SOCIAL IMPACT OF CANADIAN PUNJABI PHILANTHROPY IN PUNJAB AN ASSESSMENT

Introduction

As seen in previous chapters, the range of philanthropic activities and scale of investment undertaken by Canadian Punjabis is quite extensive and is spread over almost a century. CPP has come to play a major role in the social and economic development of Punjab affecting various sections of society in different ways. Although its precise magnitude and direction are not sufficiently known because there have been a few studies of this phenomenon, there is no doubt that the Punjabi diaspora has increasingly influenced the rural population of Punjab by investment in numerous projects ranging from religious, educational, and health to ostentatious display of wealth by erecting mansions and gates in hundreds of villages. Almost every village has such reminders of overseas Punjabis and especially now of Canadian Punjabis’ intervention in the village life. Naturally there are several questions which arise immediately. What has been the impact of such projects and activities? How has it affected particular villages, especially the recipients of such philanthropic benevolence? How has CPP affected the local community, its economy and social welfare; and what are its wider implications for Punjab’s social, religious and cultural life? This chapter attempts a preliminary answer to these questions in the light of specific projects discussed in previous chapters and also examines the policy implications of such findings.

Assessing Canadian Punjabi Philanthropy: Criteria and Measures

However, the task of analysing the impact of CPP on Punjabi society is not an easy one for a number of factors. First, such an evaluation encompasses Punjab as a whole which means deriving generalisations from particular projects which may not be applicable to other places
or regions. Second, CPP has to be seen in the context of all such philanthropic activities undertaken by the Punjabi diaspora as a whole – i.e., Punjabis from other countries, especially the larger communities of the US and the UK. The picture is complicated as many philanthropic projects are shared; any effort to isolate Canadian Punjabi philanthropic projects’ impact on Punjab from the rest of Punjabi diaspora philanthropy is almost impossible besides being unrealistic. Still, as far as possible, this study will concentrate on the CPP. However in view of above remarks and due to rather limited and uneven studies of philanthropic linkages of Canadian Punjabis, a comprehensive review will only be possible in the future. As there are no detailed studies of large or other projects except those noted earlier in this study the following assessment is based upon case studies, a field survey of 331 projects for which extensive notes were made. In addition it draws upon interviews with a number of philanthropists, local residents, relevant information from local newspapers, along with secondary literature. This chapter thus presents a broad assessment of the Canadian Punjabi philanthropy in Punjab.

This chapter assesses the social impact of philanthropic investments; proceeding from specific projects studied or illustrated as part of CPP profile towards assessing their overall social impact. It is immediately obvious that there are considerable regional variations, and within a region there are considerable variations across districts.

This evaluation involves judgements about projects’ contribution in terms of addition to ‘social capital,’ ‘human capital’ and ‘productive capital.’ Social capital usually refers to how social forces within a society are affected by particular developments, in this case philanthropic investments. Within this social capital criterion, sometimes explicit reference is made to the equity issue which takes account of diaspora philanthropic activities as they affect different sections of local society – i.e., how an addition or opening up of a new facility
or social service through diaspora philanthropic activities affects the existing power balance between different sections of society. Thus, for example, an opening up of a hospital will generally mean new or additional facilities of health services for the local community. However, access to these facilities by different sections of society is subject to their existing status and incomes; and not all sections may be able to utilise such facilities according to their needs or in terms of their numerical strength. Thus, a philanthropic project that adds generally to the existing facilities for the local community but also helps its poor section in a specific way would be better in terms of the equity criterion than a project which maintains the existing social inequalities or indeed accentuates them. Another aspect of social capital relates to the gender issue. In Punjab’s case it seems especially relevant, as there is much concern about the gender bias of Punjabi society. Thus the role of diaspora philanthropy in achieving gender equality can be significant, as the exchange of new ideas from abroad has considerable impact on social values of Punjabi society. This factor will be measured empirically; the extent and share of female participation in the planning or execution of a particular philanthropic project is positive indicator and so is any specific benefit to females in terms of health education, educational facilities, or training for employment or ‘empowerment’ and so on.

Human capital refers to addition to human skills which a particular project injects into a social setting making the affected local population more productive and/or adding to their skills and knowledge, thus affecting employability and resourcefulness. Productive capital refers to physical addition to a society’s resources which add to its welfare. Thus an addition of school, crèche, hospital and any other services are examples of such productive capital. However the merit of a new philanthropic project in not simply in terms of an addition to existing facilities but also in the way it affects the existing social and economic differentials
Thus, taking these three elements of social impact into consideration, one can proceed to evaluate Canadian Punjabi philanthropy in Punjab.

