CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted some salient features of Canadian Punjabi philanthropy and offers an initial assessment of its impact on the Punjabi society. For over a century, Canadian Punjabis have influenced their ex-homes in various ways. Starting in the first decade of twentieth century funds have flown from Canada to Punjab, first mainly in terms of remittances which were used to improve the lot of families left behind. However, a part of such funds was also used for common village institutions, mainly for religious places, adding a room to the local gurdwara or other religious place. However, in the 1920s, Canadian Punjabis also tried to spread education in rural Punjab. As a result, a number of schools were established in Doaba and Malwa region. Besides religious and educational philanthropy, the influence of Punjabis settled in Canada and the United States was quite substantial via social movements –in particular through the Ghadar movement and the aftermath of the Komagata Maru episode. Given the number of Punjabis in Canada was quite small, their overall impact on Punjabi society was quite significant especially in the Doaba region.

In the post-1947 period as the number of Punjabis increases sharply from the 1970s, Canadian Punjabis along with other overseas Punjabis have made substantial investment in their homeland. This has taken more diverse forms than earlier two channels of religious and educational philanthropy. In particular Canadian Punjabis explored new fields of health and developmental activities. Although the Punjabi diaspora was hampered by the political crisis of the 1980s which blocked their connections with their homeland, they responded vigorously in the late 1990s. This period coincided with the government of India’s changed attitude towards its diasporic population seeking the richer section of overseas Indians to offer the hard currencies to tide over the crisis of foreign exchange funds. Following the lead of federal
government, the Punjab government tried to induce its overseas population to invest in Punjab offering several kinds of incentives and some measure of representation.

During the last two decades, overseas Punjabis have invested in all leading sectors of Punjab economy. Many parts of Punjab have been transformed by CPP through different kinds of institutions, hospitals, schools and so on. Canadian Punjabis, emerging as the most prominent part of the Punjabi diaspora, have extended their philanthropic activities from religious shrines and educational institutions to many other areas. Canadian Punjabis have been especially innovating in terms of widening philanthropic activities by financing hospitals, augmenting medical facilities, and in offering funds for arts and sports.

Reviewing the social impact of Canadian Punjabi philanthropy for religious causes, we noted how Sikh religious centre at Amritsar receives major consideration. This is reflected not only in overseas pilgrims’ share of offerings at Harmandir Sahib but also through many kinds of associated donations to the whole complex. Thus, its Sarais and Langar Hall have considerably expanded, while the whole complex was repaired through re-moulding of its golden plates. The latter task was accomplished by a UK based Sikh organisation which mobilised funds from the worldwide Sikh diaspora. Many Sikh historic shrines have been modernized – although the scale of hectic and ill-planned demolishing of the old and replacing them by new structures has been described by Tatla (2009a) as sheer ‘vandalism of Sikh historic memory.’

However, in terms of policy the study also points out how funds for religious institutions have been causing concern as some of these have been directed to build sectarian movements or deras. Although the Punjab situation is not as serious as in some other parts of India, the state of Gujarat being prime example, there is concern about the role of overseas Punjabis’
patronage of certain kinds of religious activities demanding serious analysis and sensitive policies.

Canadian Punjabis intervention in educational field also raises several policy questions; the crucial question is whether diasporan funds could be directed towards more productive use? While it seems difficult to mould intentions of overseas Punjabis in the short term, there are policies and incentives which can eventually yield the desirable outcomes. For instance, as the Punjab government has recently committed to establish ‘model schools’ in each district, this venture can well be realized through collaboration. Suitable incentives and publicity could attract Canadian Punjabi philanthropists’ attention. Similarly, some Canadian Punjabis might be willing to share expenses for special schools that aim to teach handicapped children. The NRI Secretariat should devise suitable combination of incentives to attract funds in this regard.

In addition, there is scope for existing educational institutions to mobilise overseas resources for enhancing their services to the public. Thus, for example, Khalsa College Amritsar with its Sikh History Library which holds valuable collections of old periodicals, manuscripts and newspapers could easily appeal to its overseas alumni, for preserving this valuable library resources. Similarly, Sikh Kanya Mahavidialya at Firozepur -first Sikh female institution of its kind, could be saved from its contemporary decay through appeal to overseas Punjabis. The government could assist such formal collaborative associations through suitable legislation and administrative measures.¹ Through appropriate policies, Canadian Punjabis could be persuaded to invest in more imaginative projects such as scholarships for poor and deserving students, establish new institutions in deprived areas and so on. There is considerable scope for governmental intervention in educational ventures once these are
established – to think about rationalizing where they are located, regulating how they set their fee structure and to ensure quality of care.

