolled in courses which could be of use to them in securing a visa to move abroad.

The number of cases of deviance among the youth of such Punjabi migrant households has increased, probably due to easy availability of money and lack of parental control due to the emigration of the latter to the countries abroad. The truancy, misbehavior, and petty crimes have increased due to the emigration of the members of the family particularly the male members from the family.

The health condition of the members of the families left behind is not impacted much due to the emigration of the members. Further, from the discussions carried in the selected villages, it was clear that the households who have one or more members abroad certainly enjoy more social status in the village.

MAJOR CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

From the above discussion we came to the following conclusions:

i. Emigration is a source of raised prestige in the community. This is clear from the fact that people from well off families are also going abroad although there is no financial compulsion to do so. In addition, the poor families are able to gain social status by the very fact of their relative being abroad, even if there is no monetary gain. People sometimes go out of the way to show their NRI connection by constructing some structures resembling aeroplanes, maps of European countries and sometimes getting the names of their relatives abroad on the entry gates of the villages by spending money.

ii. Males have migrated more in number as compared to the females and also
more number of women are left to head the families left behind in Punjab where families traditionally have a patriarchal family structure.

iii. Migration has had considerable impact on the families left behind in the region. The impact of migration of the families left behind can be measured in social, economic and psychological dimensions. The families left behind have been impacted in all three ways. However, we find that the impact is not consistent in respect of the social, economic, and psychological dimensions. Some families have benefitted in some aspects and lost in other dimensions. The results were asymmetrical in terms of impact, e.g., a family which has gained economically, did not attain psychological satisfaction. Similarly, the social impacts of emigration may not always correspond to the economic aspects. And interestingly a family which lost everything to send their son abroad, is still given higher social status, if it has one of the members abroad.

iv. The impact of caste is visible in the reasons of migration and the choice of country for migration. The people from castes like Jat and Lubhana have migrated to USA, Canada and Europe whereas those from Scheduled castes have gone to destinations like countries of the Gulf. Also, the choice of destination depends upon the economic status of the family as those who are already affluent tend to go to US, Canada and Europe while those from poorer families usually go to Gulf region because it is cheaper to migrate to such countries.

v. In terms of gender, although a fair number of women have emigrated, there are very rare cases of emigration of the scheduled caste women.

vi. Another notable finding was that the upper caste emigrants usually helped their relatives emigrate whereas in the case of low castes, once a person emigrated and settled abroad he/she did not make an effort to call his/ her relatives abroad.

vii. An interesting phenomenon observed was that land ownership pattern is changing. The lower caste families, who were traditionally landless, are purchasing land and property due to the remittances from abroad. Many Jats and upper castes, on the other hand, have sold their land in the villages after the emigration of one or more family members.
viii. In terms of psychological outcomes, it was earlier assumed by us that the respondents from the families left behind will be unhappy due to the emigration of a member from their family. However, this was not true in many cases. This is clear from their state of psychological well-being. The parents and spouses were happy that the members of their family are in a better economic and social position due to their emigration to other countries. The gains in economic and social dimensions of life seem to compensate the loss in psychological well-being of the respondents.

ix. Emigration does not result in advancement of higher education. It was expected that the educational level of the families left behind will increase as most of the people left behind will make use of the remittances received from abroad and send their children to schools and colleges. However, the results show that there has not been much of improvement in the number of people going for the higher education.

x. Despite scores of cases of deserted women NRI brides, the marriage of a girl with NRIs is considered a ticket for emigration of other members of family. Thus, we find a lot of mismatches in the marriages to the NRIs. Also, interestingly, the women were not found complaining much about the fact of their husbands having been married or engaged with other women in the country of destination. They were ready to accept this fact as a necessary evil of being married to a NRI.

xi. The religious faith, family, friends and relatives have helped the respondents in being in the state of high well-being. Thus, we can say that strong community sentiments and kinship network is very useful in overcoming the psychological state of low well-being of the members of the family left behind.

xii. Not all the families left behind have gained economically on account of their family members emigrating abroad. The rosy picture of successful emigrant sending money to his family has been belied in quite a few cases. The family left behind has to keep on sending money to the emigrant family members till the time he settles, especially in case of illegal emigrants.

xiii. The joint family system and agriculture based occupation of the people in
villages of Punjab has been major factor helping in promotion of members moving abroad. The families can spare one or more members easily as the other members can share the increased burden due to emigration of one or more members abroad.

xiv. The impact on the different category of people within the family has been varying. The youth are in a state of flux, the women have moved towards empowerment while the aged feel a sense of pride on sending the family members abroad.

xv. The traditional authority of head of the family over other family members has decreased in case of the families left behind.

xvi. The lure of foreign lands has had an undesirable impact on the youth in the villages. Many a youth in the villages have made emigration as the only aim in their life. They are not willing to work in India, but ready to work in other countries even in menial jobs. The deviance among the youth appears to have increased in the villages of Punjab, where the youth are under the drug-addiction due to easy availability of money and lack of purpose in life.

xvii. The mismatch among the married couples is visible in many a cases where even educated and young girls are married to the NRIs.

Towards a Sociological Understanding of Emigration and its Impact on Families Left Behind

As we know there are three major sociological perspectives viz. the functionalist, the conflict and the interpretative/interactionist into understand the social reality around us. The Structural-functionalist perspective views society as a complex system of interrelated parts that work together to maintain social order and stability.