The Impact of Canadian Punjabi Philanthropy on Colonial Punjab

In assessing pre-1947 Canadian Punjabi philanthropy in Punjab, the task of assessment is somewhat easier as its range was rather limited; donation to religious institutions or such causes; and financial help to educational institutions. Education was not as wide spread in colonial Punjab and was largely confined to a few government schools in major cities (Leitner 1882; Allender 2006). The colonial Punjab government started establishing some colleges and schools in cities of Punjab from 1870s onwards, but it was a very slow process. However, it was due to two parallel religious reform movements – Arya Samaj and Singh Sabha among urban Hindus and Sikhs that led to the establishment of many educational institutions in the state. As noted earlier, as an off-shoot of the Singh Sabha movement, the Chief Khalsa Diwan in Amritsar was established which exclusively focused on educational concerns of the community. The CKD mobilised overseas Sikhs for its educational ventures, first appealing to those in the Far East and then to North American Sikhs. Gradually, the CKD was able to establish a chain of schools, both primary and secondary, in the Doaba region. A similar process was at work in some villages of Malwa and Majha regions.

Thus the contribution of overseas Punjabis to formal education in colonial Punjab is considerable – enhancing social mobility of rural Punjabis. It might have added to their recruitment into armies and also changed their attitudes towards social issues, such as health, seeking employment through acquisition of skills, and such unquantifiable factors as outlook on life. The establishment of some social welfare institutions obviously meant a better life for the handicapped and destitute in their local areas.
It is also clear that North American Punjabis significantly contributed to various social and political events in Punjab. This exchange of ideas, backed by philanthropic activities undertaken by North American Punjabis has influenced Punjab’s social and political life. This can be seen through the Ghadar movement and its aftermath. As a result of this movement, a loyal relationship between rural Punjabis and the British authorities was eventually ruptured as the new consciousness was ushered by Ghadar activists who propagated new ideas of freedom as they returned to their homeland. Although the movement was crushed violently, its impact was widespread (Puri 1994; G. Singh 1994). Social and political organisations such as KKP and the Communist Party in Punjab were direct consequences of the Ghadar movement while it led to a more radical element within other political movements among the Sikhs. The Central Sikh League and the Shiromani Akali Dal, as also formation of the SGPC, can be seen as heavily influenced by new ideas coming from abroad. Moreover, the new organisations received substantial overseas funds. Indeed, formation of such associations, the news media and establishment of education institutions went hand by hand and complemented each other. For the pre-1947 period, overseas associations such as *Malwa Welfare Society* in Canada as well as similar society for Doaba regions were front organisations for exchange of funds for both political and educational purposes in Punjab. It should be noted that British authorities took stringent measures to stem the flow of such ‘rebellious’ ideas and resources from abroad.

A special feature of CPP in pre-1947 era was that much of funding from Canadian Punjabis took the shape of getting together for a particular cause, as few Punjabis were rich enough to undertake individual projects. The one exceptional case was of Mayo Singh and Kapoor Singh Sidoo as noted in Chapter 4. In the case of Mayo Singh, a local development arising from his philanthropy in Punjab is noteworthy. Mayo Singh patronised many *baniya* Sikhs of
his native Paldi and neighbouring villages. The group was of Mahton caste and through philanthropic patronage felt empowered enough to claim a change in their collective status. In the 1930s Mahtons of Paldi mobilised to seek Rajput status for its members, and British administrators were sufficiently impressed by their arguments (which included establishment of a school, small dispensary, a gurdwara and a mandir) to grant them their desired status in the 1941 census. These activities acted as a spur to other overseas Punjabis from Hoshiarpur district. Most of the emigrants from Paldi belonged to baniya class/caste, and their Canadian remittances and philanthropic investment in several projects enhanced their status both in their own eyes as also within the ilaqa. Thus social uplift and communal mobilisation were inspired by diasporan philanthropy which had much impact upon the dynamics of rivalry and caste based factionalism which need further analysis at the local level.

Another consequence, it may be conjectured, of their elevated status (and for Paldi residents) was to inspire a competition for the neighbouring Jats to undertake philanthropic activities that ultimately resulted in Kharoudi becoming the focus of Canadian Punjabis in the 1990s. An old rivalry between Paldi and Kharoudi villagers in Canada was to show later in more spectacular way in the post-1947 period when Kharoudi was chosen by new generation of Canadian philanthropists for investment to transform its environment as we have seen in Chapter 7.

Thus for the pre-1947 period despite the small number of Canadian Punjabis, their connection though philanthropic activities had a significant social impact on Punjabi society, especially on its rural population. It added to social, human and productive capital especially of the rural society in Punjab.
The Impact of Canadian Punjabi Philanthropy since 1947

After 1947, Punjab underwent tremendous social and political changes. Truncated in geography after Partition, it was further divided in November 1966 into two states of Punjab and Haryana while areas were merged into Himachal Pradesh. The new post-1966 Punjab witnessed even more of its residents leave for abroad. From the 1970s heavy migration of Punjabis to Canada started and the quantum of CPP also underwent a change. Although the Punjab government was aware of the increasing strength of overseas Punjabis since the 1960s, it could not take any systematic steps to engage them. The regular policies towards NRPs began only as the Indian federal government changed its stance in the 1990s. In Punjab, the state government invited NRPs through a combination of some incentives, as overseas Punjabis once again started travelling to their homeland in large numbers resuming their traditional social and financial connections as discussed through case studies in earlier chapters. Below, The social impact of CPP on Punjabi society is assessed broadly evaluating major sectors by turns.