Among issues arising from health provision by diaspora philanthropy is the role of state provision for medical facilities. The Punjab government is committed to provide basic health facilities in every large town of Punjab, certainly so at tahsil headquarter with a state financed hospital offering subsidised medical facilities. These hospitals generally cater to poor and low income groups of the society. The role of CPP in financing basic health facilities is almost negligible and calls for appropriate policy incentives. This is especially so as one compares other states like Kerala with Punjab, where the former has been successful in tapping diaspora funds for its basic health facilities. On the other end of the scale, Punjab also lacks the specialist hospitals that have been built in some other parts of India. Although these speciality hospitals are virtually all private institutes established to seek maximum return on its investment, even here some of hospitals have made special provisions for patients with low incomes; which is to say that these institutions have tried to balance their philanthropic intent with profit motives. Evolution of such mixed diasporic philanthropic ventures (also known as social entrepreneurship) is a recent phenomenon that calls for further analysis as to their impact on the local society.

Another issue thrown up by the case study of Dhahan-Kaleran project needs to be addressed; the issue of the management. The management devised by Budh Singh has faced a crisis of smooth transfer to the next generation of managers. The differences among its trustees concerned administrative powers of its founder, his style of leadership and the employment of a female employee in a position of responsibility led to a serious crisis within the management?² While the administration has changed hands, with some decisions subject to court rulings, this leading philanthropist has raised some uncomfortable questions in a
published pamphlet in what seems his final farewell to GNMMET. It is well to remember that Budh Singh is an outstanding philanthropist who has spent the best part of his life since 1980s contributing to social welfare of his native land. He was forced to start another parallel venture but faces major challenges in establishing a new venture as outlined earlier. His legacy at GNMMET, issues raised by the disarray of its administration, which amount to a failure in institutional building need an in-depth analysis from social scientists. The issues raised by Budh Singh are also worthy of attention by policy makers, as these involve the working of laws and regulations of charitable trusts.

Canadian Punjabi philanthropic activities in sports and arts have also become significant and call for policy considerations. We have noted how in proportion to funds invested in organising Kabaddi fixtures, there is very small amount of funds that are going towards building sports infrastructure in rural Punjab. Hence the kind of funding which is currently in vogue has to be channelled into more productive use. There is discernible role for sports administrators to take note of. The government could play a significant role in involving overseas Punjabis in expanding sport facilities in the state. It is noteworthy that the Director of Sports, Pargat Singh, has recently been trying to woo Punjabi philanthropists for such collaborative ventures. The government could seek more enlightened Canadian philanthropists to invest in a variety of other games, especially hockey - a popular Punjabi sport with famous players from villages like Sansarpur. Moreover, in terms of the gender criterion, none of these philanthropic projects have made such a consideration among their objectives.

Finally, there are policy issues arising from Canadian Punjabis’ investment in development projects. We have seen Canadian Punjabis have taken the lead in undertaking these ‘environmental projects’ and it suggests the influence of ‘learning from host societies.’ It
seems the new generation of Punjabis are likely to undertake welfare-oriented projects and would seek cooperation of official or semi-official agencies in their countries of residence concerned with development issues.

While benefits of developmental projects are quite large and the government wants to attract overseas Punjabis to undertake such projects, the question naturally arises as to why there has been so poor a response to governmental incentives? Obviously there are many factors involved. One should note that the government incentives gained very limited response from Canadian Punjabis; just one major association became involved. There are multiple reasons for this. Among reasons, first is the government’s reluctant and shifting stand on fully underwriting their share of projects undertaken by VLIF has not inspired other philanthropists to form a collateral association to undertake such projects. Second, lack of relevant and well-publicised policies means Canadian Punjabis continue to invest in activities that interest them without seriously considering governmental incentives.

