

Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Taylor, Steve and Singh, Manjit (2013) Punjab's Doaban Migration-Development Nexus: Transnationalism and Caste domination. Economic and Political Weekly, 43 (24). ISSN 0012-9976

Published by: The Economic and Political Weekly

URL: <http://www.epw.in/special-articles/punjabs-doaban-...> <<http://www.epw.in/special-articles/punjabs-doaban-migration-development-nexus.html>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/15120/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE



UniversityLibrary

Punjab's Doaban Migration-Development Nexus

Transnationalism and Caste Domination

STEVE TAYLOR, MANJIT SINGH

Drawing upon longitudinal, ethnographic research within the United Kingdom and India between 2004 and 2011, this article discusses the migration-development nexus within the Doaba region of east Punjab. It points out that Doaban transnationalism is shaped by, and shapes, the social structure of the region. It focuses upon the relationship between contemporary Doaban transnationalism and caste and argues that multifaceted Doaban transnationalism is not only shifting the dynamic caste relations of Doaba but is also deepening the established patterns of caste domination and inequality. This can inhibit, rather than promote, regional development, given that a development process should be inclusive of the entire regional population.

In a recent study, Upadhya and Rutten (2012) focus upon and attempt to map out the theoretical and empirical resources necessary for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex and multifaceted relationship between migration and development in India, which is emerging as a key area of both research and policymaking within the nation. Intense and increasing scrutiny and legislation is being applied to the remittances, investments and philanthropic donations transmitted “home” by Indian diasporic communities living abroad. In order to counter the rather simplistic, economic and methodologically nationalistic representation of such transnational flows within much current literature, research and policymaking, where they are often unequivocally celebrated as facilitating “development” within India, Upadhya and Rutten (2012) call for a series of “ethnographically thicker” (pp 60-61) and “regional-level” (p 59) studies. Drawing upon some emerging micro-level studies of the impact of diasporic remittances, investments and philanthropy within specific Indian localities, the authors argue that this is because:

...transnational flows are shaped and inflected by the specific histories, social structures and political-economic formations of the migrant sending regions...a series of regional-level studies will allow for comparison of...(transnational) flows across regions (of India)...paying more attention to the historical and sociological specificities of different regions and their transnational social fields...will generate a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the migration and development nexus in India (59-61).

We take our cue from Upadhya and Rutten. Drawing upon original, transnational and longitudinal ethnographic research within India and the UK,¹ this paper discusses the migration-development nexus in relation to the predominantly rural Doaba² region of east Punjab. We do this by examining contemporary transnational relationships between part of the UK-eastern Punjabi diaspora and Doaba, while recognising that these two places represent only two nodes within a multi-sited, geographically diverse, and vastly heterogeneous as well as globally spread eastern Punjabi (hereafter Punjabi/Punjab) transnational community. We specifically focus upon the relationship between Doaban transnationalism and the dynamic (re)production of caste relations and caste domination, the latter being one significant aspect of “the historical and sociological specificities” of Doaba. While there has been much previous scrutiny of Punjabi caste relations and inequities, most notably within this publication (Jodhka 2002, 2009; Judge and Bal 2008; Puri 2003; Ram 2007), the relationship between transnationalism and caste, which has profound implications

Steve Taylor (stephen.a.taylor@northumbria.ac.uk) is with the Department of Social Sciences and Languages, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Northumbria University, United Kingdom. Manjit Singh (manjits@pu.ac.in) is with the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Panjab University, Chandigarh.

for the migration-development nexus within the Doaba region, has been neglected to date.

The History and Dynamics of Doaban Migration

It is widely accepted that there is a long and continuing history, and deeply embedded cultural tradition, of significant overseas emigration from the Doaba region of Punjab. It is a cliché, but also factual, to assert that Doabans can now be found all over the globe. Recent conservative estimates (Thandi 2010) as to the number of eastern Punjabis overseas, the majority of whom are originally Doaban, settle at around two million, meaning that this migrant group constitutes at least 10% of the global Indian diaspora. The history, dynamics and implications of Doaban, particularly Sikh, migration to the UK have been well-documented (e.g. Helweg 1979; Singh and Tatla 2006). However, while these and other studies have described the caste categories of Doaban and Punjabi-UK migrants, there has been, to date, very little analysis of the relationship between international migration and the constantly evolving (re)production of Doaban caste relations, an investigation which this paper seeks to undertake. Juergensmeyer (1982) and Hardtmann (2009) do analyse Punjabi caste relations and discuss the role of international migration therein, but their predominant focus is upon the nature and significance of scheduled caste (SC) political movements, and upon the role of the UK Punjabi dalit diaspora in developing and supporting these. Ghuman (2011) also discusses caste relations in his study of Punjabi dalit diaspora identity and education, but this is within the UK only, rather than transnationally.

In common with the dominant representation of the Indian diaspora as “agents of development” by contemporary development discourses (Upadhyaya and Rutten 2012), many recent commentaries upon Doaban and Punjabi transnationalism (Dusenbery and Tatla 2009; Singh and Singh 2008; Thandi 2010) celebrate the relationship between overseas migration, and via diasporic remittances, investments and philanthropy within Punjab, Indian regional development. While not denying some of the undoubtedly progressive development consequences of such transnational flows to Doaba, on the basis of our data, we argue that these authors crucially neglect the relationship between transnationalism and enduring, but simultaneously dynamic, caste inequalities, both within Punjab and across international borders, and that these inequalities are inhibitors to regional development within Doaba. Although some other researchers do suggest the fundamental ambiguity of Punjabi transnationalism, by demonstrating the uneven spatial and social effects of diaspora philanthropy (Walton-Roberts 2004a, 2004b) and the (re)production of gendered power relations across transnational space (Mooney 2006; Walton-Roberts 2004c), again, the relationship to caste inequities is neglected.