Religious Institutions

As seen earlier, the major component of Punjabi diaspora philanthropy consists of religious philanthropy, and CPP is no exception. Canadian Punjabis’ investment in religious institutions and activities has continued as individuals have been donating to local shrines, gurdwaras, mandirs and other popular deities. As such this is continuation of the pattern from pre-1947 period with two significant changes. In the post-1970s period, diasporan philanthropic activities diversified. This reflected Punjab’s religious diversity as followers of various sects and deras sent donations for their respective shrines.

The main focus of overseas Punjabis generally and Sikh diaspora in particular has become Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar as the most sacred shrine where donations have increased many
times. In addition to funds for Sikhs’ religious centre in Amritsar, devout Sikhs have found other religious causes too. In a more recent move, some Canadian Sikhs are keen to promote Sikhism in Punjab through education and sports activities. Knowing how modernisation has led many young Sikhs to discard their turbans, they have offered incentives to encourage the wearing of Sikh dress. A Canadian Sikh with support from others organises an annual sports festival at Jhorrhan (Ludhiana) where only kesdhari players take part and receive cash awards. As seen earlier, Akal Academy which a chain of schools throughout Punjab and Amrit Indo-Canadian Academy at Ladian (Ludhiana) aims to encourage pupils to keep their turbans and offer preferential admission for practicing Sikhs.

Donations to all kinds of religious shrines, including popular symbols of common Punjabi religious beliefs and customs have found overseas Punjabi patrons. Such well-known sects such as Nirankaris, Namdhari, Radhasoamis, Nanaksarias and others have all gained through such transnational connections. It is fair to say that Canadian philanthropic funds for religious institutions as part of Punjabi diaspora philanthropy has led to the strengthening of socio-religious difference within the Punjabi community. Thus diaspora philanthropy has contributed to religious divide within the Punjabi community, and this phenomenon is more pronounced in areas which have more extensive contacts abroad.

Thus, the Doaba region in particular (but the Malwa region, too) has seen promotion of new sectarian movements leading in some places to religious strife. In the last five years, newspapers have reported violent clashes between followers of a particular dera and Sikhs in general. The most notable case was of Sant Sarwan Dass Dera at Ballan (Jalandhar). One of leading sants of this dera was killed in Vienna in May 2009 leading to considerable disruption and violence in Jalandhar city. The Dera has called upon its followers to differentiate themselves completely from Sikhism and to regard themselves as follower of a
new Ravidasia religious tradition. A recent study of this Dera (Singh et al 2011) provides evidence of transnational factors as major factors in fostering socio-religious movements. Overseas Punjabi followers of dera have funded several institutions to provide educational, health and social welfare services. The Dera runs two hospitals and a modern secondary school and its heads have regularly visited overseas followers collecting funds as well as providing spiritual guidance to them. The Dera has thus emerged as a significant institution in the Doaba region. Assessing the impact of such transnational connections, they conclude their study as such:

The key element in this transformation has been the resources and ideas exchanged between the British and Canadian followers of the dera through various intermediaries. These links have transformed this small religious centre to a leading institution with the capacity to devise a new assertive and collective identity for its followers underwritten by several developmental initiatives (Singh et al 2011: 87).

Similarly, another dera, Sacha Sauda (based at Sirsa just across the border of Punjab) has been a focus of considerable religious strife. Some older cases of Sant Bhaniarawala and Ashutosh at Nurmahal have also been in the news. Another site of caste antagonism was Talhan village, where a dispute over the ownership of a common religious shrine led to considerable confrontation between the Jat Sikhs and Dalits. Although the case was resolved after several negotiations, part of the problem arose due to transnational support for factions to the dispute.³

The rise of dera phenomenon in Punjab can be attributed in part to overseas Punjabis’ support for such institutions (Ram 2004; Judge 2004). Although more case studies are required to sustain this general argument, evidence from Sant Sarwan Dass Dera at Ballan endorses this proposition (Singh et al 2011). Across Indian states, Gujarat, as some social
scientists have noted, presents this scenario where some US-based Hindu organisations contributed funds to certain religious organisations to foster Hindutva agenda which instigated violent protests against Muslims in some parts of the state. Although the Punjab case seems different from Gujarat, diasporic funds for religious philanthropic activities have complicated some cases; those shrines whose ownership is subject of some dispute and also contributed in some ways towards widening sectarian divide. Thus philanthropic funds for religious institutions and activities have become a sensitive and serious issue for social scientists concerned with the rise of religious fundamentalism as a world-wide phenomenon and Punjab provides an interesting case of this phenomenon.