A common issue faced by overseas Punjabi philanthropists attested during this study was the uncaring attitude of bureaucrats. Repeatedly, philanthropists attested how the NRI Secretariat is unresponsive, that unless one has connections with ministers, concerned officers do not even acknowledge enquiries, letters or emails. Obviously, there is lack of communication and credible medium through which to persuade overseas Punjabis to fund social welfare activities in Punjab. The NRI Secretariat has yet to address real issues faced by overseas Punjabis when they wish to invest in philanthropic or even commercial activities. Such issues range from legal provision under trust laws to various bureaucratic hurdles that frustrate them as they try to invest in a particular project.
In a region-wise analysis of developmental projects, it is surprising that Ludhiana district does not figure in the list for 2006-07, while Moga has but one project. The Malwa region is prominently connected with Canada. Hence there is need for publicity to attract Canadian Punjabi businessmen-cum-philanthropists from this region. But a more reliable verdict would require more recent data for 2008-11, which the NRI secretariat has not issued.

The government is of course aware of the poor response to its generous offer, and this led to a public complaint by the state’s chief minister, Parkash Singh Badal, who was quoted as admitting that ‘his government’s generous offer of 75 percent share of funds for developmental projects undertaken by overseas Punjabis has found reluctant response.’ However, there is also evidence for lack of commitment by the government in funding existing or new projects. Budh Singh, the Canadian Punjabi philanthropist with his wide experience of dealing with the government specifically commented on official apathy as such:

My experience is that government politicians and officers promise a lot but deliver little. Dealing with bureaucracy creates severe problems for a voluntary institution of the kind I have been running. Even an ordinary matter, say, of getting a ‘No Objection Certificate’ government officers tend to create numerous hurdles and delays.

Moreover, philanthropists need to cultivate personal ties with politicians to get things done, otherwise even routine matters get delayed. Budh Singh tells how even getting a connection for telephone required personal intervention of the chief minister of Punjab:

In 1983, when there was no telephone connection in the villages of Punjab, I visited several offices to get connection. I had to go Chandigarh where chief minister Darbara Singh saw me standing in a row and asked what the matter was. I told the
whole story. He assured me to allot telephone connection within 24 hours. He immediately phoned to the concerned authority. I stayed for a day in Chandigarh and when I went back to Dhahan next day, there was telephone in my office.

This kind of frustration is corroborated by another Canadian philanthropist familiar with the government bureaucracy. Anantpal Singh’s experience of Punjab bureaucracy endorses such views. When he made personal appeal to the then chief minister, he reported that positively ‘Captain Amarinder Singh, chief minister of Punjab personally brought the cheque of matching grant to the village.’ However, like most NRIs, Anantpal rates schemes by the government as being more on paper, as there are so many hurdles that trap such schemes. He feels the state bureaucracy makes everyone quite frustrated. In the Bahrampur case, there was delay in getting money from Government of Punjab, but they were spared bribery to obtain the grant. Dr. Gurdev Singh Gill has dealt with government officers to all major political leaders of Punjab for almost a decade on a continuous basis. Although initially funds were released, the government support has fluctuated widely:

Punjab government, in years, has been reluctant to release further funds despite full audit and local level verification of work in progress.6

In fact for recent projects, VLIF was forced to issue an urgent appeal to concerned officials to release funds. Despite all efforts by VLIF, work came to standstill as government funds dried up. In his appeal Dr. Gill revealed the government attitude as:

The Chief Secretary told me that there will be no funds for us till March. Even then he was not sure…. These gentlemen are not really interested in our rural development projects and at least I get the impression they are not very enthused or supportive of our work… Those of you who have any influence on the politicians or
bureaucrats, I say, please help in any way you can. I will be writing to donors of different villagers a separate e-mail.\textsuperscript{7}

In contrast donor has been quite enthusiastic. Dr. Gill, in his experience of raising funds from fellow Canadian Punjabis recalls:

People donated generously. Even those who had sold off their properties in the village and had no visible links with the village came forward to contribute. The bonding with the motherland was too strong to be ignored.\textsuperscript{8}

This issue of governmental delay and reluctance in releasing funds of its assured part raises severe problems for potential donors. It alerts them to the financial crisis of the Punjab government that has plagued many development plans of the state – a crisis which stems from the militancy period in the post-1984 period. Several economic reports have attested that the Punjab government is facing a financial crunch for several years and that the state is heavily debt-ridden with payment of interest to the Federal government in Delhi draining most of revenue sources leaving little for developmental activities. The management of debt owed to the central government led to the resignation of financial minister in October 2010, and there seems no easy solution in sight.\textsuperscript{9} Unless the government clearly rationalises its procedures and earmarks special funds to the NRI Commissioner for such collaboration ventures, potential donors are bound to feel frustrated and turn away.