Caste Relations and Transnationalism

Punjab is now a Sikh majority state. Within rural Doaban districts, Sikhs constitute between 70% and 90% of the population (Ram 2012) and it is estimated that around 60% of these Sikhs belong to the Jat caste (Puri 2003; Ram 2012). With SCs

constituting 50% of some Doaban village populations (Ram 2007, 2012), the region under scrutiny is predominantly Sikh, dalit and Jat. While Punjab as a whole is being urbanised, the SC population is growing in rural areas, with Chamars, Chuharas, Balmikis, Mazabi Sikhs and Ramdasias Sikhs being the most numerous.³ Despite the overall maintenance of relative economic inequalities between Jats and dalits in Punjab (Judge and Bal 2008; Ram 2007, 2012), some Punjabi SCs, particularly Chamars, have experienced rising economic prosperity in absolute terms during the post-green revolution era, enabled by occupational diversification, access to reservations, educational opportunities and the very transnational migration under focus here.

There is an explicit opposition to caste differentiation within the scriptures of Sikhism. Intrinsic to the historical foundation and development of Sikhism was the religious conversion of the shudra (artisans) and *ati-shudra* (untouchables). Despite both this and the ever-changing nature of caste relations, inequalities, discrimination and social exclusion on the basis of caste are still a significant feature of the lived reality of contemporary Indian Punjab (Jodhka 2002, 2009; Judge and Bal 2008; Puri 2003; Ram 2007, 2012). Jat Sikhs are the most economically powerful, politically/socially influential and occupationally privileged group within Punjab and the “dominant caste” (Jodhka 2002), owning over 80% of available agricultural land (Jodhka 2009; Ram 2012). The Punjabi dalit population is greater in number, but their share of landownership lower, than in any other Indian state, with Jats and dalits living “in extreme contrast of affluence and deprivation” (Ram 2007: 4066). However, when recognising the regional context and dynamism of Punjabi and Doaban caste relations, we should also note that preoccupations with purity and pollution, the phenomenon of untouchability and the association of the SCs with particular activities or forms of labour currently appear to be receding even further within the state. The importance of dalit assertion and transnational dalit social/political movements within the caste relations of Punjab should not be underestimated in this respect (Hardtmann 2009; Jodhka 2004, 2009; Judge 2004; Ram 2004, 2008, 2012; Singh 2012). Ram (2007: 4066, 2008, 2012) goes as far as to claim that contemporary dalit assertion in Punjab, partly manifesting in the proliferation of over 9,000 Sikh and non-Sikh *deras* as “alternate spiritual sites for the oppressed...(and) the near-exodus of dalits from Sikhism towards the...deras”, and frequent Jat-dalit confrontation, not only represents a challenge to the mainstream religion of Punjab, but also threatens the security of both the state and the Indian nation.

Doaban Jat Sikhs have an historical reputation as expert farmers and indomitable peasant proprietors. The ownership and cultivation of land through “hard” manual labour attracted high economic returns and social status in Punjab for much of the 20th century. The significance of overseas migration to the economic and status dominance of Jat Sikhs has increased in recent times. A host of previous studies (Helweg 1979; Kessinger 1974; Singh and Tatla 2006; Varghese and Rajan 2010) illustrate that international emigration from Doaba has historically

been, and invariably still is, generally motivated by a cultural desire to maintain or improve the *izzat* (prestige/honour) of the kinship and caste group to which one belongs within Punjab, particularly manifested through the flow of remittances, investments and philanthropic donations to the region from overseas. This previous research also demonstrates the importance of kinship and intra-caste networks for Doaban transnational migration, by providing, among other things, information about opportunities abroad, communal financial support, crucial support networks for new migrants within a foreign land, a mechanism for attending to responsibilities (e.g. land, families and businesses) left behind by migrants.

The accumulation of wealth (*jaidad*) is an important component, but not the sole route, to securing high *izzat* within traditional Punjabi culture (Helweg 1979). Other criteria include the development and exhibition of: *muhabat* (brotherly love); *khidmat* (hospitality); *sewa* (service to others); *robh* (power); *zamindari* (landownership); and *pirhi* (generation – prestige accumulated through family history). Much of this behaviour, and by implication high *izzat*, is more possible if one has relative material wealth. On the basis of our data, we will be suggesting that overseas migration has enabled many Doabans to accumulate wealth, expand landownership and exercise power. However, despite attempts to assert high *izzat* in other ways, e.g. through what the UK Doaban diaspora describe as “service to others”, this behaviour is not always perceived and received as such by those remaining in India, perceptions which are part of the currently shifting nature of caste relations within the Doaban transnational community.