On the positive side, CPP has helped one of the best known philanthropic institutions in Punjab - the All India Pingalwara Charitable Society, Amritsar. For several years now, Canadian Punjabis have played a prominent part in supporting this institution. In recent years over half of its funding has been contributed by Canadian Punjabis. As an institution for orphans, the handicapped, and the mentally ill, and as a last refuge for the dying, this charity has been compared to Mother Teresa’s welfare home in Calcutta. Inspired by the example set by its founder Puran Singh, there are now other similar affiliated institutions in Ropar, Jalandhar and other places too, which have also drawn on Canadian Punjabis and others in providing such services. These are new additions to older welfare institutions such as Khalsa Orphanage at Amritsar and Birdh Ashram at Tarn Taran. They provide welfare for the most vulnerable.

Taking religious institutions in Punjab, CPP has obviously added to the welfare capacity of many of these institutions –as a majority of such institutions are affectively distribution centres of welfare services for the poor. However, diasporan philanthropy is also implicated in some recent cases of inter-religious strife.
Educational Institutions

Examining the educational field hundreds of institutions have been established through Punjabi diaspora philanthropy, many of these funded by Canadian Punjabis. In the post-1947 period, and especially from 1990s onwards, diaspora educational investment has shifted to opening of parallel private schools and technical colleges. In this sector too, Canadian Punjabi philanthropy has contributed to several new ‘modern public schools’ in Doaba and Malwa regions. In all there are over a hundred secondary schools and scores of technical institutions which have been financed by CPP either alone or in partnership with Punjabi philanthropists from other countries. Indeed the range of such institutions is very wide – from residential schools to fees paying private educational institutions and colleges providing education in such fields as nursing, homeopathy, industrial technical training, engineering courses and English teaching institutes. In technical education several colleges have been established offering engineering, medical, business and other professional qualifications, it is obvious case of addition to social, human and productive capital of Punjab. However, in evaluating their social impact upon Punjabi society, there are several questions too.

As we look at the detailed portrait and contrast this with the pre-1947 era, the current picture offers more complex scenario. A majority of new educational institutions are private schools or technical colleges offering professional courses. It is not a simple question of educational opportunities for Punjabi pupils where none existed before as was the case in pre-1947 period. In terms of human and social capital, we need to see the kind of educational opportunities thrown by new educational philanthropy which raises issues of access and quality of such facilities. Moreover, pre-1947 investment was, in the majority of cases, opening up of primary or high schools in villages without such facilities. Most of diasporan funded institutions are administered through trusts and some form part of composite projects.
such as the GNMMET at Dhahan-Kaleran. Generally, these schools offer a selective admission policy, their fees structure varying from liberal admission criterion to highly competitive enrolment. Although CPP has contributed to the expansion of educational opportunities in the state and these model private schools might have arguably raised standards of educational teaching, there is attending cost too.

These can be seen through specific evidence presented in this study. The GNMMET, which runs a modern secondary school and a nursing college at Dhahan-Kaleran, is part of its large Canadian Punjabi philanthropic project of health and educational services. Although GNMMET is a dedicated charitable organisation and offers local students a high standard of education, its fees structure still does not give equal access to poor sections of the society. Still, some parents are quite happy with the provision as Sukhdev Singh of Amritsar told, ‘I visited this institution five years back with my friend. I was so impressed with the environment here and looking at the achievements of the students. A number of them going abroad as nurses and I decided to put my daughter Mandeep here for Nursing course.’

A Canadian philanthropist visiting GNMMET stated, ‘The benefactors of the activities are the poor and the forgotten rural folks for whom opportunities did not exist before. I am glad to see our funds helping young boys and girls from the disadvantaged families to receive excellent education and technical training here. This will enable them to undertake successful careers, help uplift their families and this project is a perfect example of people empowering themselves. In the prevailing social and political atmosphere in India one cannot wait for the rusted wheels of the government to move and serve the people to provide their basic needs.’

In the case of the GNMMET Nursing College, admission is competitive as in many other institutions and many students have gained qualification and are reported to have gone
abroad. While addition of seats for this particular training has obviously added to enlarge such facilities in the region, especially for girls, the absence of an explicit policy for students coming from poor background means much depends upon the discretion of the Director and Principal.

That diasporan intervention has not meant much to the poor section of the Punjabi society is supported by another institution. The case study of Harvest International School at Jassowal as part of Harvest Tennis Academy endorses the above conclusion. Harvest International School is a private institution, the only one in Punjab that is affiliated and recognised by University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE). The school, which opened its door in 2010, offers high quality education with intake of students from ‘all over India.’ Although situated in a rural area of Ludhiana district and attached to the sports academy, HTA’s high fees structure evidently makes no concessions to poor or deserving pupils from the local area or even from Punjab. Indeed, Harvinder Saran justified the school fees structure ‘in terms of its high quality education and its innovatory approach to education.’ This kind of institution by a Canadian businessman turned philanthropist opens up the question of whether this investment can be characterised as philanthropic at all. In any case, two case studies suggest that the range of educational investment by Canadian Punjabis is quite diverse, and each kind of project needs separate evaluation to determine its impact upon the locality.