One should also note the motives of overseas Punjabis in undertaking such projects. Many individuals are motivated through different levels of attachment to their native land; some want to satisfy their egos to be counted as ‘big donors’ in the eyes of their ex-fellow villagers, others have mixed motives of philanthropy cum commercial considerations while on the other end, some may feel obligations towards their ‘homeland.’ Almost all one-off projects
are to some extent undertaken by overseas Punjabis to impress local residents—*rohb* and *izzat* Punjabi normative values as catalysts. On the other hand, some devout Sikhs’ motives who undertake philanthropic projects can be described as Murphy (2004: 339) has as ‘guilt payment’ for leaving Punjab in the aftermath of 1984. Thus while the government policies have a role to play, these cannot sway all of philanthropists to invest in official designated projects.

With suitable policy intervention, there is every hope that schemes like *Mera Pind* can be extended to transform all of 12,673 Punjab villages. Or as Dr. Gill has optimistically declared ‘all of them could become model villages’ only if ‘the government has a streamlined approach to projects like these (VLIF).’ The NRI department or secretariat seems short of any consistent set of policies towards overseas Punjabis to engage them in a meaningful dialogue, as a result could not diver Canadian Punjabis’ attention towards particular kinds of projects marked under ‘*Mera Pind Initiative*’ (Scheme C.D. 2.35) Scheme.

Effectively, two different sets of policies are needed. First, overseas Punjabis need to have a more autonomous and democratic organisation to voice their concerns. This might be achieved through strengthening and providing more powerful structure to the NRI Sabha of Punjab. Second, the government policies of offering matching grants for projects inviting overseas Punjabis’ collaboration should be free from bureaucratic delays. The Secretariat of NRI Chandigarh should be more accountable, transparent and welcoming place for NRIs, rather than a forbidding official agency as seen at present by many Canadian Punjabis donors. There is a case for a new organisation to look into current problems and issues faced by experienced Canadian Punjabi philanthropists which could then pave the way for a more responsive and streamlined administrative structure for overseas philanthropists. For Canadian Punjabi philanthropists, there is also strong case of having a ‘Punjab Window’
staffed by Punjabi officials in Toronto and Vancouver as part of Indian consulate services. Such a window can provide essential information for would-be Canadian Punjabi philanthropists before they embark on a visit to Punjab.

This study has tried to document the range and magnitude of Canadian Punjabi philanthropy in Punjab. It has detected the direction of such investment towards developmental activities – in which Canadian Punjabis have taken a leading role. The study has offered case studies of such projects analysing the motivational factors behind particular Canadian Punjabi philanthropists and methods of organising such philanthropic activities. The study also offers some explanations for the change of direction in CPP activities towards environmental projects – identifying factors of CPPs’ socialisation in host countries and the role of intermediary agencies. It examines the role of Punjab government policy in attracting Canadian Punjabis funds towards its marked areas of development in rural Punjab. Although lack of reliable long series of data limits any conclusive results, the study draws some policy implications based upon the existing evidence.

What is problematic about some of these philanthropic activities is that they contain commercial considerations also. This is especially true of many private schools established through funds by overseas donors and philanthropists. The fees structure of such schools, as also the administration of these schools, needs detailed study before pronouncing judgement on their contribution to the welfare of local people and society. Then there are issues of understanding the welfare arising from such one-off activities as funding a Kabaddi fixture in a native village by a Canadian Punjabi, as hundreds of such events take place every winter. The study has argued that, Canadian Punjabis’ contribution to sports, although highly visible, is not as productive as could be.
The study also speculates about the future of Canadian Punjabi philanthropy in different sectors of Punjab. Based upon case studies of health, developmental and sports facilities projects undertaken by Canadian Punjabis, it indicates some of the issues arising in the implementation of such projects. For health projects in the Doaba region, there is issue of competitive investment in large hospitals, which are endangering the viability of some of these projects. More significant is the finding of management of large hospitals – where disputes among trustees are taking place. Such disputes, which arise partly from differences in approaches by CPP and their Punjab based collaborators, could threaten the viability of such an institution or to deterioration of the quality of services offered. There is also a case for setting up special administrative set up to deal these disputes, as legal proceedings of such philanthropic ventures can deter many future philanthropists. Perhaps the NRI Sabha, if it is strengthened suitably with legal experts and other prominent persons from public life, could sort out these cases more amicably. Otherwise there is a case for reforming some provisions relating to trust laws – an issue already raised by some social scientists working on other states of India.