Previous studies (Helweg 1979; Judge 2002; Mooney 2006; Singh and Tatla 2006; Thandi 2010) also reveal that the majority of Doaban residents within western nations, including the UK, are part of the dominant Jat Sikh caste. This research demonstrates the retention of strong economic and cultural links between these dispersed groups and the people and territory of Doaba continuing today, as well as widespread and increasing intra-diasporic communication, movement and linkage. However, while we can point to significant Jat Sikh dominance of the resources enabling access to western migration, it is important to at least note wider caste migration from Doaba to the west, and particularly to the UK where it is estimated that 10% of the Punjabi population hail from the SCs, with the majority from the Chamar community and the majority of these from the Doaba region (Ghuman 2011; Hardtmann 2009; Judge 2002; Singh and Tatla 2006).⁴ We must also note the existence of other Doaban and Punjabi populations (castes or sects) in the UK,⁵ who would not identify themselves or be identified with either Jats or Dalits. Nevertheless, our focus will be upon the dynamic dominance of the Jat caste within an aspect of the Doaban transnational community, and particularly in relation to the Dalit population, given the numerical dominance of these groups both within Doaba and amongst UK Doabans.

Reinforcing a well-documented story of 20th century Jat Sikh Punjabi-UK migration, the majority of first generation Doaban Jat migrants in our Newcastle sample arrived in the

UK during the 1950s and 1960s. The precise reasons for migration varied but the general motivation of securing and maintaining *izzat* was universal, as was the reliance upon kinship and intra-caste networks to enable the migratory journey and UK settlement. More specifically, there were two major aims to the initial migration from Doaba to the UK predominant amongst the first generation migrants within our sample, demonstrating the long history of transnationalism and how this has been integral to the Punjabi kinship and caste system over the past century. First and initially, when the single male migrants of the 1950s and 1960s viewed themselves as sojourners to the UK, the aim was to utilise UK-earned money to buy land and increase family agricultural holdings in Doaba. Second, as all of our first generation respondents became permanent UK settlers, a priority was to accumulate sufficient money to ensure the migration to, and settlement in, the UK of the immediate family (spouse and children). Both of these desires were, in turn, originally driven by a perception that such transnationalism would maintain or increase the *izzat* of the immediate family, and simultaneously the *izzat* of the wider kinship and (Jat Sikh) caste group.

(Re)Production of Caste Domination

As noted above, and in line with currently dominant development discourses which emphasise the progressive relationship between transnationalism and development in India, some accounts of contemporary Punjabi transnationalism (Dusenbery and Tatla 2009; Singh and Singh 2008; Thandi 2010) focus upon the relationship between international migration, social mobility, diaspora remittances, investments and philanthropy, and development within Punjab. There is a particular focus in these studies upon current non-resident Indian (NRI) investment and involvement in Indian business and development projects, e.g. within health, education, community development and infrastructural sectors. The significance of such transnational flows should never be underestimated. However, it is also important to note that the majority of NRI remittances (Guha 2011) to India, and their direct investments in India (Kapur 2010) and Punjab (Dhesi 2004), are directed towards NRI personal and family consumption, while the actual regional effects of NRI philanthropy have to date been difficult to discern (Guha 2011; Upadhyaya and Rutten 2012). We argue that the Doaban transnational flows under focus here are simultaneously unifying and exclusionary, and that the social exclusion precipitated by some aspects of contemporary Doaban transnationalism is shaped by, and has important implications for, the changing nature, and reproduction of, Punjabi caste relations, and consequently, (under)development within the region. Contemporary transnational flows to India, and their relationship to regional development, are complex and “multifaceted” (Upadhyaya and Rutten 2012: 54).

There is little doubt that overseas migration has facilitated “radically enhanced patterns of opportunity” (Ballard 2003: 209) for some Doaban social groups. However, the contemporary Doaban transnationalism which we researched also

simultaneously maintains and strengthens established patterns of caste domination and inequality, despite some important shifts in the way these caste relations are produced. As suggested above, given the numerical dominance of Jat Sikhs amongst the Doaban diaspora of the UK (and the Newcastle community studied is 97% Jat Sikh) and beyond, social mobility via international migration is predominantly (although not exclusively) available to an already relatively privileged section of Doaban society. The very kinship and caste-based networks which have historically enabled Doaban migration to the UK have simultaneously restricted many of the benefits of transnationalism – social mobility but also remittances, investments and philanthropy – to these same social groups (in the case of our study, the Jat Sikh caste).

Our research revealed extensive, and via, our longitudinal research, increasing evidence of division, as well as integration, between the Jat Sikh Doaban diaspora studied in the UK and their own family, kinship and caste groups, as well as wider caste groups, residing in Doaba. We accept that the long history of Doaban transnationalism has integrated immediate families and wider kinship and caste groups across national borders. As reported above, one of the prime motivations following migration amongst the UK Doabans studied was to secure the future of the immediate family by working for their transfer to the west, while simultaneously enhancing the izzat of such families, as part of wider kinship and caste networks, within Doaba itself. Furthermore, we did uncover evidence of contemporary UK NRI investment and involvement in development projects within Punjab, such as the building or improvement of educational and health facilities or the enhancement of roads, electricity and water supplies within particular villages. It is also clear that recent developments in transport and communication, particularly those which have cheapened international contact and movement, have significantly increased the rate of transnational physical and virtual contact amongst the global Doaban community.