Examining many institutions’ admission policies and fees structure reveals a very limited scope for students from poor background. Indeed as these private institutions compete for local pupils, they draw more affluent section of students. As a consequence, local government schools are deprived of a balanced intake by pupils from all sections of the society. In a sense, the social impact of private institutions has seen a dampening effect upon educational
standards of government schools – which are left to cater to pupils from poor families. This has led to widening gulf of educational opportunities for school going pupils in the state; poor parents have no option but to send their children to state schools which are of generally low standard. This is the case despite the fact that teachers in government schools are better paid and that, in recent years, the government has made consistent efforts to equip them with requisite infrastructure. While the new institutions have certainly augmented educational facilities in various ways and, in many cases, brought modern teaching methods or technologies into the classroom, it is uncertain if such expansion has benefitted the deprived or poor sections of Punjabi society. Moreover, this investment in secondary and higher education in contrast to primary education in the early phase of CPP also raises issues about philanthropic impact.

Notice should also be taken of some new educational institutions which are almost profit making ventures with little or negligible philanthropic element. So, in terms of equity and access, such institutions have very limited role in the welfare of Punjabi society. Indeed, some of them might be contributing to accentuating social inequality by offering better off pupils more chances for quality education while poor pupils having to enrol in government schools which are often dubbed as fit for ‘scheduled castes and bhaiyas [migrant labour in Punjab from Bihar and western UP] only.’ The low motivation and general atmosphere of despondency among teachers of government schools, even while in most cases such teachers are better paid than those employed by private schools, can be attributed to the rise of private schools.

**Medical Services and Social Welfare Projects**

Third major contribution by CPP is in the health sector. Unlike education, any addition to health facilities can be considered a positive contribution to local society as also to welfare of
Punjab as a whole. Although Canadian Punjabis were aware of poor health facilities in their villages and areas of origin, they offered very little support for such facilities until 1970s. The only exception was a small hospital financed by Mayo Singh in his native village Paldi in the 1930s followed by a slightly better effort by his ex-business partner, the Sidoo family, who opened a small hospital at Aur in the 1950s. However, from the 1990s, Canadian Punjabis started taking a serious note of lack of health facilities in the rural Punjab and offered help in many ways. The Doaba region in particular has benefitted from a number of hospitals and many kinds of medical facilities. Talking of GNMMET contribution to rural facilities, a senior doctor said, ‘Guru Nanak Mission hospital is one such facility where we are providing help for a community that is less privileged and is in desperate need. Most cities have an effective network of qualified physicians, but it is the rural poor who need the most help.’

An exceptional characteristic in the Doaba region should also be noted. In the inner ring of Doaba region, as a result of Punjabi diaspora philanthropy, there seems to be a competitive spirit. This has resulted in what economists call ‘over-supply’ or ‘over-capacity’ of medical services in some villages which has led to partial or complete closure of a hospital. It is paradoxical that some Punjab districts such as Gurdaspur, Ropar, Patiala, and Mansa have few such medical facilities funded by CPP. Medical facilities are unevenly concentrated.

Moreover diaspora philanthropy has not added much to the basic health provision or public health education in the state. However, it should be noted that despite much awareness of gender issues in Canada, Punjabi Canadian philanthropists have not specifically addressed this issue through their ventures in Punjab – despite the well-known fact of widespread practice of infanticide among Punjabi parents. Punjab has a peculiar demographic male to female ratio; it stands at 1000:798 (Census 2001). The falling female population of Punjab has led social scientist to speculate on the peculiar nature of Punjabi society – i.e., the fact
that it has one of the worst demographic imbalances among Indian states. More recently, a few NGOs have adopted the slogan of ‘saving the girl child’ as part of their social activities.\(^6\)

In a significant recent move, a religious edict by Jathedar of Akal Takht against female infanticide was issued. However, an apparent paradox is that as more medical facilities have become available, partly funded from diaspora donors, the practice of female infanticide has become widely diffused among Punjabi parents. Social scientists have discussed reasons and rationale for modern practices of female infanticide noting old customs of cruel neglect for young girls in Punjab.\(^7\)

Day long medical camps - especially ‘eye camps,’ where doctors from a nearby city would come to examine patients requiring treatment and would offer surgeries on a following day - have become routine. Thus eye camps during winter seasons had been the norm, until the Punjab government discouraged such camps due to inadequate after-care. Some health facilities are also attached to religious institutions, as many gurdwaras, mandirs and deras have offered basic medicines to visitors. Canadian Punjabis have exported medical equipment to various Punjab hospitals, including government civil hospitals. Here and there they have assisted doctors and hospitals to provide medical facilities for a targeted group (e.g. treating patients suffering from AIDS or TB, hearing aids for deaf, or helping handicapped children). Canadian Punjabis have built new hospitals, usually inspired by an individual but requiring close cooperation with others from Canada and elsewhere. Although some of the largest hospitals are to be found in the Doaba region (e.g., Dhahan-Kaleran, Mehatpur Uladdani, Bilga, Rakhra), there is wider diffusion of such medical facilities in other regions also. Thus, there is demonstrative impact of such philanthropy inspiring others to undertake similar ventures.
In sum, CPP activities in the health sector of Punjab have added both to the existing provision and provided new facilities, although its spread is uneven. Case studies of such facilities are few and far between but analysis of GNMMET at Dhahan-Kaleran helps us to understand several issues. Establishing hospitals is a large venture. It needs a long term commitment and cooperation between Canadian Punjabi donors, local people, and state officials. The long-term viability of these hospitals remains in balance as the on-going disputes among trustees at GNMMET indicate.