Sociologists using this approach describe how the social institutions are organized to meet basic human needs. The Conflict perspective views conflict, competition, and disagreement over scarce resources (e.g., power, wealth, and prestige) as the fundamental reality of social life. Society is structured in ways to benefit a few at the expense of the majority. Social stratification or inequality is linked to such factors as class, race, sex, and age. According to the interactionist perspective, society arises from the ongoing interaction of individuals. It assumes that
people's perceptions of reality are variable and changing. Interactionists examine how people learn attitudes and behavior, as well as how people come to define situations as problems. The process by which people creatively shape reality through symbolic interaction is referred to as the social construction of reality. Determining whether a social problem exists often depends on which audience is watching, who the actor is, where the action takes place, and when the action occurs.

The functionalist perspective, when applied to the phenomenon of emigration and its impact on the families left behind would assume that each household as a system and the individuals within family are related to each other in such a way that their roles are complementary and lead to the overall stability of the institution of family. A disturbance or movement in one part leads to adjustments in other parts of the system of family so that the system continues to survive. Thus, focus of such a study from functionalist perspective would stress the adjustment pattern of family as a response to the disturbance caused by the emigration of family members. It would also focus on the positive role that emigration plays in the advancement of family left behind, as well as, the society in general.

The conflict perspective will stress the negative facets of the emigration by focusing on issues such as how the members of the poor families and developing countries have to leave their families unattended in order to earn in the other countries, and how the families left behind face a lot of economic, social and psychological problems. Further, the conflict perspective which emphasizes role of conflict in human societies, if applied in this study, would focus on emergence of various kinds of conflicts within the family and contradictions due to changing authority relations and roles.

The interpretative analysis if applied to the understanding of the issue at hand would focus on the everyday experiences of members of the family who construct their reality based on their subjective interpretation of the reality. This approach would therefore, also take into account the way emigrants, the “left-behind” and migration as a process are socially constructed as this would tend to influence what kind of value is attached to each of them. It will focus on the issues such as perceptions of the emigrants and their families, on issues such as their subjective takes on the impulses and driving forces which cause the compulsions and sometimes, craving of the
members who go abroad, the feeling of elation on receipt of gifts from abroad and satisfaction derived due to their increased status of the family owing to the emigration of one or more member of the family abroad and on the other hand, their feeling of helplessness in the wake of the increased workload and uncertainties and insecurities regarding the finances, the future of their children and also in regard to issues such as to the loyalty and behavior of their husbands and sons abroad.

It is clear that the sociological perspectives mentioned above, if taken separately offer only a partial analysis of any phenomenon. Therefore, for this study it made sense to use all the three approaches to study and comprehend different aspects of the emigration phenomenon. For instance, the rise in income and standard of living of majority of the families left behind due to the remittances from abroad, the role adjustments taking place in the family where the functions of the young male member who has moved abroad are willingly taken by the females and aged persons in the families left behind, the continued state of psychological well-being of the head of the household even in the absence of one or more members from the family, etc., all indicate that the influence of emigration on the families left behind can be functional. On the other hand, it is clear from the study that as suggested by the conflict perspectives, most of the migration from the region has occurred due to the push factors such as poverty and unemployment of the youth and there appears to be discrimination in terms of caste and class. Those who are rich can manage to go to the countries of their choice and countries like USA and Canada where the living standard is higher than India. They are also able to call their families abroad. On the other hand, people belonging to the lower castes and classes have to take loans and have to go abroad illegally. The families left behind by them have to face several problems such as desertion of women, the drug addiction of the children and conflicts among the members of the family left behind. Their children have no option but to stay with single parents and in many cases, the women face social stigma, financial problems and low state of psychological well. This leads us to assume that the emigration from this area has resulted in lot of harm to the families left behind.

In the same way, once one tries to study the day to day experiences of the people left behind, the aspirations of those who have emigrated, the frustrations of those waiting to emigrate, the pain and loss that the families left behind feel at losing a
family member, the joy and pride they experience on hearing about the success of their kin abroad, the feeling of abandonment when family members abroad sever all links with those left behind, the coping mechanisms that those left behind adopt to deal with their tribulations - all these come across through the Case Studies and the Focussed Group Discussions where the idea is to do qualitative research and interpretative analysis that focuses on their subjectivities.

Thus, when we tried to analyze the issue of emigration and its impact on the family left behind, it becomes clear that a) each of the three sociological perspectives can help us in understanding the topic under study, b) it is also apparent that none of these perspectives, on its own, can do so effectively, and c) by corollary, in order to comprehend the different facets of the issue under study, different perspectives had to be used.

**Conclusion**

International migration is now becoming an important phenomenon, particularly in the globalised world. However, even more important is the issue of the knowing the consequences of the process of emigration on the society of origin, the families left behind and the individuals caught up in this situation. In this study, we have tried to focus on the impact of emigration at the level of the family and to some extent, on the individuals within the family. Our modest effort has thrown up various findings, some expected and some unexpected. As such, the impact of emigration on the families left behind, as well as, the individuals in them may not be similar on the social, economic and psychological dimensions and may vary from case to case. While there may be discernible gain in economic terms in most of the families, yet in certain cases, families and individuals are left devastated and frustrated on social security and psychological fronts. Nevertheless, two definite conclusions can be drawn from this study, one, that there is urgent need for more research on the impact of emigration on the families left behind in the societies of origin of migration and two - it appears that the State intervention for the betterment of such families left behind is not satisfactory. Our government wishes to benefit from the remittances of those going abroad, but has no clear policy to safeguard the interest of the families left behind due to emigration. Some of the families may need financial help, others psychological
counseling, and still others might require social support. Hence, there is need for more research and a holistic approach towards understanding and solving the problems of families left behind by emigrants.