However, we also contend that there is clear and intensifying division, resentment and conflict between those Doabans who have migrated to the UK and those who remain as permanent Indian residents (including Jat Sikhs in the latter group). Thus, while we found an extensive evidence of the UK Jat Sikh migrants' reliance on a wider Doaban kinship and a caste network to facilitate their original passage overseas, from the perspective of our Indian respondents, once the first generation had earned enough money to secure the passage and settlement of their immediate family, there was little evidence of a material commitment to the well-being, or the enhancement of opportunities, of the wider kinship or caste group within Doaba, and even less to the human development of the wider Doaban population. Rather, it was felt that there was a common and increasing concern amongst the UK Doabans studied to distinguish themselves as a social group from those residing in India. Within Doaba, we were frequently (and by the majority of our Indian respondents) told of broken family agreements between first generation UK migrants and their Indian family and kin.

There is still a commitment to the ownership of physical space in Doaba amongst our UK sample. However, this is not landownership for Jat control of traditional Punjabi agriculture, but, as perceived by our Indian respondents, in order to build very large, palatial family homes within India to assert the distinctiveness and high izzat of the diasporic group, a phenomenon which Erdal (2012) analyses within west (Pakistani) Punjab. The landscape of rural Doaba is punctuated, and in some areas dominated, by huge houses and palaces, some with as many as 16 bedrooms and many surrounded by huge gold-tipped metal fences. There is usually a gold-lettered sign on the gate entrance with the names and country of residence of the owners. The majority of these houses have their own water tanks at the very top and these are often shaped in the image of a particular symbol to indicate that the owner is an NRI. Such symbols include aeroplanes, eagles and footballs. Both the outside and the inside of these houses are decorated in the most luxurious, western style. The NRI houses generally stand empty for most of the year and are only in use when the owner visits, perhaps once a year or once every two years. Many of the NRI houses within rural Doaba are built on the site of an original or existing family farm, others on newly purchased land.

Resistance to NRI Wealth

However, our respondents (diasporic, non-migrant, Jat and non-Jat) unanimously suggested, and particularly during our latest research visit to Doaba in 2011, that the ownership and control of agricultural production and the presentation of agricultural prowess is no longer the priority for Jat Sikhs in terms of asserting status, izzat and their dominant caste position. Our UK and Indian participants variously described Doaban agriculture as “finished” (Doaban Jat Sikh 32, male, 2011), “virtually worthless” (Doaban Jat Sikh, 55, male, 2011) and as having “no future really, except for some small, specific niche markets” (UK Doaban, 62, male, 2011).

We encountered an intense and increasing resistance to the display of NRI wealth via house building from virtually all of our Indian respondents, with the following comments being representative (Jat Sikh Doaban, 42, male, 2004).

The NRI houses...are an insult, people in the same village do not have enough sanitation...it is a dream of theirs before they go that they want to own more land and they want a big house on it...but their dreams are affecting the villages in a bad way.

More recently (Jat Sikh Doaban, 39, female, 2011):

...building these large empty palaces belittles us, it shows how different we are...I am embarrassed and humiliated...this is all they (NRIs) are concerned with now in our village...the state government may say they (NRIs) are good for investing in Punjab...in our development...but it's not true, don't listen to them, it stops them (government) having to do anything for us...they (NRIs) build these houses for themselves...very cheaply, using cheap local labour and sometimes illegal money...it doesn't do anything for us...many of us here hate them for it, I don't think they are aware how much.

It is worth reiterating the already established point that the majority of diasporic Punjabi (and Indian) remittances and direct investments to India are for personal and family

consumption, and that they are sent through informal channels and networks (Upadhy and Rutten 2012). Our data certainly supports this. All of our Indian respondents argued, and the sarpanch (elected head) of each village in question showed us evidence revealing, that the majority of the Doaban diasporic direct investments and remittances we studied were directed towards NRI personal consumption in Doaba, with house building being the most substantial part of this. It is difficult to disagree with the almost unanimous view (particularly expressed during our latest research visit to Doaba in 2011) of our Indian research participants, that they felt excluded from the benefits of Doaban migration and transnationalism.

Our Indian participants also described other ways in which they felt that NRIs are increasingly demonstrating their superior wealth through consumerism within Doaba when visiting, for example by hiring large cars and jeeps, using the very latest mobile telephones and wearing western, designer clothing (Jat Sikh Doaban, 32, female, 2011):

It is getting worse...NRIs used to be careful of rubbing our faces...with their wealth...now they don't care...I'm sure they go out of their way to try and humiliate us with their cars and phones and that...because they know it affects us and there is great tension between us.

The perceptions of, and resistance to, Jat Sikh NRI displays of wealth and status in Doaba were even stronger and unanimous amongst our Doaban sc respondents, who argued that consumer displays in India (sc Punjabi, 32-year old male, 2008)

...is what makes them Jats...we are so far away from them...they say they care about their villages but our lives have never improved because of them, they have only got worse...because everyone wants what they've got but we can never get it, we never travel away from Punjab.

It should be noted here that recent economic and social changes within Punjab and India, partly facilitated by the transnationalism under focus here, have seen the development of some similar forms of consumerism amongst non-migrants, and amongst some non-Jats, within Doaba. However, our emphasis here is specifically upon NRI consumerism, the way that this is received and perceived by our Indian Doaban respondents (as a form of social exclusion) and the implications of this for Doaban caste relations and regional development. The empty NRI houses and forms of consumer display described above are an omnipresent symbol and reminder to Doaban residents of foreign, NRI distinctiveness and wealth; they are not a sign of NRI commitment to Doaban regional development. Once their dependence upon a Doaban kinship and caste group has diminished, one of the prime motivations of the majority of those in our UK sample is distinguishing themselves, and expressing their superior wealth and izzat, to this Indian group and the wider Doaban population. Thus, when confronted with the realities of contemporary Doaban village life, the majority of first generation UK Jat Sikh migrants in our sample were very disparaging. Such criticism, and the (social inclusion/exclusion) distinction between NRIs and permanent Doaban residents was also recognised by our Indian respondents and

particularly emphasised by the dalit population (sc Doaban, 39, male, 2004).