Environment, Infrastructure and Development Projects

Canadian Punjabi philanthropy has led to several ‘development and environmental projects’ need evaluation. As noted earlier, Punjab government started an ambitious scheme under the Mera Pind Initiative and issued a suggested list of projects (Appendix A.2) that could attract its matching grant. Although government records do not provide complete chronological details of how many projects were undertaken under this scheme since 2001. An examination of data of such projects over a three-year period, should allow us to deduce some conclusions. The list of projects for three years as given in the tables (Appendices A.3) shows how the government scheme has had a limited appeal. For the year 2004-05 only two major projects - at Bahrampur and at Jian - were undertaken by VLIF as discussed earlier.

Hence it is necessary to see how Canadian Punjabi Philanthropists have responded to the governmental initiatives. In 2005-06, this scheme attracted 36 projects in Patiala, Nawanshahr, Hoshiarpur and Jalandhar districts with an investment of Rs 7.45 crore (government’s share was Rs 3.72 crore under the Matching Grant Scheme CD 2.35). In year 2006-07, a further 54 projects were started with an investment of Rs 5.77 crore. It is apparent that the scheme is gaining adherents; but it has yet to become popular, reasons for which will be discussed below.
In assessing the impact of these developmental projects completed at a score of villages – some of which are still in progress, we need to note that most of them were pioneered by VLIF – an initiative primarily of Canadian Punjabis. The first project at Kharoudi village was extended to several more villages. The transformed village of Kharoudi became a model and was lauded as the definite future of Punjabi villages. Kharoudi with its watch tower in the centre, offered a modern environment which puts this village at par with any other modern village in the Western world and certainly among the modern villages of India in terms of all civic amenities.

How have developmental projects impacted upon local people? Residents of Kharoudi and other transformed villages confirm the obvious benefits of such philanthropic investment. Shalinder Singh, a 65 year-old Kharoudi villager remembers old times when, ‘the waste from the septic tanks sometimes spilled out onto the street up to ankle level causing a stink and breeding diseases.’ Ram Dass, husband of the ex-Sarpanch observed, ‘I am so grateful to all the people who contributed to this project. Our lives have become so much better and cleanliness is a boon for all of us.’ Sohan Singh Deo, an NRP from Canada who visited the village was duly impressed with the transformation, ‘The change is unbelievable. The village stands transformed.’

A formal assessment of VLIF projects is available (Singh and Singh 2008). They have assessed the Kharoudi village project considering changes in health, economic and social life for residents, considering both qualitative and quantitative aspect of these changes and measuring several variables bearing on the quality of life. They argue that social factors are high on the mind of stakeholders in cases of investment in water supply and sanitation facilities. While evaluating the project, Gurmail Singh and Sawarn Singh consider inclusion,
equity, ownership, accountability and transparency, capacity building and change in hygiene behaviour of the targeted population. Accordingly, they find:

Sanitation raises social status, empower women, bestow self-respect, dignity and privacy to households, emancipate women from imprisonment of daylight as they wait for darkness to defecate, and provide them safety of sex assault and harassment of going out in dark on their way to and from the site of defecation (Singh and Singh 2008: 19).

They find benefits of sanitation facilities have accrued to women and children, who bear the main brunt of inadequate access to water supply and sanitation facilities. A clean environment has reduced infectious diseases and has led to improvement in women’s health. Moreover, sanitation has raised the social status of women who feel empowered through the dignity of privacy. Women certainly feel safe as they no longer feel the harassment of going out at odd hours to the site of defecation. The project has also helped low income groups through facilities of pure drinkable water, sanitation, sewerage, computer education, etc. which were beyond their reach earlier. All children regardless of parental incomes have access to information technology via shared computers.

Although range of facilities in these transformed villages has varied from a comprehensive provision of modern civic amenities to paved roads replacing the muddy and dirty lanes of the village, underground piped water supply and a sewerage treatment. Some villages have streetlights powered through solar energy. But all such villages offer an overall healthy environment through social benefits of clan water supply and improvement in sanitation which has led to quality changes in the social life of residents.
However, there is issue of sustainability of such projects. These village development projects are liable to be undermined as village residents are generally unaware of the need for active maintenance of facilities. If funds are collected monthly for the maintenance, villagers are not willing or not attentive enough to pay their little share. Such acts as throwing of polythene bags or other house wastage in sewerage pipes has led to blockage and expensive repairs. Similarly, each village needs to have an active body that continues to monitor and check the proper use of facilities provided and any defaulters need to be dealt with accordingly.