The study also takes note of wider implications of CPP in Punjab. Punjab is connected to the outside world through its overseas population leading to daily exchange of ideas and resources. Non-resident Punjabis are being socialised in different ways in their new countries of settlement, with ideas of citizenship, ways of linking to their old homes, kinds of associations for charitable causes and interacting with the institutions of their host societies. Second and third generation of Canadian Punjabis are becoming aware of international agencies that are playing significant role in channelling funds from western countries to India for developmental purposes, the CIDA being a prime example of such intermediary organisation.
Through case studies the study has suggested a range of incentives and other policy measures which would enhance Canadian Punjabis’ role in financing more desirable projects. Obviously there is strong sense of goodwill of overseas Punjabis towards their land of origins like most migrants turn to philanthropic projects in their homeland. Indeed for policy purposes, this bond than be nurtured in multiple ways through institutions, events and exchange of information.

This bonding needs to be reflected through institutional links with Punjab. It can also be argued that even when individual Punjabis like to invest in charitable works in their villages only, many of them can be easily persuaded to donate for wider public causes too. The only missing ingredient is the mediating institutions and persons who could persuade them. This is in accordance with the experience of many Canadian and other overseas Punjabis’ experience.

It is a paradox and quite lamentable situation where a huge potential exists among Canadian Punjabis to give back, but they are hampered by lack of clear guidelines as to when, where and how to give back in productive activities the Punjab state desperately needs. The study points towards many ways NRPs can contribute towards the development of Punjab. For that to happen, there is urgent need to create an environment of genuine interest, support and transparency by the government with clear set of consistent polices aimed at Canadian Punjabi philanthropists.

What is indisputable is that Canadian Punjabis will continue to influence the Punjabi society as the process of globalisation and transnationalism continues to weaken the cross border barriers. In this increasing exchange of ideas and resources in interdependent world Canadian Punjabis’ motives and propensities to forge closer relationships with its homeland provide
both a challenge and untapped reserve of funds which the Punjab government could not afford to ignore. This study offers an analysis of Canadian Punjabis’ connections through philanthropic activities with suggestions to improve this evolving relationship that could significantly contribute to the welfare of Punjabi society.

Notes
1 Kapoor, Mehta and Dutt (2004) have noted autonomy of educational institutions in India to mobilise overseas resources. Also see http://www.newsindpress/Newsitems.asp Still some of the institutions in Punjab especially engineering and medical schools can within the current administrative structure foster diaspora connections. Guru Nanak Engineering College, Ludhiana has several hundreds of its ex-students settled in Canada who through appropriate regular newsletters could keep in touch with college developments and future plans. Some of its ex-students have involved themselves in philanthropic activities e.g. Surinder Dhanjal established a Sports Trust, Kuldip Hansra has financed Desh Bhagat Yadgar Library, Jalandhar and so on.

2 Interview with S. Kulwinder Singh and Malkit Singh at GNMMET dated 8 November 2009.

3 Interview with S. Budh Singh by S. Sarup Singh Alag published in 2009.

4 Ajit editorial in May 2011.

5 Interview with Budh Singh, 7 November 2009.

6 E-mail from Dr. Gurdev S. Gill to supporters dated 11 February 2011.

7 E-mail from Dr. Gurdev S. Gill to supporters dated 11 February 2011.

8 Based on interview with Dr. Gill dated 15 November 2009.

9 Manpreet Singh Badal resigned from Punjab government as finance minister as differences arose especially with deputy chief minister Sukhbir Singh Badal over level of subsidies and payment of loans to the Central Government of Delhi.