They (NRIs) look down on the village when they come back, they often talk about how they feel dirty...speaking frankly, there is jealousy, and even hatred, on both sides...we are belittled by their presence.

Our data suggests that the majority of Jat Sikhs who have migrated to the UK are seen by Indian residents (including among them Jat Sikhs), and see themselves, as a distinct and privileged social group. Our data, mirrored by some other studies of south Asian transnationalism (Ballard 2004; Gardner 1995; Ramji 2006; Upadhy and Rutten 2012), demonstrate that social division, social exclusion, resentment and conflict is resulting from Doaban transnationalism at the same time as integration, unity and a diasporic commitment to the well-being of family, kin and region across national boundaries. Doaban transnationalism is not only transforming the physical landscape of the Doaba region, but it is also contributing to, and being influenced by, the changing nature of Doaban caste relations.

Widening Divides

This is certainly not to suggest a reduction in caste inequalities, rather a shift in the nature of their production. In fact, we can suggest that Doaban caste inequalities are not only shifting, but widening and deepening because of overseas migration, as outlined above there are clear perceptions of wealth and status distinctions within the Jat caste – between those who have migrated internationally and those who have not – as well as between our UK Jat Sikh sample and the Doaban sc population. Our Indian Jat Sikh respondents calculated that the annual household incomes of their UK Jat Sikh relatives were at least eight times higher than their own, and that the diasporic consumer displays in Doaba were “unobtainable” (Jat Sikh Punjabi, 40, male, 2011) for the vast majority of permanent Jat Sikh residents in Doaba villages.

The majority of our Doaban dalit respondents were performing agricultural, household and/or informal labour (some aspects of agricultural labour were traditionally performed by Jat Sikhs prior to widespread international outmigration) for wages which were below the statutory minimum wage and below the statutory subsistence level. The majority of exceptions to this were those belonging to the Chamar caste. As noted earlier, access to occupational diversification, educational opportunities, reservations and international migration have enabled this caste to be upwardly mobile within the fluid Punjabi caste order. The majority of UK sc Punjabis hail from the Chamar caste, again partly a result of kinship and caste-based migration networks (forthcoming) and again demonstrating the importance of transnationalism when considering the dynamism of Doaban/Punjabi caste relations alongside the endurance of caste inequalities.

Doaban transnationalism is shifting the nature of caste relations within the region in another important sense. The demonstration effect of NRI wealth is contributing to the desire of Doabans to undertake western migration. This desire

is widespread, and on the basis of our longitudinal research, intensifying amongst our Jat Sikh sample within Doaba.

Given any small chance, we would all go to the West...everyone here (Doaba) wants to be an NRI...it is a great desire...it is now in everybody's head as (agricultural) conditions have got worse...there is nothing left here (Doaba) (Doaban Jat Sikh, 52, 2011).

While our prime focus in this paper is upon the historical and sociological specificities of Doaba, particularly dynamic and fluid Doaban caste relations and inequities, and their effect upon the relationship between migration and development within the region, we must also recognise the significance of supra-regional dynamics affecting upon the processes we are reporting upon here. Capitalist globalisation, also an aspect of transnationalism, including the positive ideological projection of the west through the global mass media and the neo-liberalisation and capitalisation of agriculture, has also been important in the recent restructuring of rural Doaban social, cultural and caste relations. Despite advances in some sectors of the Punjabi economy and rising incomes for some (facilitating some conspicuous consumption for some non-migrants), there has been a gradual decline in the value of agricultural produce in recent years within Punjab and an exacerbation of relative inequalities (Ram 2007, 2012), as the region and the country has "opened up" to global market forces. In general, for those who are still involved in Punjabi agriculture, the returns are at best intermittent and unstable (*ibid*). These processes also intensify the desire to achieve NRI status for material security, caste dominance and the maintenance of izzat.

The widespread Indian criticism of NRI attempts to assert high izzat through consumer displays within Doaba suggests that such attempts have not been wholly successful. Western migration has enabled our UK sample to successfully assert high izzat through wealth acquisition and display, landownership (for building) and the exercise of power, e.g. by directing social development projects via "diaspora philanthropy". However, while our UK respondents simultaneously viewed the latter examples as evidence of *seva* (a further marker of high izzat), they were not perceived as such by our Indian sample. Our Doaban residents asserted that NRI investment in development projects was not philanthropic but was primarily for personal gain, for individual status or to improve roads, electricity and water supplies in particular villages that NRIs themselves would reside in while visiting India. During all of our research visits to Doaba, we did not find one diasporic-funded development project which was seen by our Indian respondents as offering more benefit to local village residents than to NRIs themselves. In two of the villages from our Doaban research sites, we uncovered more than one example of explicit conflict between NRIs and local residents, which resulted in large-scale vandalism of diasporic-funded "educational centres", over the purpose and beneficiaries of such diaspora "philanthropic" projects.