**Arts, Culture Amenities and Sports**

Finally, Canadian Punjabis have also emerged as major patrons of sports and arts. Many artistic ventures and in the field of sports, Kabaddi has become the largest recipient of financial support from abroad. Scores of major Kabaddi matches are sponsored every year by diaspora philanthropists while almost every village sees a local match funded through its NRPs. Canadian Punjabis are sponsoring international Kabaddi matches with players from Canada, England, Pakistan and USA also. Two ‘international’ matches take place in Ludhiana every year attended by some 50,000 spectators entertained by pop singers. A spectator, Gurnam Singh, who came all the way from Rurka Kalan, was quoted as saying, ‘I have been a regular visitor to this sports festival for the last nine years. Such events foster the sporting spirit among the youth and should be held with good infrastructure.’ M. S. Khaira, General Secretary of the Canada-USA tournament of 2010, outlined his objective as follows:

The event is an effort to take back the youth of Punjab to connect to its roots. Since majority of the youth has fallen prey to drug addiction, therefore we hope to bring some radical change in the society by bringing more and more youth in the fold of sports. Moreover, over the years we have virtually forgotten the importance and tradition of rural sports, which hold a lot of relevance till date.
Given such widespread support for Kabaddi, it is legitimate to ask if sports facilities have become more widespread through CPP activities. Kabaddi is basically a one-day event requiring little physical equipment and hence is more of a ‘spectators’ sport. As such it leads to little addition to sports facilities. Individual players are rewarded and can go abroad exhibiting their skills at different locations such as London, Vancouver and Yuba City. Canadian Punjabis have also provided sports facilities or equipment in their native villages; a few have built stadiums too. However, as yet few other games have found as much enthusiasm as Kabaddi. Only notable contribution is of a tennis academy in Ludhiana district or a wrestling and basketball club sponsored by Dhanoa family in Jalandhar district. Other games such as hockey, football, volleyball, squash, boxing, etc. have received little attention.

Punjabi diaspora philanthropy has provided some incentives for creative literature also. Overseas patrons have funded awards for creative writers of Punjabi language, and it seems reasonable to assume that the overall impact of such diasporic awards has been positive. Another form of diasporic patronage, sponsoring writers to visit Canada and other countries, has become common. Such exchanges have widened the horizon of Punjabi writers giving rise to travel accounts and impressions and strengthening the promotion of Sikh and Punjab studies abroad, especially in Canada and the United States.11 Seminars on various aspects of the Punjabi diaspora are being held abroad with participation of Punjab academics and writers.12

Besides CPP’s impact on the written Punjabi word, popular arts have also received support. The virtual transformation of Bhangra from a local seasonal dance of Punjab to become part of global entertainment industry is due to the strong transnational connections of the Punjabi diaspora. Increasing prosperity of Punjab, along with changing Bhangra ethos, has meant the emergence of Bhangra as a major entertainment industry with hundreds of artists, promoters,
dancing groups (DJs), producers and distribution agents. The new ethos of Bhangra reflects the transformation of traditional cultural signposts of Punjabi society towards urbanisation and globalisation – and the new pop culture of Punjab, largely a creation of diasporic connections with British and Canadian Punjabis is playing a leading role in this process. A song by Jazzy-B shows – as the singer gets off from an Air Canada plane at Amritsar airport has become an icon of Punjab’s linkages to the global world. Leading Punjab pop artists such as Gurdas Mann, Babbu Mann, Satvinder Bitti, Sartaj, and many others regularly tour Canadian and other overseas Punjabi communities. A pop singer turned filmmaker, Harbhajan Mann, has turned to films exploring the theme of marriage, abandoned brides and generation gap of Canadian Punjabis. It is virtually certain that Canadian Punjabis will add to Punjab’s evolving cultural scene.

Has Bhangra industry added to Punjabi society’s welfare? Do new arts depict Punjabi life in all its authenticity? As far pop industry is concerned, apart from increased employment for a category of artists, i.e. musicians, promoters, and dancers its net worth is controversial and disputable. Some would argue that contemporary pop scene has added nothing valuable to Punjabi culture; indeed, it has degraded the earlier more romantic and classical forms of entertainment. Common scenes of DJs with its chorus of girls gyrating their bodies to the tune of popular songs while entertaining wedding guests is nothing but exploitation of young and poor girls and this phenomenon has allegedly led to widespread prostitution. The lifestyle of some of Canadian bhangra singers and their videos showing half-clad girls in bikinis or short skirts depicts vulgarity and soft pornography. The emerging pop scene is part of new modernity many Punjabis abhor but find inevitable as price to pay for Punjabis’ enchantment for new ‘consumerism’ and ‘western’ life-styles.
Notice should also be taken of Canadian Punjabis influence on the Punjabi media. The old tradition of subsidies to ‘leftist’ journals and newspapers has continued, although on a much smaller scale, while priority has shifted towards television channels. Some of the television channels owned by Punjabis in Canada and UK have tried to find audience in the Punjab.\textsuperscript{15} It seems Punjabi owned channels and media from abroad will make an appreciable impact on Punjabi society in the near future.\textsuperscript{16}