Shifting Markers of Status

On one dimension at least (*seva*), our UK diaspora failed to gain the high status they asserted in India. Nevertheless, the route to high izzat for our Jat Sikh Indian respondents, including

the most intense critics of NRIs, is to emulate NRIs. In common with many other researchers (Mooney 2006; Singh and Tatla 2006; Walton-Roberts 2004c), we found that the nurturing, maintenance and development of connections with NRIs was a priority above all other ambitions for the Indian Jat Sikh families researched. Forging such links was seen as the most realistic path to material security and high izzat, much more so than agricultural development within India. The most important priority of all of our parental Jat Sikh respondents within Doaba was to arrange the marriage of their children to NRI families, thereby apparently ensuring wealth and high izzat for the family. Thus, we can now place international migration at the centre of izzat criteria and caste distinctions within the Doaban transnational community and we can even suggest that other, traditional izzat criteria (such as *seva*) are declining in importance within the contemporary caste order. The prime marker of high izzat within Doaba, and the foundation of the economic and status dominance of the Jat Sikhs, is shifting from the ownership and control of agricultural land and produce to the ownership and control of NRI status, or embeddedness within an NRI network. An observation that overseas migration is a path to enhanced social status and wealth within Punjab is not new; Kessinger (1974) and Helweg (1979), e.g., noted it some time ago. What we are suggesting as a recent development is the displacement of agricultural control by western migration as the foundation of economic and status dominance within Doaba. Remittances and direct investments to Doaba are no longer used by diasporic Jat Sikhs to expand landholdings for agriculture; they use them to display overseas wealth within Doaba. Those lower down the caste hierarchy (e.g. Chamars) of Punjab are also attempting to enhance wealth and social status through communication with NRIs and overseas migration, to the middle-east and eastern Europe, and also to the west.

In common with other studies (Judge and Bal 2008; Ram 2007; Walton-Roberts 2004c), our research also revealed that intra-caste endogamy was being maintained by the Doaban transnational community. Despite recognition from many interviewees, particularly Punjabi sc respondents, that intercaste marriage was the major way in which caste inequalities and exclusion could be challenged, we came across very few (two in total). Respondents in both Newcastle and India estimated that 98% of all marriages they were aware of were intra-caste and that there were very strong familial pressures for this to remain the case. It is clear that transnationalism has enhanced social mobility for some within Doaba, namely, those who have access to, are included within, the resources and networks (particularly migration and marriage networks) which enable them to cultivate and achieve NRI status. However, the continued dominance of the Jat Sikh caste within the Doaban diaspora of the global north and within the social structure of Doaba, and the dominance of the Chamar caste within the Doaban and overseas scs, combined with the maintenance of intra-caste endogamy and intra-caste migration networks, means that, such mobility is rarely available to those excluded from an already relatively privileged social

group, even if caste relations are constantly shifting. Multifaceted transnationalism, including the forces of capitalist globalisation and the flows of resources, remittances, investments and philanthropy from Doaban migrants to India, is both sustaining and deepening established economic and caste inequalities across international borders and within Doaba, as well as creating new forms of inequality and shifting the basis upon which caste dominance is formed.

Following wider contemporary development discourses which emphasise the progressive nature of the overseas migration-development nexus for Indian development policy and practice, some recent commentators (Dusenbery and Tatla 2009; Singh and Singh 2008; Thandi 2010) on the Doaba region of Punjab have focused upon the positive regional development implications of Doaban transnationalism, particularly via diasporic social mobility and diasporic remittances, investments and philanthropy within Doaba. We argue here that Doaban transnationalism is more complex and multifaceted than these previous authors suggest. Drawing upon Upadhyaya and Rutten (2012), when analysing the actual impact of Indian migrant transnationalism, it is important to not only take a regional, rather than a national approach, but also to consider the social structures, the historical and sociological specificities, of the region in question. The migration-development nexus will be shaped by, and will shape, these social structures. We examine one aspect of Doaban social structure-caste and its relationship to contemporary Doaban transnationalism, a relationship which has been hitherto neglected.

Creating New Inequalities

We have argued that Doaban transnationalism has both been shaped by, and played a part in shaping, the dynamic caste structure of the region. Thus, the dominance of the Jat Sikh caste in the region (originally via the ownership and control of agricultural production) has also enabled this group to dominate western migration and the opportunities for enhanced social mobility which this has offered. We present evidence of division, resentment and conflict, as well as unity and integration, between the UK Jat Sikhs who were part of our research and their family, kinship and caste group, as well as the wider population and the SCs, residing in the Doaba region of India. Our Indian sample argued that one of the main aspirations of our UK respondents is to distinguish themselves, in material and status terms, from the residents of Doaba, particularly through the assertion of diasporic wealth via house building in Doaba and other forms of consumer display. Consequently, they felt excluded from any of the supposed benefits of Doaban diasporic investments, remittances, philanthropy or development within the region, reflective of the fact that the majority of transnational flows both to Doaba and India are directed towards NRI personal consumption. Some (e.g. Singh and Singh 2008) would strongly dispute this view of contemporary NRI activities in Doaba, but the views and perceptions of Indian Doabans are crucial to measurements of unity, philanthropy and development, as well as evaluations of *izzat* and the operationalisation

of caste distinctions/relations, within this transnational community. The assertion of diasporic wealth and high status within Doaba has been significant, alongside the impact of wider transnational processes, particularly capitalist globalisation, neo-liberalisation and declining agricultural values within Doaba, in shifting the basis and nature of Doaban caste relations and caste domination while also playing a part in the maintenance and widening of relative caste inequalities between those with access to the resources and networks (migration and marriage) enabling international migration, particularly some (but not all) Jat Sikhs and (to a lesser extent) Chamars in our research, and those excluded from such networks. Transnationalism is sustaining, widening and deepening, as well as changing, caste divisions, and creating new inequalities between Jat Sikhs who have migrated and those who have not. "Development" of a region should be inclusive of the entire population, not distribute benefits only to those who are already privileged. Absolute material incomes may have risen across Doaba and Punjab in recent years, but we have also witnessed a simultaneous recent intensification of relative, caste-based, inequalities (Ram 2007, 2012). Consequent dalit assertion, as represented by the recent and rapid proliferation of the Sikh and non-Sikh Deras and the increasing frequency of Jat-dalit confrontations leads Ram (2007: 4071) to predict that "Punjab is probably bound to plunge into a deep crisis". We are here suggesting a role for Doaban transnationalism in intensifying and reshaping the caste relations which may lead to such a crisis, which will inhibit, rather than bolster, inclusive regional development. Most credible, contemporary definitions of development include working towards relative equality and peace within a region as an integral part of the process. We are arguing that Doaban transnationalism is perpetuating, deepening and widening, as well as shifting, caste divisions and conflict.

Overall, we question those who celebrate the regional development implications of Doaban transnationalism. The empirical evidence to support this perspective is yet to be produced. Our previously published arguments suggesting that the less progressive aspects of Punjabi transnationalism have been underplayed are contested by Singh and Singh (2008). However, these authors repeat previous claims that some NRI activity and remittances within Punjab support progressive developmental projects, such as the improvement of water, sanitation and health, in NRI villages of origin. Again, we are not disputing this. Although the data presented by Singh and Singh suggests more strongly than ours does that this NRI investment does "trickle down" caste hierarchies within specific Doaba villages, it still reveals caste inequalities in relation to water supply, sanitation and health within these villages of origin. More importantly, the largely quantitative approach of their study fails to capture the nature of caste relations and caste-based perceptions within the villages under scrutiny and how these might be related to all aspects of NRI activity, including, e.g. consumer displays, and lead to experiences of social exclusion. Their approach is also unable to record the transnational caste inequalities (i.e. beyond inequalities of

water supply, sanitation and health in a particular village) within which relations in the village might be situated. Walton-Roberts (2004b) and Sidel (2004, 2008) argue that there is an urgent need for a fully qualitative and independent assessment of the effects of migrant transnationalism within rural Punjab. Much of the existing research has been sponsored or conducted by those who are actually implementing the NRI

development projects within Punjab. Our study is one step in this direction. The data upon which our arguments are based is not anecdotal, it is both ethnographically thick and longitudinal, as called for by Upadhy and Rutten (2012), and can thus be part of a “series of regional-level studies...(allowing for comparison” (p 59) of transnational flows, and their impacts, across Indian regions.

NOTES

- 1 Our empirical research primarily consisted of semi-structured interviewing and non-participant observation. We conducted 78 interviews within the Doaban community of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, UK and 95 interviews within rural Doaba, in three separate phases (thus, six phases in total across both regions), between 2004 and 2011. All of our UK interviews were with Jat Sikhs. Four villages (with names withheld to preserve anonymity) were chosen as research sites within Doaba. These were the villages where our UK respondents, or their parents, originated from. Our first Indian interviews (32) were with relatives and kin of the UK sample. Our research was then widened beyond the family and kin of our UK sample in an attempt to capture the impact of Punjabi transnationalism across the population and caste structure. Some of our Indian respondents (29) had no family/kin connections abroad. Our interviews were representative of the age, gender and caste make-up of each population and location studied and the research team was collectively fluent in English, Hindi and Punjabi. We are grateful to both Deborah Booth and Joginder P Singh for their work on some of the data collection.
- 2 This area is currently comprised four main districts: Jalandhar, Horshiarpur, Kapurthala and Nawanshahar.
- 3 It is important to note that these titles refer only to some of the many caste distinctions amongst Punjabi dalits. The latter are a widely heterogeneous group, especially when compared to the relatively homogeneous Jats in terms of caste membership, hereditary occupation, shared history and religion.
- 4 A study of a UK Punjabi dalit community, and particularly the significance of religious conversion therein, will be the focus of a forthcoming paper from one of the authors of this paper (forthcoming).
- 5 For example, Ramgarhias, Bhatras, Khattris, Aroras, Namdharis, Nirankaris, Radhasoamis.