**Conclusion**

Canadian Punjabis have exerted considerable impact upon the Punjabi society through several kinds of philanthropic activities. The history of such linkages and philanthropic activities span almost a century. While earlier contribution was mainly in the form of social and political movements arising from their insecure position in Canada and the United States, more recent and post-1947 linkages have undergone both quantitative and qualitative changes. The strength of Canadian Punjabi diaspora in terms of numbers and increasing bonds due to easy transport and communication led to diverse range of philanthropic and commercial investments in Punjab. These philanthropic activities are ushering major changes in Punjab’s rural economy and society, but any measurement of their overall impact is not quantifiable in the technical sense of the term. The CPP embraces religious institutions, educational investment, hospitals and medical services, arts and sports (including scholarships and awards, promoting literacy, subsidising arts and training courses, providing help for the handicapped and needy children, subsidising the marriage of poor girls, helping to improve the environment), and large projects aiming to transform whole villages. These activities in each field require detailed analysis through case studies before their cumulative impact can be adequately assessed. Individual projects, such as provision of health facilities have definitely improved general health of the local communities; the benefits for women,
children and old persons are substantial. Similarly, in the education field, the opening of new schools or colleges has affected educational opportunities and choices for the local communities while changing overall ethos of Punjabi youth in seeking various careers and employment. There are now wider opportunities for quality education; but how far pupils with disabilities due to income, gender or caste differentials have fared from such institutions suggests a mixed blessing. In sum, there is immediate need to examine Canadian Punjabi philanthropic activities have had a profound social impact upon local communities.

Notes
1 Martin Luther King Jr. is reported to have said, ‘Philanthropy is commendable, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice that make philanthropy necessary.’ Burkeman (1999) observed, ‘unless philanthropy helps to change the situations that give rise to the need for it in the first place, then it simply reinforces existing power imbalances in society and enables the rich and powerful to feel good about themselves despite the fact that they are doing nothing to effect real change for the poor and powerless.’

2 A biradari gathering took place in Nadalon High School in 1935 where Mahtons sought changes in their social caste to Rajputs. Inviting Maharajah of Nabha, who was himself a Rajput, they asked him to represent their case. They thus resolved to register themselves as Rajputs and duly appeared so in 1941 Census when they changed their caste name to ‘Rajput Mahta Sikhs.’ The Paldi village government records show that original Mahton proprietors became Rajputs in 1941.

3 Ronki Ram (2010: 286-7) elaborates regarding Talhan Gurdwara dispute: ‘Then, in 1999, the Dalits approached the local administration and the court of law. …This ultimately led to a fight between them and the Jutts in January 2003. Subsequently, the Jutts publicly announced their social boycott. …The fight against the social boycott and for representation in the committee, the Dalits organized a Dalit action committee (DAC) under the leadership of L. R. Balley, a prominent Ambedkarite of the region. … On 5 June 2003, the conflict took a violent turn and soon spread to the adjoining areas. Boota Mandi, a suburb of Jalandhar city, became the epicentre of the violence. … Eventually the Dalits of Talhan succeeded in securing representation in the Gurdwara Management Committee.’ Also see Ram (2004), Jodhka and Louis (2003), Puri (2004) and others.

4 Interview with Harvinder Singh Saran on 1st and 24th October 2008 and another similar interview on 17 December 2009 with his brother Hardeepak S. Saran.

5 However in his talks, Saran emphasises how the school will feed sports academy and will encourage local participation of suitable pupils. However in its present structure there seems no concession to local poor pupils.

6 Campaign by Simarnjit Badal, namely nani shaan.

7 See (Purewal 2010); campaign by Dr. Harshinder Kaur.
8 Nawanshahr district has cleared 29 projects costing Rs 2.99 crore. Hoshiarpur has approved five projects costing 1.52 crore. Patiala has seven projects worth Rs 54.4 lakh and Jalandhar had only two projects of Rs 2.87 crore.

9 *The Tribune*, 17 March 2005. Also see the study by Singh and Singh (2007). In later case Singh and Singh have assessed this VLIF project undertaken at Kharoudi in terms of both qualitative as well as quantitative impact. The study discusses impact on quality of life including impact on villagers’ health and also on social strata of the village.


12 Personal communication with Anne Murphy, UBC

13 The title of the popular song is ‘Rambo-Rambo.’

14 Harbhajan Mann sought Sukhbir Singh Badal –deputy chief minister of Punjab to provide subsidy to Punjabi cinema at PTC television channel’s Punjabi Film Awards on 28 January 2011.

15 Canada’s Punjabi channels: ATN-Alpha ETC Punjabi, ATN MH1, PTC Punjabi Canada, Sur Sagar TV, Gaunda Punjab, Des Pardes; UK’s Punjabi channels: Channel Punjab, Sangat TV, Sikh Channel, Sikh TV, Zee Punjabi.

16 See, for example, some of the issues raised by Tatla (2010).