REFERENCES

- Ballard, R (2003): “The South Asian Presence in Britain and Its Transnational Connections” in B Parekh, G Singh and S Vertovec (ed.), *Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora* (London: Routledge), 197-222.
- (2004): “A Case of Capital-Rich Underdevelopment: The Paradoxical Consequences of Successful Transnational Entrepreneurship from Mirpur” in F Osella and K Gardner (ed.), *Migration, Modernity and Social Transformation in South Asia* (London: Sage), 25-57.
- Dhesi, A S (2004): “Closing Address”, paper presented to Rural Development International Seminar, Indian Council for Social Science Research and Punjab Development Society, Panjab University, Chandigarh, March.
- Dusenbery, V A and D S Tatla, ed. (2009): *Sikh Diaspora Philanthropy in Punjab: Global Giving for Local Good* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- Erdal, Marta (2012): “‘A Place to Stay in Pakistan’: Why Migrants Build Houses in Their Place of Origin”, *Population, Space and Place*, 18 (5): 629-41.
- Gardner, Katy (1995): *Global Migrants, Local Lives: Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Ghuman, Paul (2011): *British Untouchables: A Study of Dalit Identity and Education* (Farnham: Ashgate).
- Guha, Puja (2011): “Measuring International Remittances in India: Concepts and Empirics”, Provincial Globalisation Working Paper No 1 (Bangalore: NIAS and AISSR), available at provglo.org
- Hardtmann, Eva-Maria (2009): *The Dalit Movement in India: Local Practices, Global Connections* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- Helweg, Arthur Wesley (1979): *Sikhs in England: The Development of a Migrant Community* (Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- Jodhka, Surinder Singh (2002): “Caste and Untouchability in Rural Punjab”, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 37 (19): 1813-23.
- (2004): “Sikhism and the Caste Question: Dalits and Their Politics in Contemporary Punjab”, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 38 (1&2): 165-92.
- (2009): “The Ravi Dasis of Punjab: Global Contours of Caste and Religious Strife”, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 44 (24): 79-85.
- Judge, Paramjit Singh (2002): “Punjabis in England: The Ad-dharmi Experience”, *Economic & Political Weekly* 37 (31): 3244-50.
- Judge, P S (2004): “Interrogating Changing Status of Dalits of Punjab” in H K Puri (ed.), *Dalits in Regional Context* (New Delhi: Rawat), 100-31.
- Judge, P S and Gurpreet Bal (2008): “Understanding the Paradox of Changes among Dalits in Punjab”, *Economic & Political Weekly* 43 (39): 49-55.
- Juergensmeyer, Mark (1982): *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchability in 20th Century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Kapur, Devesh (2010): *Diaspora, Development and Democracy: The Domestic Impact of International Migration from India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- Kessinger, Tom (1974): *Vilayatpur 1848-1968: Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Mooney, Nicola (2006): “Aspiration, Reunification and Gender Transformation in Jat Sikh Marriages from India to Canada”, *Global Networks*, 6 (4): 389-03.
- Puri, Harish K (2003): “Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective”, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 30 (26): 2693-2701.
- Ram, R (2004): “Limits of Untouchability: Dalit Assertion and Caste Violence in Punjab” in H K Puri (ed.), *Dalits in Regional Context* (New Delhi: Rawat), 132-89.
- Ram, Ronki (2007): “Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras in Punjab: Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab”, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 42 (40): 4066-74.
- (2008): “Ravidass Deras and Social Protest: Making Sense of Dalit Consciousness in Punjab”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 67 (4): 1341-64.
- (2012): “Beyond Conversion and Sankritisation: Articulating an Alternative Dalit Agenda in East Punjab”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 46 (3): 639-702.
- Ramji, Hasmita (2006): “British Indians ‘Returning Home’: An Exploration of Transnational Belongings”, *Sociology*, 40 (4): 645-62.
- Sidel, M (2004): “Diaspora Philanthropy to India: A Perspective from the United States” in P Geithner, P D Johnson and L C Chen (ed.), *Diaspora Philanthropy and Equitable Development in China and India* (Harvard: Harvard University Press), 215-59.
- (2008): “A Decade of Research and Practice of Diaspora Philanthropy in the Asia Pacific Region: The State of the Field”, paper presented at the Asia Pacific Philanthropy Consortium Conference on “Diaspora Giving: An Agent of Change in Asia Pacific Communities”, Hanoi.
- Singh, Gurharpal (2012): “Religious Transnationalism, Ravidasi Identity and the Dera Sant Sarwan Dass, Ballan”, *Sikh Formations*, 8 (1): 21-36.
- Singh, Gurmail and Sawan Singh (2008): “Diaspora Philanthropy in Action: An Evaluation of Modernisation in Punjab Villages”, *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 14 (2), 225-48.
- Singh, Gurharpal and Darshan Singh Tatla (2006): *Sikhs in Britain: The Making of a Community* (London: Zed Books).
- Thandi, Shinder Singh (2010): “Punjabi Diaspora: Conceptualising and Evaluating Impacts of Diaspora-homeland Linkages”, paper presented to “Migrations, Mobility and Multiple Affiliations: Punjabis” in a Transnational World International Conference, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, March.
- Upadhy, Carol and Mario Rutten (2012): “Migration, Transnational Flows, and Development in India: A Regional Perspective”, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 47 (19): 54-62.
- Varghese, V J and S Irudya Rajan (2010): “Migration as a Transnational Enterprise: Migrations from Eastern Punjab and the Question of Social Licitness”, paper presented to “Migrations, Mobility and Multiple Affiliations: Punjabis” in a Transnational World International Conference, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, March.
- Walton-Roberts, Margaret (2004a): “Returning, Remitting, Reshaping: Non-Resident Indians and the Transformation of Society and Space in Punjab, India” in P Jackson, P Crang and C Dwyer (ed.), *Transnational Spaces* (London: Routledge), 78-103.
- (2004b): “Globalisation, National Autonomy and Non-Resident Indians”, *Contemporary South Asia*, 13 (1): 53-69.
- (2004c): “Transnational Migration Theory in Population Geography: Gendered Practices in Networks Linking Canada and India”, *Population, Space and Place*, 10.